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Latin America and the Caribbean: U.S. Policy and Key Issues in the 117th Congress

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SUMMARY

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Latin America and the Caribbean: U.S. Policy and Key Issues in the 117th 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 of the 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with free-trade agreements enhancing economic linkages with 11 countries. The region is a large source of U.S. immigration, both authorized and irregular; major factors driving migration include proximity, economic and security conditions, and familial ties. Curbing the flow of illicit drugs has been a long-standing component of relations with the region, involving close cooperation with Mexico, Colombia, Central America, and the Caribbean. U.S. Administrations have long supported democracy and human rights in the region, with a current focus on authoritarian governments in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, as well as democratic backsliding and corruption in other countries. Since 2020, support to help the region respond to the health and economic impacts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has been a major component of U.S. policy.

In its approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean, the Biden Administration espouses three broad priorities—expanding economic opportunities, strengthening democracy, and building security. The COVID-19 pandemic and related recession exacerbated long-standing structural challenges in the region, fueled political social unrest, and prompted unprecedented levels of irregular immigration. The Administration is attempting to confront these challenges and advance its policy priorities through a strategy of intensified engagement comprising increased foreign assistance and enhanced bilateral, multilateral, and institutional collaboration, including through various commitments made at the June 2022 Summit of the Americas hosted by the United States. Among its key efforts, the Administration is aiming to improve health security in the region; collaborate on effective migration management; deepen engagement on climate change and energy security; promote inclusive democracy and combat corruption; and press for democracy and respect for human rights in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

117th Congress Action. Congress traditionally has played an active role in U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean through legislation and oversight. In March 2021, Congress appropriated $10.8 billion (P.L. 117-2; American Rescue Plan Act of 2021) to respond to COVID-19 worldwide, including in Latin America and the Caribbean. In November 2021, Congress approved the RENACER Act (P.L. 117-54), which directs the use of diplomatic tools and targeted sanctions against antidemocratic actions and corruption in Nicaragua. In December 2021, Congress approved the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (P.L. 117-81), which included provisions on Colombia, Central America, and China's presence and influence in the region, among other regional matters. In March 2022, Congress completed action on the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill, enacted as Division K of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103). It included funding directives for several key countries and regional programs; the State Department estimates an allocation of about $2 billion in assistance for Latin America and the Caribbean, a 13% increase from FY2021. P.L. 117-103 also included, as Division V, the Haiti Development, Accountability, and Institutional Transparency Initiative Act, intended to promote the sustainable rebuilding and development of Haiti and the prioritization of U.S. support for anti-corruption efforts and human rights. Both houses approved several resolutions on the region, including H.Res. 760, S.Res. 37, S.Res. 81, S.Res. 310, and S.Res. 489 on the human rights situation in Cuba; S.Res. 22 on relations with Ecuador; S.Res. 120 on the Summit of the Americas; H.Res. 1168 on prioritizing trade programs with the Caribbean region; and S.Res. 753 on Brazil's presidential election.

Pending action includes completion of FY2023 foreign aid appropriations (House Appropriations Committee-reported H.R. 8282 and Senate-introduced S. 4662) and the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2023 (House-passed H.R. 7900 and Senate Armed Services Committee-reported S. 4543.) Both of these measures may include various provisions on Latin America and the Caribbean, including funding or aid conditions and reporting requirements. More than 40 congressional hearings have focused on U.S. policy challenges in the region (see **Appendix**).

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Regional Political and Economic Environment

The Latin American and Caribbean region consists of 33 countries, ranging from the Caribbean nation of St. Kitts and Nevis, one of the world's smallest states, to the South American nation of Brazil, the world's fifth-largest country. (See **Figure 1** and **Table A-1** for a map and basic facts on the region's independent countries.) Over the past four decades, the region has made significant advances in political and economic development. Notable political and economic challenges remain, however, and some countries have experienced major setbacks.

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. 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).

COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean[1]

Beginning in 2020, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had widespread public health, economic, social, and political effects throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Countries throughout the region suffered sharp recessions in 2020 and increases in poverty. Most Latin American and Caribbean countries began to recover economically in 2021 and 2022 but are still contending with the lingering effects of the pandemic, China's economic slowdown, and increases in global fuel and food prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (see "Economic Situation," below). Difficult economic times also have contributed to increased social protests in some countries and have fueled an anti-incumbent electoral trend in the region (see "Political Situation," below).

In terms of public health, from the start of the pandemic through early November 2022, Latin American and Caribbean countries reported more than 1.74 million COVID-19 deaths, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. The region reported 26.4% of deaths worldwide despite the region accounting for about 8.4% of the world's population. Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Argentina had the highest numbers of COVID-19 deaths in the region; Brazil had the second-highest COVID-19 death toll globally, after the United States. The regional rankings change when examining mortality (death) rates per 100,000 population; using this metric, Peru had the highest recorded COVID-19 mortality rate in the region (and globally), followed by Brazil, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Colombia, and Paraguay. Some Caribbean countries that have had fewer deaths compared with other countries in the region have had high mortality rates (see **Table 1**).[2] Experts have expressed concerns that countries worldwide, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, have significantly undercounted deaths for various reasons, suggesting that COVID-19 deaths in the region could be significantly higher.[3]

When the pandemic first surged in the region in 2020, Pan American Health Organization Director (PAHO) Director Dr. Carissa Etienne expressed concern about the poor and other vulnerable groups at greatest risk.[4] In 2021, the PAHO director stated that the virus had deepened inequities that had long divided the region and exposed vulnerabilities in the region's health, economic, and social sectors.[5] In October 2022, PAHO's director maintained that trends show "we may be transitioning from the acute phase of the pandemic into a phase of sustained control" but also noted the need to "rely on testing and increase vaccination rates in every country in the region."[6] She noted that although over 70% of people in Latin America and the Caribbean had

[1] For further background, see CRS In Focus IF11581, *Latin America and the Caribbean: Impact of COVID-19*, by Mark P. Sullivan and Peter J. Meyer.

[2] Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, "Mortality Analyses," November 2, 2022, at https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality (hereinafter, Johns Hopkins, "Mortality Analyses," November 2, 2022). Data presented by Johns Hopkins reflect COVID-19 deaths as reported by countries worldwide.

[3] See, for example, *The Economist*, "The Pandemic's True Death Toll," updated October 25, 2022, at https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/coronavirus-excess-deaths-estimates, which estimates that COVID-19 deaths in the Latin America and Caribbean region could be 50% higher than reported. Also see David Adam, "COVID's True Death Toll: Much Higher Than Official Records," *Nature*, March 10, 2022.

[4] Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), "PAHO Director Calls to Protect Vulnerable Groups from Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic," press release, May 19, 2020; PAHO, "PAHO Calls on Countries to Intensify Efforts to Prevent Further Spread of COVID-19 Among Indigenous Peoples in the Americas," press release, July 20, 2020; and PAHO, "Countries Urged to Face Challenge of Better Access to Health for Populations of African Descent in COVID-19 Pandemic," press release, December 2, 2020.

[5] PAHO, "Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director's Remarks," April 7, 2021; and PAHO, "Annual Report of the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, 2020, Director's Remarks," July 21, 2021.

[6] PAHO, "Press Briefing on COVID-19: Director's Opening Remarks," October 12, 2022.

been fully vaccinated, several countries and territories had yet to reach the 40% mark. As noted in **Table 1**, as of early November 2022, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines had fully vaccinated less than 40% of their populations, with Haiti having fully vaccinated only 2% of its population.

PAHO has helped countries with their vaccination campaigns and has facilitated access to vaccines through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, a mechanism developed by global health organizations to facilitate equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines; 22 countries in the region signed agreements to access vaccines through the facility. In addition, 10 countries in the region—Bolivia, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines—benefit from the COVID-19 Vaccines Advance Market Commitment (COVAX AMC) launched by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to provide donor-funded vaccines for low- and middle-income economies.[7] As of November 2022, PAHO reported that over 151 million doses had been delivered through COVAX.[8]

Latin American and Caribbean countries also acquired COVID-19 vaccines from other sources, including China, Russia, and India. The United States significantly ramped up its donation of vaccines to the region beginning in June 2021 and had provided almost 70 million doses to 29 Latin American and Caribbean countries as of early November 2022, both bilaterally and through COVAX (see "Biden Administration Policy," below).[9]

Table 1. COVID-19 Deaths, Mortality Rates, and Vaccinations in Latin America and the Caribbean

Country	Deaths (11/02/22)	Deaths per 100,000 (11/02/22)	Population Fully Vaccinated (%) (11/06/22)
Brazil	688,219	323.78	82
Mexico	330,392	258.54	64
Peru	217,012	658.17	87
Colombia	141,837	278.75	73
Argentina	129,991	287.62	84
Chile	61,677	322.64	93
Ecuador	35,920	203.59	81
Bolivia	22,239	190.52	54
Guatemala	19,892	111.03	42
Paraguay	19,601	274.81	50
Honduras	11,037	111.43	58
Costa Rica	8,999	176.65	84
Cuba	8,530	75.31	88

[7] The COVAX Facility, "Committee Agreements; Confirmations of Intent to Participate, and AMC-Eligible Countries," December 15, 2020.

[8] PAHO, "Tracker COVAX Initiative—COVID-19 Deliveries in the Region," updated November 8, 2022.

[9] U.S. Department of State, "COVID-19 Vaccine Donations, Western Hemisphere," updated November 8, 2022, at https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha.

Country	Deaths (11/02/22)	Deaths per 100,000 (11/02/22)	Population Fully Vaccinated (%) (11/06/22)
Panama	8,509	197.21	74
Uruguay	7,518	216.42	84
Venezuela	5,820	20.47	50
Dominican Republic	4,384	40.41	56
Trinidad and Tobago	4,255	304.04	51
El Salvador	4,230	65.22	67
Jamaica	3,320	112.12	25
Suriname	1,392	237.29	41
Guyana	1,281	162.86	59
Haiti	857	7.52	2
Bahamas	833	211.83	42
Belize	687	172.78	57
Barbados	560	194.87	54
St. Lucia	407	221.64	33
Nicaragua	245	3.70	89
Grenada	237	210.63	35
Antigua and Barbuda	146	149.09	*63
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	116	104.55	28
Dominica	74	102.79	*41
Saint Kitts and Nevis	46	86.48	*50
Total LAC*	1,740,263	—	—

Sources: Statistics for COVID-19 deaths and deaths per 100,000 are from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, "Mortality Analyses," November 2, 2022, at https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality. Vaccination statistics are from Josh Holder, "Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations Around the World," *New York Times*, updated November 6, 2022, at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html, which draws vaccinations data from local governments via Our World in Data. Vaccination numbers marked with an asterisk are from Pan American Health Organization, COVID-19 Vaccinations in the Americas, updated November 4, 2022, at https://ais.paho.org/imm/IM_DosisAdmin-Vacunacion.asp.

Notes: **Total LAC* includes all independent countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) but not overseas territories. Peru revised its official COVID-19 death toll in May 2021 to account for excess deaths attributed to COVID-19 not previously counted.

Political Situation

Electoral Practices

In the early 1980s, authoritarian regimes (ideologically on both the left and the right) governed 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Today, observers consider four countries in the region—Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and most recently Haiti—to be ruled by authoritarian governments

or to be not free because of their poor records on political rights and civil liberties.[10] Most governments in the region are elected democracies. Nevertheless, although free and fair elections have become the norm in Latin America and the Caribbean, elections for head of government at times have been controversial and contested.

In 2021, six Latin American and Caribbean countries held successful free and fair elections for head of government. **Ecuador** held two presidential rounds in February and April, electing center-right candidate Guillermo Lasso, inaugurated in May.[11] **Peru** held two president rounds in April and June; in a close election, Peru's national electoral court ultimately declared far-left candidate Pedro Castillo the winner in July. **St. Lucia** held parliamentary elections in July in which Philip Pierre of the opposition center-left St. Lucia Labour Party became prime minister in a landslide election, ousting the conservative United Workers Party of Allen Chastanet from power after one term. The **Bahamas** held parliamentary elections in September in which the opposition center-left Progressive Liberal Party, led by Philip Davis, ousted the ruling center-right Free National Movement of the outgoing prime minister in a landslide. In **Honduras**, Xiomara Castro of the leftist Liberty and Re-foundation Party won a decisive victory in presidential elections in November, alleviating concerns expressed prior to the election that a close race could be marred by a lack of transparency or fraud allegations, as occurred in 2017. In **Chile**, leftist and former student leader Gabriel Boric won a decisive victory in a second presidential round held in December.

The November 2021 presidential race in **Nicaragua** was the regional exception to free and fair elections for head of state in 2021. Ahead of the election, the government of President Daniel Ortega escalated repression by arresting opposition figures and banning major opposition parties from participating in the race, in which Ortega claimed victory for a fifth (and fourth consecutive) term.

In 2022, six Latin American and Caribbean countries held free and fair elections. **Barbados** held successful elections for head of government in January, in which Prime Minister Mia Mottley won a second term, with her center-left Barbados Labour Party winning all 30 seats in the House of Assembly. **Costa Rica** had completed two presidential rounds by April, electing Rodrigo Chaves of the center-right Social Democratic Progress Party.[12] **Colombia** elected leftist candidate Gustavo Petro, who led a coalition of leftist parties and became Colombia's first leftist president.[13] In summer 2022, two Caribbean countries held elections in which incumbent parties were ousted; **Grenada** elected Dickon Mitchell of the center-left National Democratic Congress in June, and **St. Kitts and Nevis** elected Terrance Drew of the St.

Latin America and the Caribbean: 2022 Elections

Barbados	January 19
Costa Rica	February 6 / April 3
Colombia	May 29 / June 19
Grenada	June 23
St. Kitts and Nevis	August 5
Brazil	Oct. 2 / Oct. 30

Notes: Elections for head of government. Includes first and potential second rounds for presidential elections.

[10] See Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Democracy Index 2021*, February 2022 (hereinafter, EIU, *Democracy Index 2021*), which classifies all four governments as *authoritarian* based on some 60 indicators; and Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022*, February 2022, which classifies Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela as *not free* based on their poor records on political rights and civil liberties.

[11] See CRS In Focus IF11218, *Ecuador: An Overview*, by June S. Beittel and Rachel L. Martin.

[12] See CRS In Focus IF10908, *Costa Rica: An Overview*, by Peter J. Meyer.

[13] See CRS Insight IN11955, *Colombia: Presidential Elections in 2022*, by June S. Beittel.

Kitts and Nevis Labour Party in August. In late October 2022, **Brazil** conducted a second presidential round in which former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the center-left Workers' Party defeated rightist populist President Jair Bolsonaro.

Candidates and parties from the political left and center-left won all but two elections for head of government in the region in 2021 and 2022. This leftward political shift appears to be less about ideology than about the unpopularity of incumbent leaders and parties seeking reelection amid tough economic conditions as countries struggle to recover from the pandemic and contend with increased food and fuel prices and other global economic challenges.

Decline in Democratic Practices

Despite significant improvements in political rights and civil liberties since the 1980s, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean 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. Numerous elected presidents in the region have left office early amid severe social turmoil, economic crises, or high-profile corruption; in several cases, the presidents' own autocratic actions contributed to their ousters. 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.

EIU Democracy Index. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU's) 2021 democracy index, issued in February 2022, showed a continuous decline in democratic practices in Latin America since 2017.[14] Prior to 2017, the EIU viewed Cuba as the only authoritarian regime in the region. Venezuela joined Cuba's authoritarian ranks in 2017, as President Nicolás Maduro's government violently repressed the political opposition. Nicaragua escalated authoritarian practices in 2018 under longtime President Ortega, as the government violently repressed protests. The EIU added Haiti to the list of authoritarian governments in the aftermath of the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, which left the country virtually bereft of elected officials functioning at any level.

The downward trend in democratic practices accelerated in 2021, according to the EIU, with a particularly sharp decline in the region's commitment to democratic political culture. This reflects widespread dissatisfaction with governments' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, growing skepticism about democratic governments' ability to address the region's challenges, and increasing tolerance of authoritarian practices. According to the EIU, the region's weak commitment to democratic political culture has enabled illiberal populists to thrive, including Presidents Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador. Despite these and other notable challenges, the EIU noted that 80% of the region's population lived under democratic regimes, scoring below only Western Europe and North America.[15]

Freedom House. Freedom House cited Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela as *not free* in its annual report assessing political rights and civil liberties worldwide in 2021. The report highlighted concerns about Cuba's repression against peaceful protestors in July 2021, Nicaragua's jailing of major opposition candidates to ensure the noncompetitive reelection of President Ortega, and the Venezuelan government's prioritization of political power over the population's well-being. Freedom House also raised concerns about El Salvador's decline under

[14] EIU, *Democracy Index 2021*.

[15] Ibid.

President Bukele and the normalization of claims of fraud by President Bolsonaro in Brazil. According to Freedom House, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Haiti were among the countries worldwide with the most significant deteriorations in political rights and civil liberties.[16]

Decline in the Quality of and Satisfaction with Democracy. Public satisfaction with how democracy is operating has declined along with the quality of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. 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 since the poll began in 2004.[17] In the 2021 AmericasBarometer Survey, satisfaction with democracy increased marginally to 43% among 20 countries in the region, still far lower than in 2012, when 57% of the region expressed satisfaction with democracy.[18]

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; high levels of income inequality in many Latin American countries; increased poverty; and the inadequacy of public services, social safety net programs, and advancement opportunities, along with the increased precarity of the region's previously expanding middle class. Given these trends, the eruption of social protests in many countries throughout the region in 2019 was unsurprising to many observers, though unique circumstances sparked unrest in each country.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of these challenges, contributing to increased protests in the region since late 2020. Regional economic decline, along with difficult security and political conditions, also has helped fuel increased migration, especially from Central America, but also from other countries, including Haitians who had migrated to South America in the aftermath of the country's 2010 earthquake and Venezuelans who had settled in countries throughout the region since 2015.

Economic Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic took a significant toll on Latin American and Caribbean economies. Even before the onset of the pandemic and its economic effects, the region had experienced several years of slow economic growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported a 7.0% economic contraction for the region in 2020. Caribbean nations that depend on tourism had deep economic recessions, many with gross domestic product declines of 10% of more in 2020.[19]

Most of the region's countries began some economic recovery in 2021, with the IMF estimating a regional growth rate of 6.9% for the year, ahead of world economic output. The IMF projects 3.5% growth for 2022, still ahead of projected world output. For 2023, the IMF it projects that regional growth in Latin America and the Caribbean will slow to 1.7%, about one percentage point behind projected world growth (see **Table 2**). Major economic challenges to the regional

[16] Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021*, March 2021.

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

[18] Noam Lupu, Mariana Rodríguez, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, eds., *LAPOP's AmericasBarometer Takes the Pulse of Democracy*, Vanderbilt University, LAPOP, 2021.

[19] International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2022.

and world economies include the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has led to increased energy and food prices; persistent and broadening inflation pressures; and China's economic slowdown.[20]

A number of Latin American and Caribbean countries implemented stimulus programs to help protect their economies and vulnerable populations during the pandemic. Recognizing that many countries required external financing to respond to the pandemic and associated economic downturn, international financial institutions increased lending to countries throughout the region. An important factor in the region's economic recovery in 2021 was the availability and distribution of vaccines.

Table 2. Latin America and Caribbean: Real GDP Growth, 2019-2023 Projection

(annual percentage change, constant prices)

Regional Average, Six Largest Economies, and World Output	2019	2020	2021	2022 Projection	2023 Projection
Region: Latin America and the Caribbean	0.2	-7.0	6.9	3.5	1.7
Brazil	1.2	-3.9	4.6	2.8	1.0
Mexico	-0.2	-8.1	4.8	2.1	1.2
Argentina	-2.0	-9.9	10.4	4.0	2.0
Chile	0.9	-6.1	11.7	2.0	1.0
Colombia	3.2	-7.0	10.7	7.6	2.2
Peru	2.2	-11.0	13.6	2.7	2.6
World Output	2.8	-3.0	6.0	3.2	2.7

Sources: International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database,* October 2022.

