

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

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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 the region, 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 and economic and security conditions. 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 Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, as well as corruption and human rights concerns in other countries. Support to help the region respond to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic also has become a major component of U.S. policy.

In its initial months, much of the Biden Administration's focus in the region was on immigration and Central America. President Biden took executive actions revising some of the previous Administration's restrictive immigration policies, while also contending with a large increase in Central American migrants seeking to enter the United States. The Administration has proposed allocating \$4 billion over four years to implement a new strategy, released in July 2021, to address the root causes of Central American migration.

Since then, the Administration has begun to flesh out its broader approach to Latin America and the Caribbean. It is providing significant support to help countries in the region respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including, as of August 2021, the donation of almost 40 million vaccine doses to 26 countries. To support the region's recovery and advance other initiatives, the Administration requested nearly \$2.1 billion in foreign aid for Latin America and the Caribbean in FY2022, nearly 16% higher than estimated FY2021 appropriations. As the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela continues to drive large-scale migration flows, the Administration has maintained sanctions on the government while working multilaterally to restore democracy. The Administration is reviewing past policy decisions on Cuba but also imposed a series of targeted sanctions against Cuban security entities and individuals in response to the government's suppression of protests in July. The Administration expressed continued support for Haiti following the assassination of the country's president in July and is providing humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of an August 14 earthquake.

117th Congress Action. Congress traditionally has played an active role in policy toward the region through both legislation and oversight. In March 2021, Congress appropriated \$10.8 billion (P.L. 117-2, American Rescue Plant Act of 2021) to respond to COVID-19 worldwide, including in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the House approved H.R. 6, which would provide a pathway to citizenship for those brought to the United States as children and those from countries with temporary protected status. In June 2021, the Senate passed S. 1260, the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021, which would strengthen the United States' ability to compete with China worldwide. Among its numerous Latin America and Caribbean provisions, the bill would authorize a capital increase for the Inter-American Development Bank and would require strategies to increase exports of U.S. goods and services and to strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness and promote good governance, human rights, and the rule of law. A House Foreign Affairs Committee-reported bill, H.R. 3524, the EAGLE Act, has some of the same provisions as S. 1260 but also includes two provisions to strengthen U.S. engagement with the Caribbean. In July 2021, the House approved its version of the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill, H.R. 4373 (H.Rept. 117-84), which would provide assistance to key countries and programs in the region at levels either matching or exceeding the Administration's budget request, including assistance to Central America, Colombia, Mexico, and regional assistance to the Caribbean.

In country-specific legislation, in June 2021, the House approved H.R. 2471 on Haiti, which would promote the sustainable rebuilding and development of Haiti and prioritize U.S. support for anti-corruption efforts and human rights. In August, the Senate approved S. 1041 on Nicaragua, which, among its provisions, would direct the Administration to use U.S. diplomatic

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tools and targeted sanctions to support free and fair elections; the House Committee on Foreign Affairs reported its version, H.R. 2946, in July. The Senate also approved five resolutions on U.S. relations with the region: S.Res. 22 on Ecuador; S.Res. 37, S.Res. 81, and S.Res. 310 on the human rights situation in Cuba; and S.Res. 120, on the forthcoming Summit of the Americas. To date, 16 congressional hearings have focused on a variety of 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, with Nicaragua and Venezuela joining Cuba as the region's three current authoritarian regimes.

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).

Beginning in 2020, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had widespread public health, economic, social, and political effects throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates a regional economic decline of 7.0% in 2020, with almost every country in the region in recession (see “Economic Situation,” below). As a result, poverty and inequality have increased. Many countries in the region may struggle with protracted economic recoveries, given that they rely on global investment, trade, and tourism, all of which have been affected by the pandemic. The economic setback associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a resurgence of social unrest in some countries similar to that experienced in 2019. Human rights groups also have expressed concerns about some leaders in the region taking advantage of the pandemic to advance their own agendas and limit civil liberties for political gain (see “Political Situation,” below).

COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean¹

As of September 1, 2021, Latin America and the Caribbean had 43.3 million confirmed COVID-19 cases (almost 20% of cases worldwide) and more than 1.4 million COVID-19 deaths (almost 32% of deaths worldwide), according to data from Johns Hopkins University, despite the region accounting for only 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 and Mexico had the second- and fourth-highest COVID-19 death tolls globally. 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, Argentina, Colombia, and Paraguay. Some Caribbean countries that have had relatively smaller numbers of deaths compared with other countries in the region have high mortality rates (see **Table 1**).² Experts have expressed concerns that some countries could be significantly undercounting deaths for a variety of reasons.³

On August 25, 2021, during its weekly press briefing on the pandemic, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), which serves as regional office for the Americas of the World Health Organization, reported that new COVID-19 cases continued across Latin America and the Caribbean, with Mexico and Brazil having the highest number of cases and many Central American countries experiencing a rise in infections. Although hospitalizations were reportedly decreasing in much of South America, PAHO stated that infections remained high. In the Caribbean, PAHO reported steep increases in