The decline in economic growth in 2020 exacerbated poverty and income inequality throughout Latin America, with concerns that the region's past development gains could be set back more than a decade.[21] According to the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), even before the pandemic, the reductions in poverty that the region made from 2002 through 2014 had begun to erode. Overall poverty in Latin America decreased from 45.4% of the region's population in 2002 to 27.8% in 2014 but crept up slowly to 30.5% in 2019, influenced by several years of slow growth. With the pandemic-related economic recession experienced by most countries in the region in 2020, poverty increased to 33.0%. This accounted for an estimated 204 million people—an increase of 17 million people in poverty from 2019 to 2020. With economic growth rates increasing in 2021, poverty also declined slightly to 32.1%, with an estimated 201 million people in the region living in poverty.[22]

According to ECLAC, however, extreme poverty in Latin America increased from 11.4% of the population in 2019 to 13.1% in 2020 and 13.8% in 2021.[23] This increase reflected 16 million

[20] Ibid.

[21] Michael Stott, "Poverty Surge Set Latin America Back over a Decade, Says UN," *Financial Times,* March 4, 2021.

[22] U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America 2021*, January 2022. The study examines poverty and extreme poverty in 18 Latin American countries.

[23] Ibid. ECLAC estimates extreme poverty rates based on the cost of the basic food basket in each country, with the monthly costs of the basic food basket known as the "extreme poverty line." See ECLAC, "ECLAC Statistical Briefings, No. 4, Subnational Poverty Estimates for Latin America," December 2021.

more people in extreme poverty in 2021 than in 2019, for a total of 86 million people. According to ECLAC, poverty and extreme poverty were estimated to be highest in rural areas as well as among working-age women, indigenous people, Afro-descendant populations, children and adolescents, people with less education, and single-parent and extended households. The sharp fall in labor income was the main factor in increasing poverty and extreme poverty in Latin America during the pandemic. ECLAC notes, however, that government transfers to vulnerable populations helped partially offset the fall in income in the region and that poverty figures would have reached higher levels without such transfers.[24]

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, and the United States is 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. In addition, the Western Hemisphere is a large source of U.S. immigration, both authorized and irregular; 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 over 50 years. 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 as well in Latin America and the Caribbean. 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 has sought to forge close partnerships with other countries in the region to combat drug trafficking and related violence and to 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, particularly since the end of the Cold War, 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. Current U.S.-democracy promotion efforts include initiatives aimed at strengthening civil society and promoting the rule of law and human rights.

Trump Administration Policy

Under the Trump Administration, the United States took a more confrontational approach to relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, especially regarding efforts to curb irregular immigration from the region, compared to previous U.S. Administrations' emphasis on partnership. In 2018, the State Department set forth a framework for U.S. policy toward the region focused on three pillars for engagement—economic growth and prosperity, security, and democratic governance. The framework reflected continuity with long-standing regional U.S.

[24] ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2021*, January 2022.

policy priorities but at times appeared to be at odds with the Administration's occasionally antagonistic actions and statements on immigration, trade, and foreign aid. In 2020, the White House also set forth a strategic framework for the Western Hemisphere that included the prevention of illegal and uncontrolled human migration, smuggling, and trafficking as its first line of effort in the region.[25] According to Gallup and Pew Research Center polls, negative views of U.S. leadership in the region increased markedly during the Trump Administration.[26]

On trade issues, President Trump ordered U.S. withdrawal from the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) FTA in 2017. As negotiated in 2015 by 12 Asia-Pacific countries, the TPP would have increased U.S. economic linkages with Chile, Mexico, and Peru, which were parties to the agreement. The President also strongly criticized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada, threatened U.S. withdrawal, and initiated renegotiations. The three countries agreed in 2018 to the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which entered into force July 1, 2020; the agreement retained many of NAFTA's provisions but included modernizing updates and changes. Before approval, the agreement was amended to address congressional concerns regarding labor, the environment, dispute settlement, and intellectual property rights.

From FY2018 to FY2021, the Trump Administration's proposed foreign aid budgets for the region would have cut assistance considerably, but Congress rejected those proposals by providing significantly more assistance than requested. In 2019, the Trump Administration withheld some assistance to the "Northern Triangle" countries of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—in an attempt to compel their governments to curb the flow of migrants to the United States.

Perhaps no issue dominated Trump Administration policy toward the region as much as migration, which tested U.S. relations with Mexico and Central America. In 2017, the Administration announced it would end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a program begun in 2012 that provides relief from deportation for certain immigrants who arrived as children; federal court challenges led to a June 2020 Supreme Court decision vacating the Administration's recession of DACA. The Administration also announced in 2017 that it would terminate temporary protected status (TPS) designations for Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador, and Honduras, but federal court challenges put the terminations on hold. In 2018, Mexico's president agreed to allow the United States to return certain non-Mexican migrants to Mexico while awaiting U.S. immigration court decisions.

The Trump Administration used various policy tools intended to deter increased unauthorized migration from Central America. In addition to aid cuts and threats of increased U.S. tariffs and taxes on remittances, these tools included asylum cooperative agreements with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras to permit the United States to transfer asylum applicants from third countries to the Northern Triangle countries. At the end of 2020, Congress enacted the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (P.L. 116-260; Division FF, Title III, Subtitle F), requiring the State Department to develop a five-year strategy to advance economic prosperity, combat corruption, strengthen democratic governance, and improve civilian security conditions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

[25] White House, National Security Council, "Overview of Western Hemisphere Strategic Framework," August 2020; and Nora Gámez Torres, "Trump Adviser to Unveil U.S. Strategy for the Americas in South Florida Event," *Miami Herald*, August 16, 2020.

[26] Gallup, *Rating World Leaders, 2018-2020, The U.S. vs. Germany, China, and Russia*; and Pew Research Center, "Trump Ratings Remain Low Around Globe, While Views of U.S. Stay Mostly Favorable," January 8, 2020.

As democratic conditions in Venezuela deteriorated under President Maduro, the Trump Administration imposed numerous broad 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. The Administration also provided humanitarian and development assistance for Venezuelans who fled to other countries, especially Colombia, and for Venezuelans inside Venezuela. Congress largely supported the Administration's policy approach toward Venezuela; in December 2019, it enacted the Venezuela Emergency Relief, Democracy Assistance, and Development Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-94, Division J), which, among its provisions, codified several sanctions and authorized humanitarian assistance.

On Cuba, the Trump Administration reversed the engagement policy advanced during the Obama Administration and imposed numerous economic sanctions on Cuba for its poor human rights record and its support for the Maduro government in Venezuela. In January 2021, the Secretary of State designated the Cuban government as a state sponsor of international terrorism.

On climate change issues, in June 2017, President Trump announced his intent to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, an international accord to address climate change. Withdrawal took effect in November 2020.[27] Securing a clean energy future had been a key priority in U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean under the Obama Administration.[28]

Biden Administration Policy

During the 2020 election campaign, then-candidate Biden indicated that his policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean would be very different from the Trump Administration's approach.

The Biden Administration's early broad foreign policy objectives and outlook for U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean appeared in its *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, issued by the White House in March 2021. The interim guidance, which provided broad foreign policy direction to U.S. agencies and departments, maintained that the Biden Administration would expand engagement throughout the Western Hemisphere, especially with Canada and Mexico, "based on principles of mutual respect and equality and a commitment to economic prosperity, security, human rights, and dignity." This effort, according to the interim guidance, included working with Congress to provide Central America with foreign assistance and taking other steps "to address the root causes of human insecurity and irregular migration, including poverty, criminal violence, and corruption." The guidance also maintained that the Administration would cooperate to confront the regional effects of climate change, and help support good governance and democratic institutions in the region.[29] The tone of the Administration's policy toward the region, which emphasized partnership and engagement, contributed to a surge in positive views of U.S. leadership in the Americas in 2021.[30]

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[27] See CRS In Focus IF10668, *Potential Implications of U.S. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, by Jane A. Leggett.

[28] For background on climate change issues in U.S. policy toward Latin America under the Obama Administration, see the section on "Climate Change and Clean Energy" in CRS Report R43882, *Latin America and the Caribbean: Key Issues and Actions in the 114th Congress*, coordinated by Mark P. Sullivan.

[29] White House, President Joseph R. Biden Jr, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, March 2021, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf.

[30] Gallup, *Rating World Leaders: The U.S. vs. Germany, China, and Russia*, 2022. According to the Gallup study, across 19 countries in the region, 52% approved of U.S. leadership and 32% disapproved. This was a reverse image of 2020, when Gallup polling showed 52% disapproved of U.S. leadership and 34% approved.

In October 2022, the Biden Administration issued its *National Security Strategy* and laid out three broad U.S. priorities for the Western Hemisphere—expanding economic opportunities, strengthening democracy, and building security—priorities that reflected long-standing continuity with U.S. policy for the region. The Administration asserted that no region impacts the United States more than the Western Hemisphere because of strong trade ties, shared democratic traditions, and familial bonds; it maintained that "the security and prosperity of the United States hinges on that of our neighbors." According to the strategy, the United States has an overriding strategic interest in strengthening collaboration Latin America and the Caribbean through intensified diplomatic engagement with hemispheric partners to preserve economic resilience, democratic stability, and citizen security.[31]

In its *National Security Strategy*, the Biden Administration acknowledged the considerable challenges confronting the Western Hemisphere, remarking that the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant recession exacerbated long-standing structural challenges, fueled political and social unrest, undermined faith in democracy's ability to deliver, and spurred unprecedented levels of irregular migration. It also noted challenges posed by increased geopolitical and economic volatility and climate change. The Administration vowed to confront these challenges and advance its policy priorities in the region through regular interaction and engagement, multilateral and institutional collaboration, and regional initiatives.

In June 2022, the Biden Administration hosted the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, CA. The summit's official theme was "Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future."[32] President Biden met with heads of government or representatives from 30 countries (excluding Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, as the Administration did not invite representatives from these countries). The hemispheric leaders approved political commitments related to health, climate change, clean energy, digital transformation, and democratic governance.[33] The Biden Administration also announced several new regional policy initiatives at the summit, including new aid commitments to advance food security in the hemisphere as well as a new framework, the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, aimed at mobilizing increased investment, making supply chains more resilient, creating clean energy jobs and energy, and ensuring sustainable and inclusive trade.[34]

Policy analysts offered mixed assessments of the summit. Some asserted that U.S. initiatives were modest and not fully developed, whereas others emphasized that the summit prompted pragmatic steps on shared challenges that could portend stronger regional partnerships on such key issues as health, migration, climate change, and economic recovery.[35]

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[31] White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

[32] Ibid.

[33] For background, see CRS Insight IN11934, *2022 Summit of the Americas*, by Peter J. Meyer.

[34] White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Commitments to Advance Food Security in the Western Hemisphere," and "Fact Sheet: President Biden Announces the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity," June 8, 2022.

[35] See, for example, Oliver Stuenkel, Shannon K. O'Neil, Andrés Rozental, and Juan Battaleme, "A Region Divided: What Did the Summit of the Americas Accomplish? Global Memo by FGV, CFR, COMEXI, and CARI," Council of Councils, June 10, 2022, at https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global-memos/region-divided-what-did-summit-americas-accomplish; and Ralph Espach, "What Did the Summit of the Americas Accomplish?," Center for Naval Analyses, June 27, 2022, at https://www.cna.org/our-media/indepth/2022/06/summit-of-the-americas-in-review.

The following areas discussed below—COVID-19 and health security, migration, climate change, and democracy—highlight some of the Biden Administration's key policies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

COVID-19 and Health Security. At the June 2022 Summit of the Americas, the Administration launched a partnership with PAHO to establish an Americas Health Corps that would provide training to 500,000 public health, health science, and medical professionals throughout the region.[36] The initiative is aimed at supporting implementation of an Action Plan on Health and Resilience in the Americas, agreed to at the summit. The action plan focuses on addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and strengthening the capacity and resilience of the region's health systems to address future infectious disease outbreaks. Through mid-2022, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) had provided more than $539 million for the COVID-19 response in the region. As noted, as of early November 2022, the United States had donated almost 70 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to 29 Latin American and Caribbean countries, both bilaterally and through the COVAX Facility.[37]

Migration. Also at the June 2022 summit, the Biden Administration joined with 20 other hemispheric countries to endorse the Los Angeles Declaration for Migration and Protection. The agreement seeks to mobilize the region around actions to create conditions for safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration, and to strengthen frameworks for international protection and cooperation.[38]

Much of the Administration's attention to the region in early 2021 focused on immigration from Central America. By July 2021, the Administration released two new strategies to address the underlying causes that push Central Americans to migrate and to collaboratively manage migration in the region. The Administration subsequently broadened its engagement on migration issues as the pandemic-driven economic downturn contributed to large-scale migrant flows throughout the hemisphere. In October 2021, the United States participated in a migration ministerial in Colombia to address regional cooperation regarding irregular migration, which essentially was a precursor to the Los Angeles Declaration. In early October 2022, the United States participated in a ministerial in Peru on the Los Angeles Declaration and announced new U.S. commitments in humanitarian and security assistance to address the immediate drivers and root causes of irregular migration. In mid-October 2022, the Administration announced new policies, coordinated with Mexico, to address the large number of Venezuelans arriving without visas at the U.S. Southwest border.[39] (Also see "Migration Issues," below.)

Climate Change. The Biden Administration has reincorporated climate change concerns into the U.S. policy approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean.[40] The Administration invited

[36] White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Action on COVID-19 Pandemic Response and Improving Health Systems and Health Security in the Americas," June 8, 2022.

[37] U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "COVID-19-Latin America and the Caribbean," Fact Sheet #5, FY2022, June 30, 2022; and U.S. Department of State, "COVID-19 Vaccine Donations, Western Hemisphere," updated November 8, 2022, at https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/.

[38] White House, "Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection," June 10, 2022, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/.

[39] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "DHS Announces New Migration Enforcement Process for Venezuelans," October 12, 2022.

[40] Under the Biden Administration, the United States also rejoined the Paris Agreement in February 2021, reversing the Trump Administration's withdrawal of the United States from the agreement. See CRS In Focus IF11746, *United States Rejoins the Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Options for Congress*, by Jane A. Leggett.

seven Latin American and Caribbean heads of government to attend the April 2021 Leaders' Summit on Climate.[41] The summit sought to build support among the world's leading economies to adopt more ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in advance of the 2021 U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP26). In September 2021, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry participated in a virtual High-Level Dialogue on Climate Action in the Americas hosted by Argentina designed to build momentum for climate action in the region ahead of COP26.

Among the climate change actions taken at the June 2022 Summit of the Americas, the Administration announced a new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (PACC 2030) aimed at supporting climate adaptation, strengthening energy security, and building resilience for critical infrastructure and local economies.[42] The *National Security Strategy* issued in October 2022 maintains the Administration will use mitigation and adaptation efforts to fuel a sustainable economic recovery and protect forest ecosystems, including by promoting trade and investment in clean energy and mobilizing financing and other support for conservation of the Amazon.[43] At the November 2022 27th Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United States announced several new initiatives on climate change; these initiatives included engagement and technical support for climate resilience and sustainable development in small island developing states in the Caribbean (and Pacific) and expanded access to risk-based insurance to protect vulnerable people in the Caribbean and Central America (as well as Africa and the Pacific).[44]

Democracy. In its first year, the Biden Administration set forth its broad foreign policy priority of renewing democracy to counter rising authoritarianism and nationalism around the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this priority has included working with partners to promote democracy in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, as well as broader efforts in other countries to reinforce democracy and combat corruption, which undermines citizens' trust in government.[45]

Secretary of State Blinken addressed concerns about the state of democracy in the Americas during an October 2021 visit to Ecuador. He noted how the pandemic had exacerbated economic inequities in the region and contributed to an increase in dissatisfaction with the way democracy works. Blinken focused his remarks on three major challenges and approaches to help make democracy work: (1) more effectively fight corruption by strengthening existing, and developing new, anti-corruption tools; (2) improve civilian security by taking a more holistic approach that deals with the root causes of crime and violence; and (3) tackle economic and social challenges such as by bolstering labor standards, expanding access to adequate education and health, and providing more inclusive opportunities.[46] President Biden highlighted many of those same

[41] The seven leaders were from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Jamaica, and Mexico.

[42] White House, "Fact Sheet: Vice President Harris Launches the U.S.-Caribbean Partnership to Address the Climate Crisis 2030 (PACC 2030)," June 9, 2022.

[43] White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022.

[44] White House, "Fact Sheet: President Biden Announces New Initiatives at COP27 to Strengthen U.S. Leadership in Tackling Climate Change," November 11, 2022.

[45] See U.S. Department of State, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, "A Foreign Policy for the American People," speech, March 3, 2021, at https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/; and U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration and International Economic Policy, *The Biden Administration's Policy Priorities For Latin America and the Caribbean*, 117th Cong., 1st sess., November 16, 2021, Serial No. 117-90 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2022).

[46] U.S. Department of State, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, "Making Democracy Deliver for the Americas," speech, October 20, 2021.

themes, as well as the need to defend against authoritarianism and respect human rights, during the December 2021 global Summit for Democracy, in which 25 governments from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as various civil society activists, were invited to participate virtually.[47]

At the June 2022 Summit of the Americas, the hemisphere's leaders adopted a range of commitments to promote democracy, good governance, and human rights. The Biden Administration announced an initiative to protect, defend, and promote civic space in Central America and new commitments to support civil society and promote independent media and information integrity.[48]

On the Venezuela policy challenge, the Biden Administration is continuing to pressure the Maduro government through economic sanctions and providing humanitarian support to Venezuelans both inside and outside the country. The Administration has supported negotiations between the Venezuelan opposition and the Maduro regime. U.S. officials maintain that sanctions relief would come only in response to constructive steps by the regime.[49] (See "Venezuela," below.)

On Nicaragua, the Administration has used targeted sanctions and broad sanctions against the gold sector in response to the antidemocratic actions of the Ortega government. The Administration has also worked multilaterally to increase international pressure against the Nicaraguan government, including at the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations. (See "Nicaragua," below.)

On Cuba, the Biden Administration in its initial months announced it would review policy decisions made in the prior Administration, including the decision to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism.[50] Since Cuba's harsh response to street protests in 2021, the Administration has imposed several rounds of targeted sanctions against Cubans officials involved in the government's repression. In May 2022, the Administration announced several policy changes aimed at increasing support for the Cuban people, which included facilitating family reunification and easing some U.S. restrictions on travel and remittances. (See "Cuba," below.)

Since mid-2021, the situation in Haiti—with a presidential assassination, a surge in gang violence, and an earthquake—has provided considerable challenges for the Biden Administration. In October 2022, in light of increased violence by criminal gangs and deteriorating health conditions that have included a cholera outbreak, the United States worked with Canada to coordinate the delivery of equipment to the Haitian National Police with the goal of strengthening the force's ability to stem gang violence and permit the flow of humanitarian assistance. The Administration has supported efforts to secure a U.N. Security Council resolution to create a multinational force to address Haiti's security situation, cholera outbreak, and food insecurity.[51] (See "Haiti," below.)

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[47] White House, "Summit for Democracy Summary of Proceedings," December 23, 2021. The eight Latin American and Caribbean countries not invited to the summit were Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

[48] White House, "Fact Sheet: Bien Harris Administration Advances Democratic Renewal Agenda at the Ninth Summit of the Americas," June 7, 2022.

[49] See VOA News, "U.S. Secretary of State: No Changes in Venezuela Sanctions," October 7, 2022; and U.S. Congress, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Assessing U.S. Policy Toward Venezuela*, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., September 15, 2022 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2022).

[50] U.S. Department of State, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and Deputy Director of the National Economic Council Bharat Ramamurti," March 9, 2021.

[51] U.S. Department of State, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols, "The Secretary's Upcoming Travel to Canada," October 26, 2022.

Legislative Action in the 117th Congress

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 the areas of immigration and trade.

Enacted Measures and Approved Resolutions

Since 2020, Congress has appropriated some $17 billion in international affairs funding to respond to COVID-19 globally. In the 117th Congress, this funding included $10.8 billion appropriated in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2), enacted in March 2021. The funding has supported contributions to multilateral efforts and health interventions, humanitarian assistance, and donation of COVID-19 vaccine doses worldwide, including to Latin America and the Caribbean.

In November 2021, Congress completed action on the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform Act of 2021, or the RENACER Act (P.L. 117-54). Among its provisions, the measure directed the U.S. government to use its diplomatic tools and targeted sanctions to advance democratic elections and combat corruption. Prior to the bill's passage, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs had ordered reported a similar, although not identical, measure (H.R. 2946) in July 2021, and the Senate had approved S. 1041, amended, in August 2021.

In December 2021, Congress completed action on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022 (P.L. 117-81), which included several provisions on Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Section 1007 extended authority to support a unified counterdrug and counterterrorism campaign in Colombia.
- Section 1035 extended a prohibition on the use of funds to close or relinquish control of the U.S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.
- Section 1205 provided temporary authority to obligate or expend not more than $2 million in FY2022 to pay for travel and subsistence expenses of foreign national security forces participating in the training program of the United Sates-Colombia Action Plan for Regional Security.
- Section 1206 required the Secretary of Defense to develop and implement a security cooperation strategy for certain combatant commands, including the U.S. Southern Command.
- Section 1336 extended a certification requirement for the transfer of vehicles by the Department of Defense (DOD) to Guatemala during FY2022 and required a series of reports (by the Secretary of Defense, Comptroller General, and a federally funded research and development center) on U.S. security cooperation with the Northern Triangle countries.
- Section 1337 required a report, within 180 days, from the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State on the security cooperation relationship between the United States and Colombia and activities focused on human rights and the rule of law.
- Section 1338 required a report by June 30, 2022, from the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense and in consultation with the heads of

other appropriate federal departments and agencies, on efforts by China to expand its presence and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In March 2022, Congress completed action on the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill, included as Division K of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103). Although the law and its explanatory statement did not specify total funding for Latin America and the Caribbean, they included funding directives for several key countries (Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Venezuela) and regional programs for the Caribbean and Central America; ultimately the State Department allocated over $2 billion in assistance for the region (see "U.S. Foreign Aid"). P.L. 117-103 also included, as Division V, the Haiti Development, Accountability, and Institutional Transparency Initiative Act, to promote the sustainable rebuilding and development of Haiti and the prioritization of U.S. support for anti-corruption efforts and human rights.

In the 117th Congress, the House and Senate approved several resolutions on U.S. relations with the region. On the human rights situation in **Cuba**, the House approved H.Res. 760 in November 2021 and the Senate approved four resolutions (S.Res. 37, S.Res. 81, S.Res. 310, and S.Res. 489) from April 2021 to January 2022. Among other resolutions, the Senate passed S.Res. 22 in April 2021, reaffirming the U.S. partnership with **Ecuador**; S.Res. 120 in May 2021, recognizing the **Summit of the Americas** and reaffirming the U.S. commitment to a more prosperous, secure, and democratic Western Hemisphere; and S.Res. 753 in September 2022, expressing support for "free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful" elections in **Brazil**. In July 2022, the House approved H.Res. 1168, urging the President to prioritize and implement trade programs with the **Caribbean region** that promote sustainable and resilient economic development.

Pending and Additional Congressional Action

FY2023 Foreign Aid Appropriations. As of mid-November 2022, Congress had not completed action on FY2023 foreign aid appropriations. In July 2022, the House Appropriations Committee reported the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (FY2023 SFOPS bill), H.R. 8282 (H.Rept. 117-401), and an SFOPS bill, S. 4662, also was introduced in the Senate. (See "U.S. Foreign Aid" as well as country and subregional sections below.)

NDAA for FY2023. The House-passed NDAA for FY2023, H.R. 7900 (H.Rept. 117-397), approved in July 2022, has several provisions on Latin America and the Caribbean. These include provisions that would require a report on U.S. military capabilities in the Caribbean Basin; establish a State Department fellowship program for Central America; prohibit funding for aerial fumigation in Colombia and require a report on the Colombian military; require a report on arms trafficking in Haiti and express the sense of Congress and a statement of policy on Haiti; require a report on bilateral security cooperation with Mexico; and require a report on Russia's efforts to expand its presence and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Senate has not yet considered its version of the FY2023 NDAA, S. 4543 (H.Rept. 117-130), which the Senate Armed Services Committee reported in July 2022.

Competition with China. The Senate and House separately approved broad bills aimed at positioning the United States to better compete with China, both of which included numerous provisions on Latin America and the Caribbean. The Senate approved S. 1260, the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021, in June 2021, and the House approved H.R. 4521, the America COMPETES Act of 2022, in February 2022. In March 2022, the Senate approved H.R. 4521, substituting the language of S. 1260, and the measure went to conference in April 2022. Ultimately, many provisions, including those on Latin America and the Caribbean, were not included in a narrower legislative vehicle signed into law in August 2022 (P.L. 117-167) aimed at

supporting the semiconductor industry, boosting renewable energy industries, and addressing climate change.

Both House and Senate versions of H.R. 4521 would have required a strategy to strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness and promote good governance, human rights, and the rule of law in Latin America and the Caribbean; required a report assessing China's engagement in international organizations and the defense sector in Latin America and the Caribbean; support U.S. defense cooperation in the region; and increased U.S. engagement with civil society in the region regarding accountability, human rights, and the risks of pervasive surveillance technologies. The Senate version also would have required a strategy to increase exports of U.S. goods and services to Latin America and the Caribbean and would have authorized a capital increase for the Inter-American Development Bank. The House version also would have increased U.S. engagement with the Caribbean on energy issues and disaster resilience; required a strategy to expand U.S. educational and cultural diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean region (and a report on China's related activity in the region); and required reports on major Chinese infrastructure investments in Latin America and the Caribbean and on multilateral efforts to address Latin American fentanyl trafficking, including efforts between China and Latin America to combat such trafficking.

Other Action. In other congressional action in the 117th Congress, the House approved H.R. 6 in March 2021, which would provide a pathway to citizenship for those brought to the United States as children and those from countries with TPS designations. In July 2021, the Senate approved S. 2045, which would rename the street in front of the Cuban Embassy after a Cuban democracy activist. In April 2022, the House passed H.R. 4133, which would authorize Caribbean Basin Security Initiative assistance from FY2022 through FY2026 and would establish monitoring and reporting requirements for the program.

Regional U.S. Policy Issues

U.S. Foreign Aid

The United States provides foreign assistance to Latin American and Caribbean countries to support development and other U.S. objectives. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased economic and development challenges in the region. As noted, the Latin American and Caribbean economy as a whole contracted by 7.0% in 2020.[52] Although the region began to recover in 2021, with 6.9% GDP growth, Latin America's extreme poverty rate (13.8%) reached the highest level in more than 20 years, with an estimated 86 million people unable to satisfy basic nutritional requirements.[53] Moreover, nearly 61% of individuals surveyed in the region in 2021 asserted that their personal economic situations were worse than they had been a year earlier.[54] This deterioration in living conditions has contributed to political unrest and large-scale migration flows throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.[55]

[52] IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, October 2022.

[53] Ibid; and ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2021*, January 2022, p. 63.

[54] Vanderbilt University, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), "LAPOP Data Playground," accessed September 22, 2022.

[55] Moisés Naím, "Why Hard-Liners Are Gaining Steam in Latin America," *Politico Magazine*, July 12, 2022; and Michael Stott, "Repression and Poverty Trigger Record Migration in the Americas," *Financial Times*, September 11, 2022.

The Biden Administration has requested more than $2.4 billion of foreign assistance for Latin America and the Caribbean in FY2023, which (in current dollars) would be the largest annual budget allocation for the region in more than a decade. If enacted, total State Department- and USAID-managed funding for the region would increase by $369.9 million (18.2%) compared with the FY2022 estimated level (see **Table 3**). The Administration's FY2023 budget request also would provide $38.0 million to the Inter-American Foundation (IAF)—a small, independent U.S. foreign assistance agency that supports community-led development in Latin America and the Caribbean. That figure would be the same amount the IAF received in FY2022.

Much of the increased funding for the region would support continued implementation of the Administration's four-year, $4 billion plan to foster systemic reform and address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. The FY2023 request would provide $986.8 million for bilateral and regional programs in the seven countries of Central America, which would increase aid to the subregion by at least $282.8 million (41.8%) compared with the FY2022 estimate.[56] The Administration also has sought increased funding for Haiti to help the country restore democratic institutions, address the deteriorating security situation, and foster stability in the aftermath of the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and recurrent natural disasters. The FY2023 request would provide $274.8 million for Haiti, which is $55.6 million (25.4%) above the FY2022 estimate. With regard to other regional priorities in FY2023, the Administration has requested $462.9 million to support counternarcotic efforts, peace accord implementation, and rural security and development in Colombia; $141.6 million to strengthen the rule of law in Mexico; and $55.0 million for democracy, human rights, and health activities in Venezuela.

Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2016-FY2023 Request

(billions of U.S. dollars)

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022 (est.)	2023 (req.)
1.69	1.67	1.67[a]	1.69	1.72[b]	1.79[b]	2.04	2.41

Sources: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations,* FY2018-FY2023; and U.S. Department of State, "FY2022 Estimate Data," August 16, 2022.

Notes: These figures exclude Food for Peace Act (P.L. 480) food aid and assistance appropriated as voluntary contributions to the Organization of American States.

a. Final FY2018 allocations are unclear, because the Administration reprogrammed approximately $396 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.

b. The FY2020 and FY2021 totals do not include supplemental COVID-19 assistance.

Congressional Action. In March 2021, Congress enacted the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2), which provided $10.8 billion to respond to COVID-19 globally, including through health interventions, humanitarian assistance, and contributions to multilateral response efforts. That funding built on nearly $6.3 billion appropriated during the 116th Congress to support global vaccine procurement and delivery and other pandemic-related foreign assistance programs. As of June 2022, USAID had provided the region with at least $539.0 million of supplemental

[56] $27.8 million of the $986.8 million requested for Central America would be provided through global accounts that are not included in the regional total for the Western Hemisphere. This comparison between the FY2022 estimate and FY2023 request excludes assistance requested for Central America through global accounts, since FY2022 estimate data for such assistance is not available.

pandemic response aid. As of late October 2022, the United States had provided Latin American and Caribbean countries with almost 70 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines.[57]

Congress concluded action on FY2022 appropriations approximately halfway through the fiscal year. The House passed the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 (H.R. 4373/H.Rept. 117-84; also known as the SFOPS bill), in July 2021, and an SFOPS bill (S. 3075) was introduced in the Senate in October 2021, but neither was enacted. Instead, Congress passed a series of continuing resolutions (P.L. 117-43, P.L. 117-70, P.L. 117-86, and P.L. 117-95) that funded foreign aid programs in the region at the FY2021 level from October 1, 2021, until March 15, 2022, when President Biden signed into law the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Program Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K). The act and accompanying explanatory statement did not specify a total foreign assistance amount for Latin America and Caribbean; however, the State Department has allocated more than $2.0 billion to the region.[58]

Congress has not concluded action on FY2023 appropriations. In July 2022, the House Appropriations Committee reported its SFOPS bill (H.R. 8282/H.Rept. 117-401), and an SFOPS bill was introduced in the Senate (S. 4662). Although Congress has not taken further action on either bill, it approved a continuing resolution (P.L. 117-180) on September 30, 2022, that funds foreign aid programs in the region at the FY2022 level until December 16, 2022.

Congress may draw from H.R. 8282 and S. 4662 as it considers appropriations for the remainder of the fiscal year. Neither measure would specify comprehensive appropriations levels for Latin America and the Caribbean. Nevertheless, both measures would provide more funding than the Administration requested for Colombia and the IAF and less funding than the Administration requested for Venezuela. Both measures also would place conditions on some aid to Central America, Colombia, and Haiti, and direct funding to various initiatives and objectives throughout the region.

For additional information, see CRS Report R47028, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2022 Appropriations*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report R47070, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2023 Budget and Appropriations*, by Emily M. Morgenstern and Cory R. Gill; and CRS In Focus IF11581, *Latin America and the Caribbean: Impact of COVID-19*, by Mark P. Sullivan and Peter J. Meyer.

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 relations between the governments of those countries and the United States. Latin Americans comprise the vast majority of individuals 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.[59] The Trump Administration implemented many executive changes to immigration policy; the Biden Administration revised some, but not all, of these policies.

[57] USAID, "COVID-19 – Latin America and the Caribbean," Fact Sheet #5, Fiscal Year 2022, June 30, 2022, and U.S. Department of State, "COVID-19 Vaccine Donations, Western Hemisphere," updated November 8, 2022, at https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha.

[58] U.S. Department of State, FY2022 estimate data, August 16, 2022.

[59] 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

The Trump Administration's rhetoric, tariff threats, foreign aid cuts, and restrictive immigration policies tested relations with many countries in the region, and particularly with Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries. The Administration terminated TPS designations for Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras (those terminations are facing legal challenges),[60] rescinded DACA through a process that the Supreme Court ruled in June 2020 did not follow proper procedures and had to be vacated,[61] and restricted access to asylum.[62] In January 2019, the Trump Administration launched the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), a program that required many migrants and asylum-seekers to await their U.S. immigration proceedings in Mexico. The Administration also signed what it termed *asylum cooperative agreements* (ACAs) with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; these agreements would allow the United States to transfer certain asylum-seekers who arrive at a U.S. border to Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras to apply for asylum in one of those countries. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began to implement the agreement with Guatemala in November 2019 but suspended implementation in March 2020. DHS finalized ACAs with El Salvador and Honduras in late 2020, but never implemented them.

The factors that drive U.S.-bound migration from Latin America are multifaceted, and some have changed over time. These factors include poverty and unemployment; political and economic instability; crime and violence; natural disasters, climate change, and food insecurity; relatively close proximity to the United States; familial ties in the United States; and relatively attractive U.S. economic conditions. The economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with ongoing turmoil in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Haiti, have prompted increased migration from those and other countries in the region.

Migrant apprehensions at the Southwest border reached a 45-year low in 2017 but began to rise in FY2019, with increasing numbers of unaccompanied children and families from the Northern Triangle, many of whom were seeking asylum, comprising a majority of apprehensions. In FY2020, apprehensions declined by more than half, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020.[63] In response to the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an order to restrict travel across land ports of entry, known as Title 42, for the part of the *U.S. Code* it falls under. DHS's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) implemented the policy, which initially suspended asylum processing for those subject to Title 42. As a result, most migrants without valid travel documents were expelled into Mexico or returned to their home countries as quickly as possible. In FY2021, border enforcement encounters (apprehensions and expulsions) reached a record 1.7 million at the Southwest border, although that total included individuals expelled into Mexico more than once. Migrant origins also expanded beyond Mexico and Central America to include South American countries and the Caribbean.[64] In FY2022, border

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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 El Salvador in 2001, and for Haiti in 2010. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) initiative is an initiative 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.

[60] As legal challenges to the termination of TPS for these countries continue, DHS has extended the validity of TPS documents for current beneficiaries through December 31, 2022.

[61] U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. v. Regents of the Univ. of Cal.,—S. Ct.—, 2020 WL 3271746, at *3 (2020).

[62] CRS Report R46755, *The Law of Asylum Procedure at the Border: Statutes and Agency Implementation*.

[63] U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), "Southwest Border Migration FY2020." See explanation of the difference between a Title 8 apprehension under DHS authority and a Title 42 expulsion under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention authority in the notes.

[64] CRS Report R46999, *Immigration: Apprehensions and Expulsions at the Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and

encounters at the Southwest border reached nearly 2.4 million for the first time, with large increases in migration from Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.[65]

The Biden Administration initially introduced a comprehensive immigration agenda that included a focus on addressing unauthorized immigration from Central America. President Biden took executive actions revising some of the Trump Administration's restrictive immigration policies but maintained certain COVID-19-related immigration restrictions while contending with a large increase in the number of Central American and Mexican migrants seeking to enter the United States at the Southwest border. In March 2021, the Administration designated Venezuela for TPS. In July 2021, the Administration released two new strategies to address the underlying causes that push Central Americans to migrate and collaboratively manage migration in the region. In accordance with the strategies, the Administration allocated $272.2 million of humanitarian assistance in FY2021 and more than $91.9 million in FY2022 to Central America.[66] Bilateral and regional foreign assistance has sought to address the root causes of migration and to support migration management efforts. After several legal challenges, the Supreme Court ruled in June 2022 that the Biden Administration could terminate the MPP program.[67] While the MPP is being phased out, the Administration has continued to use Title 42 authority to expel migrants. On November 15, 2022, a federal court blocked the use of Title 42; the Department of Justice is filing an unopposed stay motion to keep Title 42 in place for some period to prepare for an orderly transition to new policies at the border.[68]

The Administration has broadened its engagement on migration issues as the pandemic-driven economic downturn has contributed to large-scale migrant flows throughout the hemisphere. In June 2022, the Administration announced the Los Angeles Declaration for Migration and Protection at the Summit of the Americas with 20 other Western Hemisphere countries.[69] The declaration recognized irregular migration management as a shared responsibility and sought to bolster regional efforts to improve border controls, create legal migration and protection pathways, support migrants and host communities, and coordinate responses to mass migration movements. Several of the signatory countries announced commitments to regularize certain unauthorized populations and to implement or expand temporary worker programs. The Administration announced humanitarian aid to support vulnerable migrants, a commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees from the region in FY2023-FY2024, and the resumption of family reunification parole programs for Haitians and Cubans, among other measures.[70] Implementation of the Los Angeles Declaration officially began in September 2022.[71]

William A. Kandel.

[65] U.S. CBP, "Nationwide Encounters," accessed November 2, 20222, at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters.

[66] USAID, "El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras – Regional Response," Fact Sheet #1, FY2022, December 1, 2021, and Fact Sheet #4, July 19, 2022.

[67] CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10420, *Supreme Court Grants Stay in MPP Case*, by Ben Harrington and Hillel R. Smith.

[68] Caroline Downey, "Federal Judge Blocks Use of Title 42 to Expel Migrants on Public-Health Grounds," *National Review*, November 16, 2022; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Statement from DHS on Decision Regarding Title 42," November 15, 2022; and Nancy Gimena Huisha-Huisha et al. v. Alejandro Mayorkas, in his official capacity, Secretary of Homeland Security et. al., Civil Action No. 21-100 (United States District Court for the District of Columbia 2022).

[69] The White House, "Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection," June 10, 2022.

[70] The White House, "Fact Sheet: The Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection U.S. Government and Foreign Partner Deliverables," June 10, 2022.

[71] The White House, "Readout of Los Angeles Declaration Implementation Launch," September 27, 2022.

In October 2022, the Administration launched new border enforcement policies aim to reduce the number of Venezuelans encountered by CBP at the Southwest border. Venezuelans apprehended between ports of entry are subject to the public health-related Title 42 policy, which allows CBP to expel migrants back to Mexico (in coordination with the government of Mexico). At the same time, up to 24,000 Venezuelans who are outside the United States, meet program requirements, and have a financial sponsor in the United States can apply to travel by air to the U.S. interior and be paroled into the country.[72]

Congressional Action. Congress has not considered comprehensive immigration measures (S. 348/H.R. 1177), but immigration-related bills have seen floor or committee action in one chamber, mainly in the House. These bills address temporary and permanent immigration, humanitarian admissions, and legalization of unauthorized immigrants, among other issues.[73] Congress has continued funding and overseeing U.S. assistance to respond to the Venezuela regional migration crisis, address the root causes of migration from Central America, and bolster Mexico's interdiction and humanitarian protection systems. Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about the treatment of Haitian migrants and the Biden Administration's continued use of Title 42, and others have called for a resumption in the MPP program and more restrictive border policies. Still other Members have called for the Administration to designate or re-designate certain countries for TPS.

For additional information, see CRS Insight IN12040, *New Immigration Policies Related to Venezuelan Migrants*, by Audrey Singer, Jill H. Wilson, and Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R47182, *International Migration Trends in the Western Hemisphere*; CRS Report R47061, *Immigration Legislation and Issues in the 117th Congress*, coordinated by Andorra Bruno; CRS Report R46999, *Immigration: Apprehensions and Expulsions at the Southwest Border*, by Audrey Singer and William A. Kandel; CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10798, *Supreme Court Rules That Migrant Protection Protocols Rescission Was Not Unlawful*, by Hillel R. Smith; CRS In Focus IF11151, *Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS In Focus IF10215, *Mexico's Immigration Control Efforts*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R44849, *H-2A and H-2B Temporary Worker Visas: Policy and Related Issues*, by Andorra Bruno; CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure*, by Jill H. Wilson; and CRS Report R46764, *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): By the Numbers*, by Andorra Bruno.

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/or transit zone for several illicit drugs destined for U.S. markets—cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and opioids, including heroin and fentanyl. Traffickers in the region also divert and traffic in precursor chemicals used in illicit drug production. 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. Policymakers also are concerned that methamphetamine and cocaine overdoses in the United States are rising, with some cocaine overdoses linked to the presence of synthetic opioids.

Drug demand in the United States and changes in the international drug market continue to drive drug production in Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Over 90% of heroin seized and sampled in the United States comes from Mexico. Opium poppy cultivation and heroin production rose in

[72] See CRS Insight IN12040, *New Immigration Policies Related to Venezuelan Migrants*, by Audrey Singer, Jill H. Wilson, and Clare Ribando Seelke.

[73] See CRS Report R47061, *Immigration Legislation and Issues in the 117th Congress*, coordinated by Andorra Bruno.

Mexico from 2012 through 2017 but have since declined, possibly replaced in part by the expansion of illicit fentanyl production of fentanyl. After the Chinese government implemented strict controls on all forms of fentanyl, including fentanyl analogues in mid-2019, Mexico became "the only significant source of illicit fentanyl or fentanyl analogues trafficked to the United States" by 2021."[74] Mexico is also the primary foreign source of methamphetamine encountered in the United States. Estimated coca cultivation and potential cocaine production in Colombia, which supplies roughly 89% of cocaine in the United States, decreased but remained near record levels in 2021.[75] Although estimated coca cultivation and production in Peru also fell, estimated coca cultivation and production increased slightly in Bolivia.

Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and most other source and transit countries in the region have worked closely with the United States to combat drug production and interdict illicit flows. However, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has scaled back some cooperation and Colombian President Gustavo Petro has criticized past supply-side efforts and urged a new approach to drug policy. In March 2020, the Department of Justice (DOJ) indicted Venezuela's leader, Nicolás Maduro (whom the United States does not recognize as Venezuela's legitimate president), and other current and former high-ranking Venezuelan officials. As charged, Maduro allegedly participated in a drug trafficking organization that conspired with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to traffic illicit drugs to the United States. Over the past several years, Maduro government officials have been identified as conspiring with FARC dissidents and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas operating in Venezuela to smuggle cocaine and illicit gold.[76] President Petro's restoration of ties with the Maduro government and decriminalization of marijuana and potentially cocaine could strain U.S.-Colombia antidrug efforts, although Secretary Blinken said the countries' approaches are "largely in sync" during a recent visit to Colombia.[77] U.S. antidrug cooperation with Bolivia decreased under former President Evo Morales (2006-2019) and remains limited under his successor, President Luis Arce. The lack of a constitutional government in Haiti and the ongoing political crisis in Nicaragua have hindered antidrug efforts and cooperation with those countries as well.

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. Despite efforts to combat the drug trade, many Latin American governments, particularly in Mexico, Central America, and Haiti continue to suffer from weak criminal justice systems and law enforcement agencies. Public 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, there is a widespread perception—particularly in Latin America—that U.S. demand for illicit drugs is largely to blame for the region's crime problems. The COVID-19 pandemic lowered violence in most countries, but drug trafficking-related violence remained elevated in Mexico.

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

[74] U.S. Department of State, *Supplement to the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, report to Congress pursuant to Section 489(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2291h(a)), as amended by Section 6610 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (P.L. 117-81), June 17, 2022.

[75] Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), "ONDCP Releases Data on Coca Cultivation and Production in the Andean Region," July 14, 2022.

[76] Douglas Farah, *The Maduro Regime's Illicit Activities: A Threat to Democracy in Venezuela and Security in Latin America*, Atlantic Council, August 12, 2020.

[77] U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken And Colombian President Gustavo Petro At a Joint Press Availability," October 3, 2022.

in Central America. Gang-related violence has been particularly acute in El Salvador, Honduras, urban areas in Guatemala. Gangs have been involved in a range of criminal activities, including local drug distribution, extortion, money laundering, and weapons smuggling, and they have used violence to enforce COVID-19-related quarantines. Gang-related violence has fueled irregular migration to the United States.

Violent gangs, some tied to politicians and linked to drug traffickers, threaten to overwhelm the de facto government in Haiti. Gangs have exerted power and control over territory, access to fuel, and the delivery of humanitarian aid, challenging the authority of the Haitian National Police. Escalating gang violence threatens to worsen political, economic, and social conditions in Haiti, a country where the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 40% of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance.[78]

U.S. Policy. For more than 50 years, U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean has focused on countering drug trafficking and reducing drug production in the region. The largest antidrug support program, Plan Colombia, helped the country combat both drug trafficking and rebel groups financed by the drug trade. U.S. support to combat drug trafficking and reduce crime also has included partnerships with other countries in the region: the Mérida Initiative with Mexico, CARSI, and the CBSI. Through visa denials and revocations, targeted economic sanctions, and federal criminal investigations and prosecutions, U.S. Administrations also have sought to punish foreign officials and entities complicit with drugs traffickers, gangs, and other criminal groups. The State Department manages several deterrence tools, including multiple visa denial programs targeting foreign drug traffickers, as well programs to offer rewards for information related to significant foreign narcotics traffickers and transnational organized crime.

The Biden Administration's National Drug Control Strategy, released in April 2022, focuses on using data to improve domestic treatment and harm-reduction efforts and disrupting the domestic and international financial activities of transnational criminal organizations, as well as strengthening foreign antidrug partnerships.[79] Drug policy efforts complement broader efforts to combat corruption, a core component of the Administration's national security policy.[80] To complement those strategies, the Biden Administration is implementing a new Bicentennial Framework for U.S.-Mexican security cooperation that focuses on addressing drugs and violence from a public health perspective, combating transborder crime, and dismantling illicit financial networks. The Administration also announced new "holistic U.S.-Colombia counternarcotics metrics" in May 2022; these metrics could further evolve with new bilateral approaches adopted with the Petro government.[81] Future regional drug policy may be further informed by the findings of the congressionally mandated Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission, which recommended the State Department take the lead in regional drug policy and replace the annual drug certification process with compacts negotiated with countries to identify bilateral priorities.[82]

Congressional Action. Congress continues to address drug policy and other crime-related issues through legislation, foreign assistance, conditions on foreign assistance, and reporting requirements in legislation. The FY2022 NDAA, P.L. 117-81, had several provisions on Colombia, including an extension of authority to support a unified counterdrug and

[78] U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022*.

[79] The White House, ONDCP, National Drug Control Strategy, April 21, 2022, available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf.

[80] The White House, "Memorandum on Establishing the Fight Against Corruption as a Core United States National Security Interest," June 3, 2021.

[81] The White House, "ONDCP Welcomes New Holistic U.S.-Colombia Counternarcotics Metrics," May 4, 2022.

[82] Report of the Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission, *Charting a New Path Forward*, December 2020.

counterterrorism campaign. In March 2022, Congress enacted the FY2022 Consolidated Appropriation Act (P.L. 117-103), requiring additional human rights conditions on International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) assistance to Colombia. The explanatory statement included several reporting requirements from H.Rept. 117-84, such as a review of funds provided through the Mérida Initiative, plans to improve data collection on synthetic drug trafficking, efforts to combat fentanyl flows, and the efficacy of U.S. past drug policy efforts.

Congress continues to consider the Biden Administration's FY2023 budget request and the FY2023 NDAA. H.Rept. 117-401, accompanying the House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2023 SFOPS bill, H.R. 8282, would require updated versions of the reports required by H.Rept. 117-84. The draft explanatory statement to the SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, would require the Secretary of State to submit a report including a cost-benefit analysis of past antidrug efforts in the region, how the current strategy differs from past efforts, and the goals and projected results of current efforts within 120 days of the bill's enactment. The House-passed version of the FY2023 NDAA (H.R. 7900) would extend authority to support a unified counterdrug and counterterrorism campaign in Colombia, as well as require a report on arms trafficking to Haiti and a report on drug cartel operations in Mexico and U.S.-Mexican security cooperation.

The 117th Congress has convened oversight hearings to address drug trafficking and crime in the region, including a November 2021 Senate hearing on drugs and corruption. In addition, several House and Senate hearings on relations with specific countries (e.g., Colombia, Haiti, and Venezuela) included a focus on antidrug cooperation (see **Appendix**). Issues of congressional concern expressed in hearings and through letters to the Administration have included how to address drug flows emanating from Venezuela, how to improve antidrug cooperation with Mexico after strains in bilateral relations, and how to engage with the Petro government in Colombia on antidrug issues.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10578, *U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation: From the Mérida Initiative to the Bicentennial Framework*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R41576, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS In Focus IF10371, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: An Overview*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS In Focus IF10789, *Caribbean Basin Security Initiative*, by Mark P. Sullivan; and CRS In Focus IF12182, *Haiti: Political Conflict and U.S. Policy Overview*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Maureen Taft-Morales; CRS Report R46695, *The U.S. "Majors List" of Illicit Drug-Producing and Drug-Transit Countries*, by Liana W. Rosen.

Trade Policy

The Latin American and Caribbean region is among the United States' most important regional trading partners. Economic relations between the United States and most of its trading partners in the region remain strong, despite challenges, such as the downturn in economic growth and trade due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the high levels of violence in some countries. The United States accounted for roughly 31% of the region's merchandise imports and 45% of its merchandise exports in 2021. Most of this trade is with Mexico, which accounted for 76% of U.S. imports from the region and 61% of U.S. exports to the region in 2021. After a 15% decline in total U.S. trade with the region caused by the 2020 global economic downturn, total trade rebounded to 27% growth in 2021. U.S. exports to the region increased 33% in 2021, and imports increased by 22% (see **Table 4**).

The United States has strengthened economic ties with Latin America and the Caribbean over the past 28 years through the negotiation and implementation of FTAs. Starting with NAFTA in 1994, which was replaced by the USMCA on July 1, 2020, 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 the first U.S. FTA with a country in the Latin American and Caribbean region, establishing new rules and disciplines that influenced subsequent trade agreements on issues important to the United States, such as intellectual property rights protection, services trade, agriculture, dispute settlement, investment, labor, and the environment.

The United States, Canada, and Mexico entered into NAFTA renegotiations in 2017 and concluded talks with the announcement of the USMCA on September 30, 2018. The agreement, which entered into force on July 1, 2020, continues most of NAFTA's market opening provisions but modernizes and revises NAFTA with new provisions on digital trade, state-owned enterprises, currency manipulation, anti-corruption, enforcement of workers' rights, and the environment. Certain revisions to USMCA, including tighter rules-of-origin requirements for the motor vehicle industry, removal of government-procurement provisions for Canada, and changes to investor-state dispute settlement provisions, are significant because they scale back previous Administrations' U.S. trade policy goals.

Table 4. U.S. Trade with Key Trading Partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2014-2021

(in billions of current U.S. dollars)

Partner Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
U.S. Exports								
Mexico	241.0	236.5	230.2	243.6	266.0	256.7	211.4	276.5
Brazil	42.4	31.6	30.2	37.3	39.4	42.9	34.6	46.9
Chile	16.5	15.4	12.9	13.6	15.3	15.7	12.5	17.3
Colombia	20.1	16.3	13.0	13.4	15.1	14.8	11.9	16.7
Total LAC	418.9	383.4	360.7	388.8	424.0	418.4	340.2	451.3
World	1,621.9	1,503.3	1,451.5	1,547.2	1,665.8	1,645.9	1,428.5	1,754.3
U.S. Imports								
Mexico	295.7	296.4	293.5	312.7	343.7	356.1	323.5	384.7
Brazil	30.0	27.5	26.0	29.5	31.2	30.9	23.4	31.3
Chile	9.5	8.8	8.8	10.6	11.4	10.4	10.1	15.1
Colombia	18.3	14.1	13.8	13.6	13.8	14.2	10.8	13.2
Total LAC	445.3	411.6	400.6	428.2	465.5	464.9	414.3	505.7
World	2,356.4	2,248.8	2,186.8	2,339.6	2,536.2	2,491.7	2,330.8	2,831.1

Source: CRS with data from the U.S. Department of Commerce provided by Trade Data Monitor.

Note: This table provides statistics on the top four countries followed by the total of U.S. trade with 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

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 (P.L. 98-67, subsequently amended, with no expiration), for example, provides

limited duty-free entry of selected 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, P.L. 106-200, Title II), which has been extended through September 2030 (P.L. 116-164), and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which expired on December 31, 2020. The CBTPA extends to eligible Caribbean countries preferences on apparel products, similar to those given to Mexico under NAFTA and USMCA. The GSP program, first authorized in the 1970s, 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.

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, has made efforts to negotiate a possible trade arrangement with Mercosur, composed of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. In June 2019, after 20 years of negotiations, the European Union and Mercosur reached a political agreement in principle for a potential comprehensive trade agreement. Talks, however, appear to have stagnated, and it is unclear if or when an agreement will move forward. In April 2020, Mexico and the European Union finalized negotiations to update their original FTA from 2000 and remove most of the remaining trade barriers between the two partners. This agreement appears to have stagnated, as well.

Numerous observers have proposed that the United States strengthen trade relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through regional trade agreements or other efforts.[83] Some policymakers also have expressed an interest in enhancing trade ties in the Western Hemisphere to enhance economic competitiveness. Although the United States remains the top trading partner with the region, numerous lawmakers point to the rising influence of China and the need to strengthen U.S. economic integration, reinforce regional supply chains, and promote economic growth.[84] Although 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 in the first 15-20 years after NAFTA, subsequent changes in government led to new efforts. For example, during the Trump Administration, Brazil and Ecuador, took steps to enhance their trade relationships with the United States through "mini" bilateral trade agreements on trade facilitation, regulatory cooperation, and anti-corruption. However, some Members of Congress have stated that FTAs with Brazil or Ecuador are not feasible, due to concerns regarding the environment, labor standards, and human rights.

The Biden Administration has made statements that the United States needs to strengthen trade relations with partners in the Asia-Pacific region, but through a different course of action than an FTA. Following the 2017 U.S. withdrawal from the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), all remaining TPP parties signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which essentially brought into effect a modified TPP.[85] The CPTPP has entered into force among nine countries—Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. Other parties, including China, Taiwan, Ecuador, and the

[83] Margaret Spiegelman, "Former Envoys: U.S. Must Seize Trade Opportunities in Latin America," *Inside U.S. Trade's World Trade Online*, January 11, 2022.

[84] See, for example, Madeline Halpert, "GOP Lawmakers Urge Engagement in Latin America to Counter China," *Inside U.S. Trade's World Trade Online*, October 13, 2021.

[85] The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is free trade agreement among 11 countries, including Canada, Mexico, Chile, and Peru. Ecuador has formally applied to accede to the pact.

European Union, have taken an interest in joining the pact and have formally requested to accede to the agreement. The Biden Administration has stated that it is not currently interested in joining CBTPP in its current form and that other arrangements are better suited to address U.S. economic interests in the region. Some stakeholders argue the U.S. absence from the CBTPP and other regional agreements limits the U.S. ability to shape trade rules in the region. They contend that without binding new trade rules, including on market access, the United States may be limited and potentially impaired from influencing trade policy and countering China's initiatives. China's announcement that it had formally submitted a request to join the CPTPP may be an issue for Congress as it considers future of trade policy in the Asia-Pacific region.[86]

Policy Considerations. Congress could examine how the United States might enhance trade relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, whether through bilateral FTAs or a broader initiative such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement, which was pursued in the mid-1990s but never concluded.[87] Congress could also examine whether the United States should consider partial trade agreements, such as the limited agreements reached with Brazil and Ecuador in the last quarter of 2020 on trade facilitation, anti-corruption, and good regulatory practices. Some Members of Congress favor these "mini" agreements, perceiving them as a mechanism to eventually develop and enter into a comprehensive FTA with those countries. Other lawmakers identify that such mini agreements provide less leverage for addressing concerns regarding the environment and workers' rights in these countries. President Biden has said he does not plan any new trade agreements at this time and has prioritized domestic economic recovery.[88]

Policymakers could also consider how to use trade policy to boost regional economies, especially in Central America, to help address some of the root causes of migration. Some Members have expressed an interest in the possibility of modifying CAFTA-DR's rules of origin in the textiles and apparel industries to promote investment and create manufacturing jobs in the region. For example, the flexibilities in CAFTA-DR may allow cumulation of originating content with other U.S. trade agreement partners such as USMCA or the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement, which could broaden and strengthen supply chains in the region.

In addition, policymakers could continue to monitor U.S. supply chains with countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, the entry into force of the U.S.-Brazil trade protocol, alleged forced labor conditions in the Dominican Republic, and a possible extension of apparel trade preferences for Haiti, which are set to expire in 2025. Members could also consider how the USMCA is affecting U.S. industries, especially the motor vehicle industry. Mexico and Canada are challenging the United States in an ongoing dispute over the U.S. interpretation of motor vehicle rules of origin under the USMCA.

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[86] CRS Insight IN11760, *China and Taiwan Both Seek to Join the CPTPP*, by Brock R. Williams and Michael D. Sutherland.

[87] In 1994, 34 Western Hemisphere nations met at the first Summit of the Americas, envisioning a plan to complete a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) by January 1, 2005. Faced with deadlocked negotiations, the United States and Brazil, the FTAA co-chairs, brokered a compromise at the November 2003 Miami trade ministerial. The compromise moved the FTAA away from the comprehensive single-undertaking principle toward a two-tier framework comprising a set of "common rights and obligations" for all countries, combined with voluntary plurilateral arrangements with country benefits related to commitments. The FTAA talks stalled in 2004. At the fourth Summit of the Americas, held in November 2005, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Venezuela blocked an effort to restart negotiations. Further action has not occurred.

[88] See Guy Erb and Scott Sommers, *Biden's Trade Policy and Free Trade Areas*, Washington International Trade Association, April 8, 2021.

Congressional Action. In the 117th Congress, the House approved H.Res. 1168 in July 2022, urging the President to prioritize and implement trade programs with the Caribbean region that promote sustainable and resilient economic development. The Senate-passed version of a broad bill aimed at positioning the United States to better compete with China (S. 1260/H.R. 4521) contained a provision (Section 3219J) that would require the Administration to develop a strategy to increase exports of U.S. goods and services to Latin America and the Caribbean. The Senate approved S. 1260 in February 2022 and, in March 2022, approved the House version of the bill, H.R. 4521, substituting the language of S. 1260; ultimately many provisions, including those on Latin America and the Caribbean, were not included in congressional action on a narrower legislative vehicle approved in August 2022. Several other bills and resolutions have been introduced in the 117th Congress aimed at advancing or expressing support for nearshoring initiatives to increase and strengthen supply chains in Latin America and the Caribbean; these include H.R. 7579, H.R. 7935, S. 4112, and S.Res. 661.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF11175, *U.S.-Mexico Trade Relations*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF10394, *Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS Report R44981, *The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF10997, *U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) Trade Agreement*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF10038, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA)*, by Ian F. Fergusson and Brock R. Williams.

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. In addition, 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 CARICOM (see **Figure 2**).

U.S. interests in the Caribbean are diverse and include economic, political, and security concerns. The U.S.-Caribbean relationship is characterized by extensive economic linkages (involving trade, investment, tourism, and large Caribbean diaspora communities in the United States) and by significant cooperation on counternarcotics and other security efforts. Because most Caribbean countries, with the exception of Haiti, have relatively high per capita incomes (classified by the World Bank as *upper-middle-income* or *high-income* economies), the region traditionally has not received large amounts of U.S. development assistance.[89] However, the United States has responded with humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of hurricanes that have devastated several countries in recent years. Beginning in the early 2000s, the United States significantly expanded assistance to the region to combat HIV/AIDS, with both Guyana and Haiti designated as focus countries in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief initiative.

In 2016, Congress enacted the United States-Caribbean Strategic Enhancement Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-291), requiring the State Department to develop a multiyear strategy to support U.S.

[89] World Bank, "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," at https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups.

engagement in the Caribbean. Completed in 2017, the strategy established a framework to strengthen U.S.-Caribbean relations in six priority areas: (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 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.

Figure 2. Map of the Caribbean Region: Independent Countries

Source: Prepared by Amber Hope Wilhelm, Visual Information Specialist, 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 Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, established in 1981 to promote economic integration, harmonization of foreign policy, and other forms of cooperation among member states.

Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. 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 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, security. From FY2010 through FY2022, Congress appropriated a total of $831

million (current dollars) for the CBSI. These funds benefitted 13 Caribbean countries.[90] 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. For FY2023, the Biden Administration requested $63.5 million for the CBSI, almost 21% less than Congress appropriated for FY2022.

Caribbean Energy Security Initiative and Caribbean Energy Initiative. Many Caribbean nations depend on energy imports and once participated in Venezuela's PetroCaribe program, which supplied Venezuelan oil under preferential financing terms. The United States launched the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative (CESI) in 2014, with the goal of promoting a cleaner and more sustainable energy future in the Caribbean. The CESI includes various 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.[91] In 2019, USAID launched the Caribbean Energy Initiative, a five-year program that focuses on building clean, secure, and reliable energy systems throughout the Caribbean. The initiative aims to increase renewable power generation, increase the efficiency and quality of utilities services, and enhance the ability of electricity systems in the region to withstand shocks.[92]

Disaster Resilience and Climate Change. Many Caribbean countries are susceptible to extreme weather events such as tropical storms and hurricanes, which can significantly affect their economies and infrastructure. In 2019, the State Department launched a U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership, with the goal of increasing regional disaster response capacity and promoting resilience to natural disasters, and USAID announced it was providing $10 million to improve local resilience to disasters in the Caribbean.[93] In 2020, USAID joined with CARICOM's Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency to launch the Caribbean Climate Resilience Initiative. As noted, the leaders of both Antigua and Barbuda and Jamaica were invited to participate in President Biden's Leaders' Summit on Climate in April 2021.

Biden Administration's Strengthened Engagement with the Caribbean in 2022. President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris met with Caribbean leaders at the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles in June 2022. Discussions centered on the impact of climate change; food and energy insecurity; lack of access to financing; and security cooperation and engagement, including on small arms trafficking.[94] As noted, at the summit, Vice President Harris announced PACC 2030, a new initiative with the Caribbean aimed at facilitating renewable energy infrastructure development and bolstering resilience to climate-based natural disasters.[95] PACC 2030 activities and programs focus on four areas: (1) improving access to development financing; (2) facilitating clean energy project development; (3) enhancing local capacity building; and (4)

[90] The 13 countries benefiting from the CBSI are Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

[91] 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/.

[92] USAID, "Caribbean Energy Initiative," last updated August 9, 2022, at https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1862/caribbean-energy-initiative.

[93] 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/.

[94] White House, "Joint Readout of President Joe Biden & Vice President Kamala Harris' Meeting with Leaders of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Dominican Republic," June 10, 2022.

[95] White House, "Remarks by Vice President Harris in a Meeting with Leaders of Caribbean Nations," June 9, 2022.

deepening collaboration with Caribbean partners. In September 2022, Vice President Harris held a follow-up meeting in Washington, DC, with several Caribbean leaders, with talks centered on U.S.-Caribbean collaboration on promoting energy security, access to finance, and food security in the Caribbean. At the meeting, the United States committed $28 million to address urgent food security needs in the Caribbean.[96]

Congressional Action. Support for Caribbean regional programs is continuing in the 117th Congress, including support for the CBSI as well as assistance to address other challenges in the Caribbean, including disaster resilience, energy security, and climate change.

In the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K), and its joint explanatory statement, Congress appropriated "not less than $80 million" for the CBSI and required a spend plan for CBSI funds. Among its provisions, the joint explanatory statement also provided $6.5 million for the Caribbean Energy Initiative and $25 million in development assistance for the Caribbean. Of the development assistance, $12 million was to strengthen disaster resilience, $10 million was to support inclusive economic growth (especially focusing on opportunities for women, youth, and other disadvantaged populations), and $5 million for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean.

For FY2023 appropriations, the House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2023 SFOPS bill (H.R. 8282, H.Rept. 117-401) would provide for not less than $82 million for the CBSI. The explanatory statement to the SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, would recommend not less than $80 million. Both bills would require a spend plan for the program.

The explanatory statement to the Senate bill also would recommend $7.5 million in development assistance for the Caribbean Energy Initiative. The report to the House bill also would allocate $83 million in development assistance for the Caribbean, with $19 million for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, $17 million for the Dominican Republic, $13 million for USAID's Caribbean Development Program; and $34 million for USAID's Latin America and the Caribbean Regional programs, with assistance to support resilience to natural disasters, inclusive economic growth, and a digital agenda for transformation in the Americas. Among other provisions, the report to H.R. 8282 would direct the Secretary of State and the USAID Administrator to review the U.S. diplomatic and development presence in the Caribbean and development and submit to the Committees on Appropriations a plan for expanding such presence, with a particular focus on the Eastern and Southern Caribbean.

The House also approved a resolution and took action on two other bills with provisions on the Caribbean. In February 2022, the House passed the America COMPETES Act of 2022, H.R. 4521, which would have, among its provisions, required a multiyear strategy to promote regional cooperation with the Caribbean on energy issues and would have authorized assistance for the U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership from FY2022 to FY2024 (such measures also were included in H.R. 3524, the EAGLE Act, ordered to be reported by the House Foreign Affairs Committee in July 2021); ultimately, these provisions were left out of congressional action on a narrower legislative vehicle approved in August 2022 (P.L. 117-167), which aimed at supporting the semiconductor industry, boosting renewable energy industries, and addressing climate change. In April 2022, the House passed the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Authorization Act, H.R. 4133, which would authorize $74.8 million for the CBSI for each fiscal year from FY2022 to FY2026 and would establish monitoring and reporting requirements for the program. In July 2022, the House approved H.R. 1168, which, among its provisions, urged the President to

[96] White House, "Remarks by Vice President Harris Before Multilateral Meeting with Caribbean Leaders," and "Fact Sheet: U.S. Actions to Promote Caribbean Energy Security, Access to Finance, and Food Security," September 15, 2022.

prioritize and implement trade programs with the Caribbean region that promote sustainable and resilient economic developments.

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

Cuba

Political and economic developments in Cuba, a one-party authoritarian state with a poor human rights record, frequently have been the subject of intense congressional concern since the 1959 Cuban revolution. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel succeeded Raúl Castro as president in 2018 and as head of Cuba's Communist Party in 2021. Cuba adopted a new constitution in 2019 that introduced some reforms but maintained the state's dominance over the economy and the Communist Party's predominant political role. In July 2021, anti-government demonstrations broke out throughout the country, with thousands of Cubans protesting poor economic conditions (e.g., food and medicine shortages, blackouts) and long-standing repression of freedom of expression and other basic rights. The government responded with harsh measures that led to the prosecution of hundreds of protesters. The Cuban economy has been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced support from Venezuela, and increased U.S. economic sanctions. In 2022, a fire severely damaged Cuba's main oil storage facility in early August and Hurricane Ian caused severe damage to western Cuba in late September and a nationwide power outage that sparked protests.

Since the early 1960s, the centerpiece of U.S. policy toward Cuba has been economic sanctions aimed at isolating the Cuban government. Congress has played an active role in shaping policy toward Cuba, including by enacting legislation strengthening—and at times easing—U.S. economic sanctions. In 2014, the Obama Administration initiated a policy shift away from sanctions and toward engagement. This shift included the restoration of diplomatic relations; the rescission of the Cuban government's designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism; and an increase in travel, commerce, and the flow of information to Cuba. The Trump Administration began to reverse course in 2017, introducing new sanctions, including restrictions on transactions with companies controlled by the Cuban military. By 2019, the Trump Administration had largely abandoned engagement and significantly increased sanctions, particularly on travel and remittances.

In its initial months in office, the Biden Administration announced it was conducting a review of policy toward Cuba, with human rights as a core pillar, and would examine policy decisions made by the prior Administration. After the Cuban government's harsh response to the July 2021 protests, the Biden Administration imposed a series of targeted financial sanctions and visa restrictions on those involved. In May 2022, the Administration announced several policy changes aimed at increasing support for the Cuban people. The Administration increased immigrant visa processing at the U.S. Embassy in Havana and said it would reinstate an immigration parole program for Cuban families. It eased travel restrictions by reauthorizing flights to cities beyond Havana and reinstating group people-to-people travel. It also eased restrictions on sending cash remittances by eliminating dollar and frequency limits for family remittances and by reauthorizing donative remittances to Cuban nationals. In October 2022, the Administration announced that USAID would provide $2 million to independent relief

organizations for emergency relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian that devastated western Cuba.

Driven by Cuba's difficult economic conditions and political repression, among other factors, irregular Cuban migration to the United States has surged over the past year. U.S. and Cuban officials held migration talks in April 2022, the first since 2018, and again in mid-November 2022. In September 2022, the Administration announced that the U.S. Embassy in Havana would resume full immigrant visa processing in early 2023 for the first time since 2017.

Congressional Action. The 117th Congress has continued to support funding for Cuba democracy programs and broadcasting to Cuba. For FY2022, in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K), and its explanatory statement, Congress provided $12.973 million for Cuba broadcasting, fully funding the Administration's request. The law did not specify an amount for Cuba democracy programs, but an estimated $20 million (the amount requested) is to be provided. For FY2023, the Administration requested $20 million for democracy programs and $13.432 million for broadcasting. The House Appropriations Committee's reported FY2023 SFOPS bill, H.R. 8282 (H.Rept. 117-401), would provide $12.973 million for broadcasting; the explanatory statement to the Senate-introduced bill, S. 4662, recommends providing $13.891 million. H.R. 8282 also would provide $20 million for democracy funding, whereas S. 4662 does not specify an amount for democracy funding.

In other significant action, in July 2022, the House rejected H.Amdt. 300 to H.R. 8294 (a six-bill FY2023 appropriations measure), which would have prevented funding to enforce a prohibition on private financing for U.S. agricultural exports. The House and the Senate also approved several human rights resolutions: H.Res. 760 (November 2021); S.Res. 37 (April 2021); S.Res. 81 (May 2021); S.Res. 310 (August 2021), and S.Res. 489 (January 2022). In addition, the Senate approved S. 2045 in July 2021, which would rename the street in front of the Cuban Embassy after a democracy activist.

Members of Congress have introduced a wide variety of other legislative initiatives on Cuba in the 117th Congress. These include bills that would ease or lift sanctions or promote engagement and bills that would impose further sanctions or restrictions on Cuba. Other initiatives focus on immigration parole programs for family reunification and for Cuban medical professionals.

For additional information, see CRS Report R47246, *Cuba: U.S. Policy in the 117th Congress*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS In Focus IF10045, *Cuba: U.S. Policy Overview*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS Insight IN11937, *Biden Administration's Cuba Policy Changes*, by Mark P. Sullivan; CRS Report RL31139, *Cuba: U.S. Restrictions on Travel and Remittances*, by Mark P. Sullivan; and CRS Report R43835, *State Sponsors of Acts of International Terrorism—Legislative Parameters: In Brief*, by Dianne E. Rennack.

Haiti

More than a year after the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and an August 2021 earthquake that killed 2,000 people, Haiti lacks an elected president, legislature, and mayors. No elections are scheduled to replace the expired terms of Haitian officials at any level of government. A political standoff between de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry's government and political and civil society leaders has occurred amid a worsening security crisis caused by rampant gang violence. The ongoing crises in Haiti are major concerns for the Biden Administration and many Members of Congress. Although Members have introduced legislation

that would support recent U.S. and U.N. calls to sanction Haitian gang leaders and their financial backers, congressional support for any future military intervention is uncertain.[97]

As in past periods when Haitian presidents failed to hold timely elections, former President Moïse of the Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK) had been governing extra-constitutionally prior to his assassination. Moïse failed to convene parliamentary elections due in 2019 and began ruling by decree in 2020. Moïse, like other Haitian politicians and business leaders, allegedly provided money and arms to gangs and other criminal groups in exchange for suppressing anti-government protests.[98]

Following Moïse's assassination, the United States and other donors supported Henry's bid to serve as prime minister over other competitors. Shortly before the assassination, Moïse had nominated Henry, a neurosurgeon, to be prime minister. The legislature lacked a quorum to consider him, however, and the president had not sworn him in. Henry's irregular path to his position and allegations of his possible involvement in Moïse's assassination, a case that remains unresolved, have eroded his credibility.[99] Henry has fired officials who have sought to question him about the case.

In September 2021, Henry and his supporters proposed that he name a provisional electoral council to convene elections and that Henry remain the single head of government until a new elected government takes office. He has yet to appoint that council, and many civil society and political actors oppose Henry's proposal. As an alternative, numerous civil society organizations and political parties, some in coalitions, have sought to form an interim government. After months of broad consultations, the Citizen Conference for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis (widely known as the Montana Group) came to an agreement in August 2021. The Montana Accord proposed a two-year interim government led by a president and prime minister, with oversight committees, to restore order, administer elections, and create a truth and justice commission to address past human rights violations. Although many civic leaders and political parties signed the Montana Accord, others did not (including some business groups, churches, and the PHTK and allied parties). Negotiations between Henry and the Montana Group have yet to bear fruit; civil society groups have called on the Biden Administration to withdraw U.S. support for Henry.[100]

Under Henry, inflation, protests, and gang-led blockades of ports and roads have led to food and fuel shortages that have worsened already dire humanitarian conditions in the country, with nearly 50% of the population experiencing food insecurity.[101] Gangs have exerted power and control over territory, access to fuel, and the delivery of humanitarian aid, challenging the authority of the underfunded and outmanned Haitian National Police and other state institutions. Gang violence fueled a July 2022 outbreak in violence Port-Au-Prince that the U.N. estimates resulted in more than 470 deaths. Gang violence also has led to the loss of millions of dollars' worth of food supplies and the displacement of nearly 100,000 people.[102] Violence, as well as protests over a

[97] See, for example, U.S. Mission to the U.N., "Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at a UN Security Council Briefing on Haiti," October 17, 2022.

[98] "G9 and Family," *InSight Crime,* Updated July 18, 2022.

[99] Monique Beals, "Judge, Investigators say Haitian Prime Minister Involved in President's Assassination," *The Hill,* February 8, 2022.

[100] Rafael Bernal, "More than 100 Groups Call on Biden to Drop Support for Haitian Prime Minister," *The Hill,* September 16, 2022.

[101] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Catastrophic hunger levels recorded for the first time in Haiti," October 14, 2022.

[102] International Organization for Migration, "96,000 Haitians Displaced by Recent Gang Violence in Capital: IOM Report," October 28, 2022.

September 2022 announcement of an end to fuel subsidies, have prompted closures of schools, businesses, markets, medical facilities, and ports. An October 2022 resurgence of cholera amid a population that lacks access to water and sanitation alarmed global health experts. In October 2022, the Henry government asked for a foreign security force to help reestablish control and enable humanitarian aid to the population, a request many Haitian civil society groups oppose.[103]

U.S. policy goals in Haiti aim to support Haitians in their efforts to confront insecurity; restore democratic institutions; and promote economic growth, educational opportunities, and health care. The Biden Administration's political approach to Haiti has evolved from supporting the Henry government to pushing Henry, the Montana Group, and other stakeholders to reach an inclusive political accord to working to pass U.N. Security Council resolutions sanctioning gang leaders and their financial backers (approved) and backing a non-U.N. led security assistance mission in Haiti (not yet approved). In early November 2022, the Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on two Haitian politicians for drug trafficking and the Department of Justice unsealed criminal charges against seven leaders of five Haitian gangs.[104] The Administration requested $274.8 million in bilateral assistance for Haiti in FY2023, up from the $188.5 million provided in FY2021 and the $187.9 million requested in FY2022. Haiti has also received an additional $171.3 million in humanitarian assistance in FY2021 and FY2022 as well as $47 million and 1.1 million vaccine doses to address COVID-19.[105]

Congressional Action. The 117th Congress has enacted legislation, appropriated and conditioned foreign assistance, and conducted oversight of U.S. policy toward Haiti. Congress enacted the Haiti Development, Accountability, and Institutional Transparency Initiative Act as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division V). The act requires U.S. agencies to measure the progress of post-disaster recovery and efforts to address corruption, governance, rule of law, and media freedoms in Haiti. In addition, P.L. 117-103 requires the State Department to withhold those funds and any other aid for the central government of Haiti until a new president and parliament have taken office following free and fair elections or the Secretary of State determines a transitional government representative of Haitian society is in place and it is in the U.S. interest to provide assistance.[106] Congress has held hearings and briefings on U.S. policy toward Haiti, U.S. treatment of Haitian migrants, Haiti's April 2022 selection as one of the priority countries of focus under the Global Fragility Act (P.L. 116-94), and on Haitian-led solutions to the crisis in the country.

The House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2023 SFOPS bill (H.R. 8282) would not designate a total funding level for Haiti; it would include the same conditions as P.L. 117-103. The report accompanying the bill (H.Rept. 117-401) would require a report by USAID on maternal care in Haiti. The FY2023 SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, contains similar funding restrictions and exceptions. The House-passed version of the FY2023 NDAA (H.R. 7900) would require a report on arms trafficking in Haiti from the State Department within 180 days of the bill's enactment. Additionally, Members have introduced legislation (H.R. 9147)

[103] Catherine Osborn, "Haiti's Crisis Escalates," *Foreign Policy*, October 14, 2022.

[104] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Haitian Politicians for Narcotics Trafficking," November 4, 2022; and U.S. Department of Justice, "Criminal Charges Unsealed Against Haitian Gang Leaders for Kidnappings of U.S. Citizens," November 7, 2022.

[105] USAID, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, "Haiti: Assistance Overview," August 2022; U.S. Department of State, "Senior State Department Leadership Participate in International Partners Ministerial Meeting on Haiti," July 12, 2022; and U.S. Department of State, "COVID-19 Vaccine Donations, Western Hemisphere," updated November 8, 2022, at https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha.

[106] Notwithstanding those requirements, the act allows U.S. agencies to provide assistance to support elections, anti-gang police and justice administration, public health, food security, water and sanitation, education, disaster relief and recovery, and other programs to meet basic human needs.

that would require the State Department to produce an annual report on gangs in Haiti and their financial backers and encourage sanctions on those individuals.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF12182, *Haiti: Political Conflict and U.S. Policy Overview*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Maureen Taft-Morales; and, for earlier background, CRS Report R45034, *Haiti's Political and Economic Conditions*, by Maureen Taft-Morales.

Mexico and Central America

Mexico

Congress has demonstrated sustained interest in Mexico, a neighboring country and top trading partner with which the United States has a close but complex relationship. In recent decades, bilateral relations improved as the U.S. and Mexican economies became more integrated and the countries worked together to address crime, migration, drugs, and other issues of shared concern. Disagreements on these issues have emerged on occasion. In addition, the history of U.S. military and diplomatic intervention in Mexico has periodically provoked tension.

Mexico has undergone significant changes under the populist rule of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the leftist National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party, who took office for a six-year term in December 2018. López Obrador, who created MORENA in 2014, is the first Mexican president in over two decades to enjoy majority support in both legislative chambers, although the size of those majorities decreased following June 2021 midterm elections.

López Obrador's approval ratings have remained high (61% in August 2022), even as his government has struggled to address organized crime-related violence, corruption, and the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in more than 330,000 deaths in Mexico as of early November 2022.[107] Supporters have generally praised the government's social programs and minimum-wage increases, as well as López Obrador's ability to connect with average Mexicans through daily press conferences and frequent, countrywide travel. Many observers have criticized López Obrador's attacks on freedom of the press, independent government institutions, and judicial independence as well as his increasing reliance on the military to perform roles previously carried out by civilian agencies in public security and other sectors. His government also has received broad criticism for significantly reducing public spending while sparing his priority, military-built infrastructure projects from cuts. Observers have criticized the López Obrador administration's mishandling of prosecutions against the former attorney general, a retired general, and other officials accused of involvement in the deaths of 43 students who disappeared in Guerrero in 2014.[108]

U.S.-Mexican relations under the López Obrador administration generally have remained cordial, although some tensions have emerged. Mexico has accommodated changing U.S. immigration and border security policies, worked closely with the United States on pandemic recovery, and relaunched security cooperation under a new Bicentennial Framework after the 2020 U.S. arrest of a former defense minister strained relations. Nevertheless, trade disputes, U.S. concerns over human rights issues (such as impunity for the killing of journalists and enforced disappearances) and President López Obrador's energy policies that may violate the USMCA each have strained relations with the Administration. Presidents López Obrador did not attend the June 2022 Summit

[107] Carrin Zissis, "Approval Tracker: Mexico's President AMLO," *Americas Society/Council of the Americas,* September 12, 2022; and Johns Hopkins, "Mortality Analyses," November 2, 2022.

[108] Maria Verza, "Experts: Mexico Jeopardizes Justice in Missing Students Case," AP, September 29, 2022.

of the Americas in Los Angeles, a decision that disappointed U.S. officials. Presidents Biden and López Obrador met in July and pledged to address inflation, promote renewable energy, modernize border infrastructure, bolster efforts against fentanyl and arms trafficking, and address the root causes of irregular migration.[109] A High Level Economic Dialogue occurred in September, a High-Level Security Dialogue in October, and a second North American Leaders Summit (with Prime Minister Trudeau) is scheduled for December 2022.

Congressional Action. Congress has appropriated foreign assistance for Mexico and has overseen bilateral efforts to address U.S.-bound unauthorized migration, illegal drug flows, the COVID-19 pandemic, and USMCA implementation. Congress appropriated $158.9 million for Mexico in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103), 27% above the Biden Administration's $116.5 million request. The explanatory statement included reporting requirements related to bilateral and regional drug trafficking efforts included in H.Rept. 117-84, and required a report within 45 days of the enactment of the act on Mexico's human rights efforts in three areas. The explanatory statement supports funding for State Department efforts to help Mexico address the illegal flow of opioids to the United States, among other priorities; the statement prohibits U.S. funds from supporting the involvement of Mexican military forces in law enforcement.

Congress also is considering the Biden Administration's FY2023 budget request, which includes $141.6 million in bilateral assistance for Mexico. Neither the House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2023 SFOPS bill, H.R. 8282, nor the FY2023 SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, include a total foreign assistance level for Mexico. H.Rept. 117-401 accompanying H.R. 8282 and the draft explanatory statement accompanying S. 4662 recommend U.S. funding to support Mexico's efforts to address the production and trafficking of synthetic opioids, the safety of migrants in northern Mexico, and disappeared persons, among other topics. H.Rept. 117-401 would prohibit any U.S. funds from supporting the involvement of Mexican military forces in law enforcement.

Other legislation would address U.S. relations with Mexico, including the House-passed version of the FY2023 NDAA, H.R. 7900, which would require a report from the President within 180 days of the law's enactment on, among other topics, all past and current U.S. security cooperation with Mexico, as well as the effects of drug cartel control in parts of the country on U.S. national security.

In addition, H.R. 3524, the EAGLE Act, ordered to be reported by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in July 2021, would require a report on how the United States, Mexico, and Canada could work together to reduce methane and other emissions and would implement Article 23.6 of the USMCA, which prohibits importation of goods produced by forced labor. S. 1201, the U.S. CLIMATE Act of 2021, introduced in the Senate in April 2021, contains similar provisions. The bill would require the Secretary of State to produce a report including a strategy for reengaging with Mexico and Canada on methane reduction targets and would require the President to develop a strategy for enhancing trilateral cooperation on climate issues.

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 Report R44981, *The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF10578, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, FY2008-FY2022*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R41576, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS

[109] The White House, "President Biden and President López Obrador Joint Statement," July 12, 2022.

In Focus IF10215, *Mexico's Immigration Control Efforts*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R45199, *Violence Against Journalists in Mexico: In Brief*, coordinated by Clare Ribando Seelke; and CRS In Focus IF11669, *Mexico: Addressing Missing and Disappeared Persons*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Rachel L. Martin.

Central America's Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle region of Central America (see **Figure 3**) has received considerable attention from U.S. policymakers over the past decade, as it has become a major transit corridor for illicit drugs and a top source of irregular migration to the United States. In FY2021, for example, U.S. authorities encountered approximately 319,000 Hondurans, 283,000 Guatemalans, and 99,000 Salvadorans at the Southwest border. In FY2022, U.S. authorities encountered more than 541,000 migrants from the region.[110]

These flows are the latest symptoms of deep-rooted challenges in the Northern Triangle, including widespread insecurity, fragile political and judicial systems, and high levels of poverty and unemployment. A series of tropical storms and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated socio-economic difficulties in the region since 2020, contributing to sharp increases in poverty and food insecurity. Political conditions also have deteriorated over the past three years, particularly in El Salvador, where the government has eroded checks and balances and restricted civil liberties, and Guatemala, where the government has impeded anti-corruption investigations and forced independent prosecutors and judges to flee the country.[111]

Figure 3. Map of Central America

Source: CRS Graphics.

Note: Geographically located in Central America, Belize is a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as well as the Central American Integration System.

U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America. In 2014, the Obama Administration determined it was in the national security interests of the United States to work with Central American governments to improve living conditions in the region. It drafted a new U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America and, with congressional support, significantly increased

[110] It is unclear how many of these were unique individuals versus repeat encounters. CBP, "Southwest Land Border Encounters," October 21, 2022.

[111] See, for examples, "Democracy is Quickly Eroding in Central America," *Economist,* August 25, 2021; and Gabriela Selser, "Concern that Nicaragua Repression could be 'Model' in Region," Associated Press, August 4, 2022.

annual foreign assistance for the region. From FY2016 to FY2021, Congress appropriated a total of more than $3.7 billion to implement the strategy, with U.S. agencies allocating most of the funds to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The Trump Administration initially maintained the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America but effectively halted the initiative in March 2019, when it suspended aid to the Northern Triangle due to the continued northward flow of migrants and asylum-seekers from the region. The Administration reprogrammed $396.2 million to other foreign policy priorities and withheld the remaining assistance for the region for up to 14 months while it negotiated a series of border security and asylum agreements with the Northern Triangle governments. The aid suspension adversely affected nearly 39% of the State Department's assistance projects and 81% of USAID's assistance projects in the region.[112]

Biden Administration Policy. The Biden Administration has placed renewed emphasis on engagement with Central America. In July 2021, pursuant to the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (P.L. 116-260, Division FF, Subtitle F) and E.O. 14010, the Administration released a new U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America. The strategy seeks to foster systemic change in the region by (1) addressing economic insecurity and inequality; (2) combatting corruption, strengthening democratic governance, and advancing the rule of law; (3) promoting respect for human rights, labor rights, and a free press; (4) countering and preventing violence, extortion, and other crimes perpetrated by gangs, trafficking networks, and other criminal organizations; and (5) combatting sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence.[113]

Although the root causes strategy is similar to the prior U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, Biden Administration officials assert they will improve the effectiveness of U.S. efforts by incorporating lessons learned since 2014. They intend to use migration data to target programs, place greater emphasis on host country governance, enhance partnerships with local organizations, and increase the scale of U.S. efforts.[114] As part of its increased emphasis on governance concerns, the Administration has publicly named and imposed visa sanctions on nearly 100 individuals allegedly involved in corruption or undemocratic actions in the Northern Triangle, pursuant to the United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (P.L. 116-260, Division FF, Subtitle F).[115] To increase the scale of U.S. efforts, the Administration has proposed allocating $4 billion of foreign assistance to the region over four years, including $860.6 million in FY2022 and $986.8 million in FY2023. The Administration also has sought to mobilize private sector investment in the Northern Triangle, securing more than $3.2 billion in commitments through Vice President Harris's "Call to Action" initiative.[116]

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[112] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Northern Triangle of Central America: The 2019 Suspension and Reprogramming of U.S. Funding Adversely Affected Assistance Projects*, GAO-21-104366, September 2021, at https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-104366.pdf.

[113] White House, U.S. *Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America*, July 2021, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Root-Causes-Strategy.pdf.

[114] U.S. Department of State, "On the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy and Root Causes Strategy Toward Migration," special briefing, July 29, 2021.

[115] U.S. Department of State, "Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report," July 1, 2021; Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, "United States Announces Actions Against Seven Central American Officials for Undermining Democracy and Obstructing Investigations into Acts of Corruption," press statement, September 20, 2021; Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, "U.S. Actions Against Former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez for Corruption," press statement, February 7, 2022; and U.S. Department of State, "Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report, July 20, 2022.

[116] White House, "Fact Sheet: Vice President Harris Announces More Than $1.9 Billion in New Private Sector Commitments as Part of the Call to Action for Northern Central America," press release, June 7, 2022.

The Biden Administration's Collaborative Migration Management Strategy, developed pursuant to E.O. 14010, is intended to build a regional framework for safe, orderly, and humane migration in North and Central America. Released in July 2021, the migration management strategy calls for a surge of humanitarian assistance to alleviate conditions in the region; messaging campaigns to deter irregular migration; support for partner governments' efforts to manage their borders, provide protection to vulnerable populations, and reintegrate returned migrants; and expanded access to legal migration and protection pathways in the United States and third countries.[117] In accordance with the strategy, the Administration allocated $272.2 million of humanitarian assistance to address the needs of vulnerable populations in Central America and Mexico in FY2021, and $295.6 million for such purposes in FY2022.[118] The Administration also reestablished and expanded the Central American Minors program, which reunites eligible minors in the Northern Triangle with parents in the United States, and issued more than 19,000 seasonal labor H-2 visas to nationals of the Northern Triangle countries in FY2022, up from about 9,800 in FY2021.[119]

Congressional Action. The Biden Administration's approach to Central America has been the subject of significant congressional debate and oversight, including several hearings (see **Appendix**). Some Members have demonstrated support for the Administration's funding priorities in the region, either in whole or in part. For example, the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 (S. 348/H.R. 1177), introduced in February 2021, would authorize $4 billion over four years to combat corruption, strengthen the rule of law, and consolidate democratic governance; reduce criminal violence and improve citizen security; counter sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence; and address extreme poverty and economic development in the region. The Central American Women and Children Protection Act of 2021 (S. 2003 /H.R. 4017) would authorize the Administration to enter into agreements with the Northern Triangle governments to prevent and deter violence against women and children, provide support to victims, and hold perpetrators accountable. Other legislative measures (e.g., H.R. 193, H.R. 4199, and H.R. 7528) would restrict funding for the Administration's approach to the region.

Thus far, Congress has opted not to fully fund the Administration's root causes strategy. The Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K), did not designate an overall funding level for the region, though it provided assistance for certain purposes, including $100 million for locally led development programs and $70 million to reduce violence against women and girls. The State Department has allocated an estimated $676.2 million to the region for FY2022, at least $156.9 million less than the Administration requested.[120] The FY2023 SFOPS bills reported in the House (H.R. 8282/H.Rept. 117-401) and introduced in the Senate (S. 4662) would once again provide funding for certain purposes, such as locally led development and combatting gender-based violence, but would not designate an overall funding amount for Central America.

[117] White House, *Collaborative Migration Management Strategy*, July 2021, at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Collaborative-Migration-Management-Strategy.pdf.

[118] USAID, "El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—Regional Response," Fact Sheet #12, FY2021, September 30, 2021; and USAID, "El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—Regional Response," Fact Sheet #45, FY2022, September 30, 2022.

[119] U.S. Department of State, "Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection Lima Ministerial Meeting," Fact Sheet, October 6, 2022.

[120] This comparison excludes assistance requested for Central America through global accounts, since FY2022 estimated data for such assistance is not available. U.S. Department of State, "FY2022 Estimate Data," August 16, 2022.

Many Members of Congress remain concerned about widespread corruption and impunity in the Northern Triangle. The FY2022 SFOPS legislation, like previous foreign aid appropriations measures, requires the State Department to withhold a portion of the assistance appropriated to support the Northern Triangle governments until the department certifies that those governments are combatting corruption, protecting human rights, and addressing other challenges. In August 2022, the State Department certified that Honduras met the conditions to release FY2021 assistance but did not issue certifications for El Salvador or Guatemala; FY2022 certification decisions are pending. The act also provided $61.5 million to support entities and activities to combat corruption and impunity and $500,000 to increase staff focused on Central America within the State Department's Office of Economic Sanctions Policy and Implementation. H.R. 8282 and S. 4662 would once again impose corruption-related withholding requirements on some FY2023 assistance to the Northern Triangle and provide funds to support anti-corruption efforts in the region. A provision of the FY2023 NDAA (H.R. 7900), as passed by the House in July 2022, would establish a State Department fellowship program, known as the "Central American Network for Democracy," to protect and support the work of civil society activists, prosecutors, judges, journalists, and others seeking to strengthen the rule of law in the region.

The 117th Congress also has sought to ensure that U.S. security assistance does not contribute to human rights abuses in the Northern Triangle. A provision of the FY2022 NDAA (P.L. 117-81) required a series of reports on U.S. security cooperation with the Northern Triangle countries. These include a DOD report on ongoing and planned activities in the region focused on human rights and the rule of law, a Government Accountability Office evaluation of DOD's end-use monitoring procedures in the Northern Triangle, and an evaluation to be conducted by a federally funded research and development center regarding how DOD's security cooperation programs promote the rule of law and human rights and advance other U.S. objectives in the region. The FY2022 SFOPS legislation maintained a prior year prohibition on Foreign Military Financing (FMF) aid for the Northern Triangle countries in FY2022. For FY2023, H.R. 8282 would impose additional restrictions on State Department-managed security assistance to the Northern Triangle, whereas S. 4662 would create exceptions allowing the provision of FMF to the Northern Triangle to support disaster response, humanitarian assistance, and maritime security.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF11151, *Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report R43616, *El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Insight IN11658, *El Salvador: Authoritarian Actions and U.S. Response*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report RL34027, *Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Peter J. Meyer; and CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*, by Peter J. Meyer.

Nicaragua

President Daniel Ortega further solidified his control over Nicaraguan institutions and society in November 2021 elections that eliminated all viable candidates and parties from participation. Ortega has been suppressing unrest in Nicaragua in a manner reminiscent of Anastasio Somoza, the dictator Ortega helped overthrow in 1979 as a leader of the leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Ortega first served as president from 1985 to 1990, during which time the United States backed right-wing insurgents (contras) in an attempt to overthrow the Sandinista government. In the early 1990s, Nicaragua began to establish democratic governance.

Ortega reclaimed the presidency in 2007 and has served as president for the past 15 years, creating what the State Department calls "a highly centralized, authoritarian system."[121] The

[121] U.S. Department of State, *Nicaragua 2021 Human Rights Report*, April 12, 2022.

FSLN and Ortega gradually consolidated control over the country's institutions. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), this consolidation of power in the executive "has facilitated Nicaragua's transformation into a police state in which the executive branch has instituted a regime of terror and of suppression of all freedoms ... supported by the other branches of government."[122]

Until 2018, for many Nicaraguans, Ortega's populist social welfare programs, which had improved their standards 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 government control began to unravel in 2018 when his proposal to reduce social security benefits triggered widespread protests. The government's repressive response included extrajudicial killings, torture, political imprisonment, and suppression of the press and led to thousands of citizens going into exile.[123] The government says it was defending itself from coup attempts.

Despite domestic and international calls for Nicaragua to reform its electoral laws and hold free and fair elections, the Ortega administration continues to utilize antidemocratic practices. In 2021, 40 opposition leaders were arrested and barred from participating in the November elections, which an OAS resolution declared had "no democratic legitimacy."[124] As of October 2022, the government had closed more than 2,000 nongovernmental civil society organizations, and U.N. and IACHR experts asserted that Nicaragua held more than 200 political prisoners.[125]

The 2018 political crisis undermined economic growth in Nicaragua, the hemisphere's second-poorest country. Government repression continued, and the COVID-19 pandemic and hurricane damage worsened conditions in the country. From 2018 to 2020, Nicaragua's economic contraction averaged almost 3%. In 2021, the economy began recovery, with 10.3% growth. The IMF forecasts 4% growth for 2022. Unemployment nearly doubled, from 6.2% in 2019 to an estimated 11% in 2021.[126]

U.S. policy toward Nicaragua aims to promote the reestablishment of democratic practices (including free and fair elections), support human rights, and address humanitarian needs. The United States has provided democracy and human rights assistance to support civil society; the Biden Administration requested $15 million in each of FY2022 and FY2023 for such support. The United States also has provided humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters and to help Nicaragua respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the United States has provided more than 1.6 million COVID-19 vaccines since 2021.

The Biden Administration has increased targeted U.S. sanctions on the Ortega regime in an effort to hold the government accountable for its antidemocratic practices and attacks on civil society. These sanctions include financial asset blocking sanctions and visa restrictions on members of the Nicaraguan government, legislature, and judiciary, along with others determined to be responsible

[122] Inter-American Commission On Human Rights, *Nicaragua: Concentration of Power and the Undermining of the Rule of Law*, OEA/Ser.L/V/II, Doc. 288, October 25, 2021, p. 65.

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

[124] U.S. Mission to the OAS, "OAS General Assembly Condemns the Ortega-Murillo Regime in Nicaragua," November 12, 2021 (includes resolution text).

[125] White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Expands Efforts to Hold Nicaraguan Government Accountable," October 24, 2022; and U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Nicaragua must restore full enjoyment of civil and political rights, particularly freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, media and civic assembly: UN and IACHR experts," October 3, 2022.

[126] IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2022.

for undermining democracy and threatening stability in Nicaragua. The Department of the Treasury has imposed financial sanctions on 44 individuals and 11 entities, and the State Department has imposed visa restrictions on several hundred officials. Individuals sanctioned include Vice President Rosario Murillo, four of the Ortega-Murillo children, and numerous government officials, including national security adviser, defense minister, commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan Army, and vice minister of finance and public credit. Entities sanctioned include the Nicaraguan National Police, Attorney General's Office, a fuel distribution company (which the government subsequently nationalized), the state-owned Nicaraguan mining company, and the General Directorate of Mines of the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

The Ortega regime has pushed back against pressure from the United States and other international actors. This has included refusing to accept new U.S. Ambassador Hugo Rodriguez, who was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in September 2022, breaking ties with the Netherlands, declaring the head of the European Union delegation persona non grata, and ceasing its participation in the OAS.[127]

Congressional Action. The 117th Congress enacted the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform Act of 2021 (RENACER Act), P.L. 117-54, in November 2021, which requires the Administration to align U.S. diplomacy and the use of targeted sanctions to advance free, fair, and transparent elections in Nicaragua, among other provisions. The act also requires the State Department to monitor, report on, and address corruption and human rights abuses in Nicaragua.

Congress also continued funding to support democracy and human rights programs in Nicaragua. In March 2022, Congress appropriated "not less than" $15 million for such activities in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K). For FY2023, both the House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2023 SFOPS bill, (H.R. 8282, H.Rept. 117-401) and a FY2023 SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, would provide "not less than" $15 million for democracy programs for Nicaragua, including support to civil society. In 2021, House and Senate committees had several hearings on democracy and human rights in Nicaragua (see **Appendix**).

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF12247, *Nicaragua*, by Karla I. Rios; and CRS Report R46860, *Nicaragua in Brief: Political Developments and U.S. Policy*.

South America

Brazil

Occupying almost half of South America, Brazil is the seventh most-populous country and 12th largest economy in the world. Given its size and tremendous natural resources, Brazil has long had the potential to become a world power and periodically has been the focal point of U.S. policy in Latin America. However, uneven economic performance and political instability have hindered Brazil's rise to international prominence. The country experienced a period of strong economic growth and increased international influence during the first decade of the 21st century, but it has struggled with a series of economic, political, security, and health crises since 2014. This domestic turbulence discredited much of Brazil's political class, paving the way Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing legislator and retired army captain, to win the presidency in 2018.

[127] Agence France Presse, "Nicaragua Breaks Ties with Netherlands, Bars U.S. Envoy, October 1, 2022; Reuters, "EU Ambassador Leave Nicaragua in Week of Diplomatic Tensions," October 1, 2022; and "Nicaragua Expels OAS, Leaves Organization Early," VOA, April 25, 2022.

During his four-year term, President Bolsonaro implemented some economic reforms favored by international investors and Brazilian businesses and proposed measures to ease firearms regulations and promote development in the Brazilian Amazon. Rather than building a broad-based legislative coalition to advance his agenda, Bolsonaro governed in a populist manner, using social media to communicate directly with his political base; take polarizing stands on cultural issues; and criticize perceived enemies, such as the press, civil society organizations, and other branches of government. This approach alienated potential allies within the conservative-leaning congress and placed additional stress on the country's already strained democratic institutions. It also appears to have hindered Brazil's ability to implement a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[128] As of November 2, 2022, Brazil had recorded more than 688,000 deaths, giving it the third-highest COVID-19 mortality rate in the Western Hemisphere.[129]

In international affairs, the Bolsonaro administration moved Brazil toward closer alignment with the United States. Bolsonaro coordinated closely with the Trump Administration on regional challenges, such as the crisis in Venezuela, and frequently supported the Trump Administration within multilateral organizations. The Trump Administration welcomed Bolsonaro's rapprochement as an opportunity to strengthen U.S.-Brazilian relations. In 2019, the Trump Administration designated Brazil as a major non-NATO ally for the purposes of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended (22 U.S.C. 2321k), and the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2751 et seq.). The United States and Brazil also forged agreements on several trade and investment matters, including a Protocol on Trade Rules and Transparency, concluded in October 2020, which aims to foster cooperation on trade facilitation and customs administration, regulatory practices, and anti-corruption measures.

Relations have cooled somewhat under President Biden, potentially suggesting those advances were the result of Bolsonaro's personal and ideological rapport with President Trump rather than a growing alignment between Brazil and the United States. Nevertheless, bilateral merchandise trade reached a record high of $78.2 billion in 2021, and the U.S. and Brazilian governments have maintained frequent, high-level engagement. Among other objectives, the Biden Administration has sought to work with Brazil to enhance bilateral security ties, combat Amazon deforestation, and coordinate approaches to regional and international policy challenges, including within the U.N. Security Council, where Brazil is serving a two-year term (2022-2023).

Bilateral relations are likely to shift again in January 2023, when former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula, 2003-2010) of the center-left Workers' Party is to be inaugurated to a third presidential term. Lula narrowly defeated Bolsonaro in an October 2022 runoff election, 50.9% to 49.1%.[130] Based on the record of his first two terms, Lula is likely to pursue more autonomous foreign and defense policies, potentially breaking with U.S. policy toward Venezuela and placing increased emphasis on coordination with fellow Latin American governments and members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group. At the same time, bilateral environmental cooperation may increase, as Lula has pledged to combat deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, which reached a 15-year high in 2021, and meet Brazil's commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change.[131]

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[128] Matias Spektor, "Brazil: Polarizing Presidential Leadership and the Pandemic," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 28, 2020; and Lisa Alves, "Health Experts Welcome Brazil COVID-19 Inquiry Findings," *Lancet*, November 4, 2021.

[129] Johns Hopkins, "Mortality Analyses," November 2, 2022.

[130] Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, "Eleição Geral Orinária 2022, 2º Turno," at https://resultados.tse.jus.br/oficial/app/index.html#/eleicao/resultados./.

[131] Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais, "Taxa PRODES Amazônia – 2004 a 2021 (km²)," November 19, 2021.

Congressional Action. The 117th Congress has continued to shape U.S.-Brazilian cooperation on environmental issues. Congress appropriated $25 million for foreign assistance programs in the Brazilian Amazon in the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103, Division K), up from $17 million in FY2021. H.Rept. 117-84, incorporated into the act's explanatory statement, directed the Secretary of State to work with the Brazilian government to ensure it consults with Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities in the Amazon regarding projects and policies that affect them and to prioritize preventive actions to protect threatened community leaders and other environmental human rights defenders. The explanatory statement to the FY2023 SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, would again designate $25 million for environmental programs in the Brazilian Amazon. The SFOPS bill reported in the House, H.R. 8282, would not specify a funding level for such programs.

In addition to those appropriations, some Members have introduced measures related to U.S. environmental policies globally that could affect U.S.-Brazilian relations. The U.S. CLIMATE Act of 2021 (S. 1201), introduced in April 2021, includes a provision that would direct the Secretary of State to engage with Brazil on environmental enforcement, sustainable development, and emissions reduction efforts. It also would express the sense of Congress that the President should consider Brazil's land use policies in the Amazon when negotiating bilateral agreements with Brazil or engaging with Brazil in international forums. The FOREST Act of 2021 (H.R. 5508/S. 2950), introduced in October 2021, would prohibit the importation of certain commodities produced on illegally deforested land—including cattle and soybeans—and establish a fund to assist foreign governments and civil societies in combatting deforestation.

Some Members of the 117th Congress have expressed concerns about democracy in Brazil, particularly as President Bolsonaro and some Brazilian armed forces leaders have questioned the integrity of Brazil's electoral system.[132] On September 28, 2022, the Senate adopted a resolution (S.Res. 753) that urged the Brazilian government to ensure the October 2022 general elections are conducted in a "free, fair, credible, transparent, and peaceful manner." The resolution also called on the U.S. government to continue to speak out against efforts to undermine the electoral process, immediately recognize the outcome of elections determined by international observers to be free and fair, and make clear that undemocratic actions would jeopardize U.S.-Brazilian relations, including security assistance. A companion resolution (H.Res. 1335) was introduced in the House. A proposed amendment to the FY2023 NDAA (H.Amdt. 282 to H.R. 7900) would have required the Secretary of State to report on the Brazilian armed forces' actions regarding the elections and consider whether such actions would require the termination of U.S. assistance in accordance with Section 7008 of the FY2022 SFOPS legislation (P.L. 117-103, Division K). Opponents of the amendment argued it could harm U.S.-Brazilian security cooperation and denigrate the reputation of a U.S. ally; the amendment ultimately was withdrawn.[133]

Some Members also have sought to ensure that U.S. security assistance does not contribute to human rights abuses in Brazil. The House-passed version of the FY2022 NDAA (H.R. 4350) would have prohibited the use of any DOD-managed security assistance to support Brazilian security forces in the involuntary relocation of Indigenous or Quilombola communities.[134]

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[132] See, for example, Jack Nicas, "Bolsonaro's New Ally in Questioning Brazil's Elections: The Military," *New York Times*, June 12, 2022.

[133] "Providing for Further Consideration of H.R. 7900, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023—Continued," House debate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 168, No. 115—Part II (July 13, 2022), pp. H6467-H6468.

[134] Quilombolas are inhabitants of communities founded by individuals who escaped or were freed from slavery. Some Members have expressed concern that a 2019 technology safeguards agreement, which enables the launch of spacecraft

Although that provision was not included in the final FY2022 NDAA legislation (P.L. 117-81), the accompanying explanatory statement called on the Secretary of Defense to ensure any security assistance provided to Brazil is in compliance with U.S. laws and DOD policies regarding adherence to human rights and international law.[135]

For additional information, see CRS Insight IN12022, *Brazil's October 2022 Presidential Election*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report R46236, *Brazil: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report R46619, *U.S.-Brazil Economic Relations*, coordinated by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF11306, *Fire and Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon*, by Pervaze A. Sheikh et al.

Colombia

Colombia—a close U.S. ally in Latin America—endured more than half a century of internal armed conflict. To address the country's role in illegal drug production, which fueled the conflict, the United States and Colombia forged a close relationship. Plan Colombia, a program focused initially on counternarcotics and later on counterterrorism, laid the foundation for an enduring security partnership that has lasted more than two decades. The United States also has supported the implementation of a peace accord that President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) concluded with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—the country's largest leftist guerrilla organization at the time. U.S. assistance over the past two decades has exceeded $13 billion to support Plan Colombia, its successor strategies, and peace accord implementation.

During a U.N.-monitored demobilization effort in 2017, some 13,300 FARC disarmed. The FARC later transformed from a leftist guerrilla army into a political party known as *Comunes*. Neither the government nor the rebels have upheld all their commitments under the agreement. Some guerrillas, known collectively as FARC dissidents, rearmed or never demobilized and added new recruits. In early December 2021, on the fifth anniversary of the peace accord's signing, the U.S. government removed the FARC from its list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) and designated two FARC dissident groups, Segunda Marquetalia and FARC-People's Army (FARC-EP), as FTOs.[136]

Former President Iván Duque from the conservative Democratic Center (CD) party came to office in 2018 as a peace accord critic. Some Colombians protested what they viewed as the Duque government's lax peace accord compliance and inadequate efforts to protect human rights defenders and other social activists. Colombia's Human Rights Ombudsman reported more than 145 targeted social activist killings in 2021.[137] Some blame ongoing violence on the FARC dissidents and on Colombia's current largest insurgent group, the National Liberation Army (ELN). The Duque Administration faced nearly two months of protest in May and June 2021 about tax reform, rising inequality, and other issues. The Colombian government's crackdown on

and satellites that use U.S. technology from Brazil's Alcântara Space Center, could result in the expansion of the center and the forced relocation of Quilombola families in the area.

[135] Explanatory Material Statement Submitted by Mr. Smith of Washington, Chair of the House Committee on Armed Services, On House Amendment to S. 1605, *Congressional Record*, vol. 167, No. 211 - Book II (December 7, 2021), p. H7335.

[136] U.S. Department of State. "Revocation of the Terrorist Designations of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Additional Terrorist Designations," U.S. Department of State Press Release, November 30, 2021.

[137] BBC, "Colombia Saw 145 Activists Killed in 2021, Ombudsman Says," January 18, 2022.

the widespread and mostly peaceful demonstrations resulted in demands for police reform and further diminished President Duque's approval ratings.

Former President Duque faced an enormous influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, with Colombia taking in a reported 40% of the Venezuelan exodus who had fled their homeland. The Duque government provided a decade of temporary protected status to Venezuelans who entered Colombia before January 2021. The U.S. government, international refugee agencies, and other nongovernmental groups concerned with the regional migration crisis commended this effort. Yet, Venezuelan migrants residing in Colombia reportedly continue to face xenophobia and other steep challenges.[138] In a shift from prior years, Colombians left their country and attempted to enter the United States in greater numbers, with border enforcement encounters (apprehensions and expulsions) at the U.S. Southwest border more than 20 times greater in FY2022 than the prior year (from 6,202 in FY2021 to 125,172 in FY2022).[139]

In June 2022, Colombian voters elected former Senator Gustavo Petro president in a close but decisive victory over Rodolfo Hernández, a construction magnate and one-term mayor. President Petro, inaugurated in August 2022, is the country's first leftist president and leads a coalition of leftist parties known as the Historic Pact. The president is a longtime leader of the political opposition and was once a member of the M-19, a leftist guerilla group that demobilized in the late 1980s.[140] Following his election, Petro surprised many observers by forging a strong congressional coalition, which included the traditional, established Liberal and Conservative parties.[141]

President Petro entered office promising sweeping changes. Among them is full implementation of the 2016 peace accords. His program calls for "Total Peace," in an effort to end violence among armed groups, investment in areas ravaged by conflict, and reform of the Colombian military and police, including moving the national police out of the Ministry of Defense.[142] Petro is also seeking broad tax reforms to raise funds for anti-poverty programs. His proposals include improving tax collection by preventing evasion as well as raising taxes on the wealthiest Colombians and on selected exports.[143] In another consequential reversal from the Duque government, President Petro reestablished diplomatic relations with neighboring Venezuela in August 2022.[144] The presidents of Venezuela and Colombia met and held discussions on commercial relations and other matters in early November 2022.[145]

To date, more than 9 million Colombians, or roughly 17% of the population, have registered as conflict victims. Many await promised compensation, including land from which they were forcibly displaced or other reparations. More than 300 demobilized former FARC combatants

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[138] "Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia," International Crisis Group, August 9, 2022.

[139] U.S. CBP, "Nationwide Encounters," accessed November 2, 2022, at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters.

[140] "Who is Gustavo Petro?" *Economist*, August 6, 2022.

[141] "Colombia: Petro Forges Formidable Coalition," *Latin News Weekly Report*, July 7, 2022.

[142] Joshua Collins and Daniela Diaz, "Petro's 'Total Peace' in Colombia: Essential, but Not Easy," NACLA, August 18, 2022.

[143] Megan Janetsky, "Colombia's Leftwing Government Unveils Tax-the-Rich Plan to Tackle Poverty," The Guardian, August 26, 2022.

[144] "Venezuela and Colombia Restore Diplomatic Ties After Three Years," *France 24*, August 29, 2022; "Colombia's New President Cosies Up to Venezuela's Despot," *Economist*, September 16, 2022.

[145] Ana Vanessa Herrero, Samantha Schmidt, "Colombia's New President Meets with Maduro as Ties Grow," *Washington Post*, November 2, 2022.

have been killed since 2016, about two-thirds during former President Duque's term.[146] Delays in funding major peace accord commitments at its five-year mark has meant its implementation is not on pace to reach its 15-year target.[147]

A significant portion of the Colombian public is skeptical of the peace process and the FARC's role in Colombia's democracy, and most Colombians increasingly rank implementation of the peace agreement well behind their concerns related to urban crime, official corruption, and the economy.[148] Other Colombians maintain that full implementation of the peace accord is vital. Some argue that more complete implementation of the 2016 peace accord would bring unrealized benefits, such as less violence in the rural and remote zones facing armed groups that compete to inherit the former FARC's illicit businesses.[149]

Colombia has set records in cocaine production in recent years, including an estimated 972 metric tons produced in 2021, according to the U.S. government; the United Nations reports an even larger amount of 1,400 metric tons in 2021.[150] The United States works closely on interdiction with Colombia to seize cocaine leaving the country, primarily destined for the United States. The future of bilateral antidrug cooperation is unclear, as President Petro has criticized the "war on drugs," in part for punishing impoverished drug crop farmers, although Petro and his Cabinet ministers have expressed strong interest in working with the United States on voluntary crop substitution and other citizen security issues.[151] In early October 2022, President Petro met with U.S. Secretary of State Blinken to discuss the security relationship and counternarcotics cooperation. In press remarks at the Bogotá meeting, the Secretary of State said,

> on counternarcotics, to take one example, we strongly support the holistic approach that President Petro's administration is taking to counter narcotics through comprehensive rural security, justice, development, environmental protection, supply reduction, as well as demand reduction ... on both the enforcement side but also on the comprehensive approach to the problem which is so necessary, I think that we're largely in sync.[152]

Congressional Action. Congress has appropriated foreign assistance to Colombia from the Departments of Defense and State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The FY2022 NDAA, P.L. 117-81, enacted in December 2021 included several provisions on Colombia, including an extension of authority to support a unified counterdrug and counterterrorism campaign. The House-passed version of the FY2023 NDAA (H.R. 7900) would provide the same extension of authority as in the FY2022 NDAA, through the year 2025 (Section 1011), and would prohibit the use of funds for aerial fumigation (Section 1051). The bill also

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[146] United Nations Security Council, "Colombia: Quarterly Meeting," What's in Blue, Security Council Report, January 19, 2022.

[147] Adam Isacson, "A Long Way to Go: Implementing Colombia's Peace Accord after Five Years," Washington Office on Latin America, November 23, 2021.

[148] "Petro Tiene una Aprobación del 56% en Su Gestión, Según Encuesta Invamer," *Infobae*, August 31, 2022.

[149] For more background, see Javier Cárdenas, Cristal Downing, Kyle Johnson, Ángela Olaya, y Juanita Vélez, "Percepciones Sobre Los Grupos Disidentes de las FARC en Colombia: Implicaciones para la Futura Construcción de Paz," United Nations University, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, October 2022; and Juan Diego Posada, "Ex-FARC Mafia vs. ELN: A Fight Too Far at the Colombia-Venezuelan Border?," *InSight Crime*, January 11, 2022.

[150] Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), "ONDCP Releases Data on Coca Cultivation and Potential Cocaine Production in the Andean Region," July 14, 2022; and Juan Diego Posada, "Colombia Hits Historic Levels of Coca Cultivation and Cocaine Production, *InSight Crime*, October 20, 2022.

[151] "Colombia's Leftist President Says War on Drugs has Failed," *The Guardian*, August 2022.

[152] U.S. Department of State, Antony J. Blinken, Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Colombian President Gustavo Petro at a Joint Press Availability," Remarks, October 3, 2022.

would mandate a report on the Colombian military forces (Section 5856) that reviews the knowledge and intelligence of the Colombian Armed Forces from 1980 to 2010, to include their involvement in assassinations and collaboration with paramilitaries; the military's role in extrajudicial executions known as "false positives"; collusion with private companies for security; and an overview of the U.S.-Colombia military partnership during those years, especially with regard to restrictions on U.S. funding for training or equipment to any Colombian military unit associated with gross violations of human rights.

For FY2022, the State Department allocated $484.7 million in bilateral foreign assistance for Colombia.[153] The FY2022 legislation included a new human rights provision that required the State Department to withhold 5% of INCLE account funding for Colombia until the Secretary of State certified that police have been held accountable for abuses committed against protesters in 2021.

The Biden Administration's FY2023 congressional budget justification, released in March 2022, proposed $462.9 million for Colombia. The House Appropriations Committee's reported FY2023 SFOPS bill (H.R. 8282) would provide $487.4 million, whereas a bill introduced in the Senate (S. 4662) would provide $484.7 million. As Congress finalizes FY2023 appropriations levels and provides oversight of U.S. policy toward Colombia, it may consider the extent to which the United States will be able to work with the Petro administration on issues such as counternarcotics, peace accord implementation, regional migration, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and trade. Several Members of Congress have expressed support in recent years for Colombia's continued leadership role to assist in a democratic transition in Venezuela and to respond to the dire humanitarian situation caused by outmigration.[154] Members also may monitor Colombia's normalization of relations with Venezuela under the Petro government, and the potential impact on regional security.

For additional information, CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS Insight IN11955, *Colombia: Presidential Elections in 2022*, by June S. Beittel, CRS In Focus IF12181, *Colombia: Police Reform and Congressional Concerns*, by Rachel L. Martin and June S. Beittel.

Venezuela

Venezuela, under the authoritarian rule of Nicolás Maduro, is mired in a deep economic and humanitarian crisis worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Maduro has consolidated power over all of Venezuela's democratic institutions since his narrow 2013 election following the death of President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013). His United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) took control of the National Assembly, the last independent branch of government, in January 2021. The PSUV and its allies won 19 of 23 gubernatorial elections in flawed elections held in November 2021.

Maduro has used repression to quash dissent; rewarded allies, particularly in the security forces, with income earned from illegal gold mining, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities; and relied on support from Russia, China, Iran, and others to subvert U.S. oil sanctions and resist international pressure to step down. Meanwhile, international support for opposition leader Juan Guaidó, the former National Assembly president once regarded as interim president by the United States and nearly 60 countries, has dissipated. Colombia, long a staunch Guaidó supporter, has

[153] This includes $11.6 million in Global Health Programs (GHP) accounts of U.S. State Department and USAID. See U.S. Department of State, "FY2022 Estimate Data," August 16, 2022.

[154] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *U.S.- Colombia Relations: New Opportunities to Reinforce and Strengthen our Bilateral Relationship,* 116th Cong., 2nd session, 2019.

restored diplomatic relations with the Maduro government under leftist President Petro, who took office in August 2022. Petro backs a negotiated solution to the Venezuela crisis.

Between 2014 and 2021, Venezuela's economy contracted by 80%, according to IMF estimates, largely due to low oil prices and the government's economic mismanagement and corruption. According to a February 2021 Government Accountability Office report, sanctions imposed by the United States in response to Maduro's authoritarian actions, particularly sanctions targeting Venezuela's oil industry, contributed to the crisis. Since 2021, hyperinflation has abated and higher oil prices driven by Russia's invasion of Ukraine appear to be driving a nascent economic recovery. Nevertheless, an ongoing humanitarian crisis has prompted some 7.1 million Venezuelans to flee the country as of September 2022 according to U.N. agencies, most to neighboring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean but also increasingly to the United States.[155]

In September 2021, seeking sanctions relief and international recognition of his government, Maduro resumed Norway-led negotiations—previously suspended in 2019—with the opposition Unity Platform (a group that includes Guaidó supporters and other factions). Maduro once again suspended the negotiations, however, after the United States extradited a top ally, Alex Saab, from Cape Verde to stand trial for money laundering in late 2021. After a March 2022 meeting with U.S. officials, the Maduro government released two unjustly imprisoned Americans and pledged to restart negotiations with the opposition but has not done so. In October 2022, Venezuela released seven more unjustly imprisoned Americans, including five CITGO executives detained since 2017; the United States released two nephews of First Lady Cilia Flores serving drug trafficking sentences. It is unclear whether this prisoner exchange could signal that Maduro is willing to resume negotiations with the opposition. Even if negotiations restart, Maduro is unlikely to make significant concessions without U.S. sanctions relief.

The U.S. government ceased recognizing Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate president in January 2019. The Trump Administration discussed using military force in Venezuela but ultimately sought to compel Maduro to leave office through diplomatic, economic, and legal pressure. The Biden Administration has maintained a similar policy toward Venezuela, although U.S. talks with Maduro in March and June 2022 and the October prisoner releases could signal a slight policy shift. Biden officials have considered whether U.S. sanctions relief, particularly in the energy sector, could incentivize Maduro to negotiate a path toward free and fair elections in 2024. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols testified in September 2022, however, that U.S. patience with Maduro "is not limitless" and that new sanctions could be imposed if Maduro does not resume negotiations.[156] In July 2022, the Administration announced an 18-month extension of the TPS first announced for Venezuelans in March 2021. U.S. officials are grappling with how to handle a significant rise in apprehensions of Venezuelans at the Southwest border.

Congressional Action. In March 2022, Congress enacted the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-103), which includes $40 million for democracy programs in Venezuela ($7 million more than the FY2021 allocation). Congress is considering the Administration's FY2023 request of $55 million for Venezuela. The House Appropriations Committee-reported FY2023 SFOPS bill (H.R. 8282) would provide $50 million in funds for Venezuela, including democracy funding. The FY2023 SFOPS bill introduced in the Senate, S. 4662, would provide $40 million.

[155] R4V, Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, "Venezuelan Refugees & Migrants in the Region," September 2022.

[156] U.S. Congress, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assessing U.S. Policy Toward Venezuela, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., September 15, 2022 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2022).

Oversight has focused on the Administration's approach to sanctions and negotiations. While some in Congress support continued pressure on the Maduro government, others assert that broad sanctions have hurt the Venezuelan people. Whereas some Members of Congress expressed support for recent U.S. talks with Maduro that reportedly broached energy-related topics, others opposed those talks and introduced legislation that would prohibit U.S. imports of Venezuelan oil (H.R. 6942, H.R. 7012, H.R. 7023, H.R. 7207, S. 3798). Among other bills, S. 688 (reported by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in July 2021) would prohibit contracting with persons who do business with the Maduro regime. H.R. 8813, reported by the House Foreign Affairs Committee in September 2022, would direct the Administration to support extending the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela beyond the expiration its mandate in September 2022. H.R. 6539 and S. 1417 would establish a fund to help repatriate frozen Venezuelan assets in the United States to the Venezuelan people.

For additional information, see CRS Report R44841, *Venezuela: Background and U.S. Relations*, coordinated by Clare Ribando Seelke; 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 Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R46213, *Oil Market Effects from U.S. Economic Sanctions: Iran, Russia, Venezuela*, by Phillip Brown; and CRS In Focus IF11029, *The Venezuela Regional Humanitarian Crisis and COVID-19*, by Rhoda Margesson and Clare Ribando Seelke.

Outlook

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Latin American and Caribbean region faced significant political and economic challenges—most prominently, Venezuela's ongoing political impasse and economic and humanitarian crisis, but also increasing public dissatisfaction with the state of democracy throughout the region.

The pandemic multiplied the region's challenges and negatively affected its economic prospects. Instead of registering low economic growth rates, as originally forecast before the pandemic, the region experienced a deep recession in 2020, with millions of people impoverished. Although economic growth bounced back in 2021 for many countries, rising global commodity prices and inflation have since posed new challenges, especially for countries that had yet to fully recover from the pandemic-induced recession. Economic projections show the region's economic growth rate decelerating in 2022 and further slowing in 2023 to below global growth prospects. The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the continued global economic effects of Russia's war in Ukraine, and China's economic slowdown all factor into concern about Latin America's economic prospects looking ahead.

The pandemic and its economic fallout also contributed to a variety of other challenges facing the Biden Administration and the 117th Congress in Latin America and the Caribbean. Foremost among these is an unprecedented increase in irregular migration across the Southwest border with Mexico. Southwest border enforcement encounters (apprehensions and expulsions), which had dropped to 458,000 in FY2020 due to the pandemic, rose from nearly 978,000 in FY2019 to 1.7 million in FY2021 and almost 2.4 million in FY2022. In FY2022, the largest number of migrant encounters were from Mexico, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.[157] The region's weak economic growth prospects could continue to fuel migration pressure throughout the region.

[157] U.S. CBP, "Nationwide Encounters," accessed November 2, 20222, at https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters.

The economic downturn resulting from the pandemic and other economic challenges contributed to an anti-incumbent political trend in the region that has resulted in a leftward political shift—as noted, left and center-left parties won all but two elections for heads of government in 2021 and 2022. This shift presents both challenges and opportunities for the United States in relations with various countries where shifts in policies could either conflict or dovetail with U.S. policy interests and priorities; examples include the future of counternarcotics cooperation with Colombia and climate change cooperation with Brazil.

The Biden Administration has set forth three broad policy priorities in its policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean—expanding economic opportunities, strengthening democracy, and building security—all of which reflect substantial continuity in U.S. policy toward the region. To advance its policy priorities and collaborate with the region on such policy challenges as migration, health security, climate change, and governance, the Administration has espoused a strategy of intensified diplomatic engagement and collaboration, including bilaterally, multilaterally, and through follow-up commitments and initiatives launched at the Ninth Summit of the Americas in June 2022.

As the 117th Congress winds down, it faces final action on FY2023 SFOPS appropriations and the FY2023 NDAA, two legislative measures that will likely shape aspects of U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean in 2023. Both of these measures may include various provisions on the region, including funding and aid conditions, reporting requirements, and/or expressions of congressional sentiment.

Appendix. Latin American and Caribbean Countries: Basic Data and Hearings

Table A-1. Latin American and Caribbean Countries: Basic Facts

Country	Area (square miles)	Population (2021 estimated, thousands)	GDP (2021 est., U.S. $ billions, current)	GDP per capita (2021 est., U.S. $, current)	Leader (elected/next election)
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	171	99	1.47	14,809.5	Gaston Browne (Mar. 2018/by Mar. 2023)
Bahamas	5,359	389	11.2	28,792.1	Philip Davis (Sept. 16, 2021/by Sept, 2026)
Barbados	166	289	4.9	16,817.3	Mia Mottley (Jan. 19, 2022/ by Jan. 2027)
Belize[a]	8,867	430	2.4	5,638.4	Juan Antonio "Johnny" Briceño (Nov. 2020/by 2025)
Cuba	42,803	11,326 (2020)	107.4 (2020)	9,477.9 (2020)	Miguel Díaz-Canel (Apr. 2018/ Apr. 2023)[b]
Dominica	290	74	0.5	7,280.9	Roosevelt Skerrit (Dec. 2019/by Mar. 2025)
Dominican Republic	18,792	10,540	94.7	8,986.2	Luis Abinader (July 2020/May 2024)
Grenada	133	113	1.1	9,856.4	Dickon Mitchell (June 23, 2022/by June 2027)
Guyana[a]	83,000	789	7.7	9,777.6	Irfaan Ali (Mar. 2020/by 2025)
Haiti	10,714	11,906	21.0	1,765.2	Ariel Henry (Nov. 2016/postponed indefinitely)[c]
Jamaica	4,244	2,740	15.4	5,614.8	Andrew Holness (Sept. 2020/by 2025)
St. Kitts & Nevis	101	58	1.0	16,467.4	Terrance Drew (Aug. 5, 2022/by 2027)
St. Lucia	238	182	1.7	9,287.9	Philip Pierre (July 2021/by 2026)
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	150	111	0.9	7,948.5	Ralph Gonsalves (Nov. 2020/by 2025)
Suriname[a]	63,251	610	2.9	4,680.6	Chandrikapersad "Chan" Santokhi (May 2020/2025)
Trinidad & Tobago	1,980	1,407	24.0	17,055.7	Keith Rowley (August 2020/by 2025)

Country	Area (square miles)	Population (2021 estimated, thousands)	GDP (2021 est., U.S. $ billions, current)	GDP per capita (2021 est., U.S. $, current)	Leader (elected/next election)
Mexico and Central America					
Mexico	758,449	128,972	1,297.7	10,061.5	Andrés Manuel López Obrador (July 2018/July 2024)
Costa Rica	19,730	5,180	64.4	12,435.6	Rodrigo Chaves (Feb. 6, 2022 & Apr. 3, 2022/Feb. 2026 & Apr. 2026)
El Salvador	8,124	6,519	28.7	4,408.5	Nayib Bukele (Feb. 2019/Feb. 2024)
Guatemala	42,042	18,340	86.0	4,687.8	Alejandro Giammattei (June & Aug. 2019/ June 2023)
Honduras	43,278	10.1	28.5	2,816.2	Xiomara Castro (Nov. 28, 2021/Nov. 2025)
Nicaragua	50,336	6,539	14.0	2,141.0	Daniel Ortega (Nov. 7, 2021/Nov. 2025)
Panama	29,120	4,337	63.6	14,664.3	Laurentino Cortizo (May 2019/May 2024)
South America					
Argentina	1,073,518	45,842	486.7	10,616.9	Alberto Fernández (Oct. 2019/Oct. 2023)
Bolivia	424,164	11,800	40.7	3,449.4	Luis Arce (Oct. 2020/2025)
Brazil	3,287,957	212,609	1,608.1	7,563.6	Jair Bolsonaro (Oct. 2 & 30, 2022/Oct. 2026)[d]
Chile	291,932	19,718	316.7	16,065.0	Gabriel Boric (Nov. 21 & Dec. 19, 2021/Nov. & Dec. 2025)
Colombia	439,736	51,049	314.4	6,158.9	Gustavo Petro (May 29, 2022 & June 19, 2022/May & June 2026)
Ecuador	109,484	17,757	106.2	5,9789.0	Guillermo Lasso (Feb. 7 & Apr. 11, 2021/Feb. 2025)
Paraguay	157,048	7,353	38.8	5,279.4	Mario Abdo Benítez (Apr. 2018/Apr. 2023)
Peru	496,225	33,829	225.9	6,678.9	Pedro Castillo (Apr. 11 & June 6, 2021/Apr. 2026)
Uruguay	68,037	3,543	59.3	16,735.3	Luis Lacalle Pou (Oct. & Nov. 2019/Oct. 2024)
Venezuela	352,144	27,586	59.5	2,157.3	Nicolás Maduro (May 2018/May 2024)[e]

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 2022. Population and economic statistics for Cuba are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators databank.

Notes:

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 therefore are 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. President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated on July 7, 2021. Ariel Henry was sworn in as prime minister on July 20, 2021. Under the Haitian Constitution, either the Council of Ministers under the Prime Minister should govern or, in the last year of a presidential term, the legislature should elect a provisional president. Currently, there is no functioning legislature, as most of the legislators' terms have expired. In September 2021, de facto Prime Minister Henry dissolved the Provisional Electoral Council and has since said he also plans to hold a constitutional referendum and elections soon after. Elections were repeatedly postponed and no date has been set. Henry has said he will remain in office until new elections are held. Civil society and political coalitions are calling for an interim government to take his place, in part because they say his term expired when Moïse's should have, on February 7, 2022. See CRS In Focus IF12182, *Haiti: Political Conflict and U.S. Policy Overview*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Maureen Taft-Morales.

d. On October 30, 2022, Brazil conducted a second presidential round in which former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defeated President Jair Bolsonaro and is to be inaugurated January 1, 2023. See CRS Insight IN12022, *Brazil's October 2022 Presidential Election*, by Peter J. Meyer.

e. Venezuela's May 2018 elections were characterized by widespread fraud and considered illegitimate by many in Venezuela and in the international community. The United States recognizes Juan Guaidó, elected as president of Venezuela's National Assembly in January 2019, as interim president of Venezuela. See CRS In Focus IF10230, *Venezuela: Political Crisis and U.S. Policy*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

Table A-2. Congressional Hearings in the 117th Congress on Latin America and the Caribbean

Committee and Subcommittee	Date	Title
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	March 3, 2021	A Way Forward for Venezuela: The Humanitarian, Diplomatic, and National Security Challenges facing the Biden Administration
House Foreign Affairs Committee	March 12, 2021	Policy Recommendations on Haiti for the Biden Administration
Senate Armed Services Committee	March 16, 2021	United States Southern Command and United States Northern Command
Senate Foreign Relations Committee	March 24, 2021	The State of Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	April 14, 2021	Renewing the United States' Commitment to Addressing the Root Causes of Migration from Central America
House Armed Services Committee	April 14, 2021	National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activity in North and South America
House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense	April 15, 2021	United States Southern Command
House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations	April 27, 2021	Unaccompanied Children at the Border: Stakeholder Perspectives on the Way Forward

Committee and Subcommittee	Date	Title
House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management	April 28, 2021	The Non–Governmental Organization Perspective on the Southwest Border
House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management and Accountability	May 6, 2021	Stakeholder Perspectives on Addressing Migration Push Factors
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	May 13, 2021	A Race Against Time: Deploying Vaccines and Addressing the Disproportionate Impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	June 9, 2021	Judicial Independence in Central America
House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations	June 10, 2021	Unaccompanied Children at the Border: Federal Response and the Way Forward
House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management and Accountability	June 11, 2021	Enhancing Border Security: Addressing Corruption in Central America
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	June 23, 2021	The Biden Administration's Efforts to Deepen U.S. Engagement in the Caribbean
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	July 1, 2021	Protests in Colombia
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	July 20, 2021	Historic Protests in Cuba and the Crackdown on Free Expression
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	July 21, 2021	The Ortega Government and the Human Cost of Repression in Nicaragua: Political Prisoners
Senate Committee on Finance	July 27, 2021	Implementation and Enforcement of the United States – Mexico – Canada Agreement: One Year After Entry into Force
House Committee on Homeland Security	July 28, 2021	DHS's Efforts to Disrupt Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	September 21, 2021	An International Response to Ortega's Destruction of Democracy in Nicaragua
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	September 23, 2021	Root Causes of Migration: Food Insecurity and the Right to Food in Central America
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	November 16, 2021	The Biden Administration's Policy Priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean
Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control	November 17, 2021	The Nexus between the Illicit Drug Trade and Corruption

Committee and Subcommittee	Date	Title
Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues	November 18, 2021	Vaccine Diplomacy in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Importance of U.S. Engagement
Senate Foreign Relations Committee	November 30, 2021	U.S. Policy on Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	January 20, 2022	Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Panama: A New Alliance for Promoting Democracy and Prosperity in the Americas
House Foreign Affairs Committee	February 3, 2022	Overview of U.S. Priorities in the Western Hemisphere: Opportunities, Challenges, and the Path Ahead
Senate Foreign Relations Committee	February 16, 2022	Reinvigorating U.S. - Colombia Relations
House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability	February 17, 2022	Call to Action: Private-Sector Investment in the Northern Triangle and Its Impact on Homeland Security
House Armed Services Committee	March 8, 2022	National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activity in North and South America
Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities	March 23, 2022	Testimony on strategic competition and security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere
Senate Armed Services Committee	March 24, 2022	Testimony on the posture of United States Northern Command and United States Southern Command
Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues	March 31, 2022	China's Role in Latin America and the Caribbean
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs	May 5, 2022	Securing and Ensuring Order on the Southwest Border
Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues	May 26, 2022	Ninth Summit of The Americas
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	June 23, 2022	Human Rights Challenges in Mexico
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	July 20, 2022	Russia in the Western Hemisphere: Assessing Putin's Malign Influence in Latin America and the Caribbean
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	September 12, 2022	State of Exception in El Salvador
House Financial Services Committee	September 14, 2022	When Banks Leave: The Impacts of De-Risking on the Caribbean and Strategies for Ensuring Financial Access
Senate Foreign Relations Committee	September 15, 2022	Assessing U.S. Policy Toward Venezuela

Committee and Subcommittee	Date	Title
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Civilian Security, Migration, and International Economic Policy	September 15, 2022	Learning Loss in Latin America and the Caribbean: Building Better Education Systems in the Wake of the Pandemic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee	September 21, 2022	Women Leaders Countering Authoritarianism
House Foreign Affairs Committee	September 29, 2022	Haiti at the Crossroads: Civil Society Responses for a Haitian-led Solution
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	October 4, 2022	Considerations on Economic Sanctions

Source: CRS, prepared by Carla Davis-Castro, 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; Senate Armed Services Committee at https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings; and House Armed Services Committee at https://armedservices.house.gov/hearings.

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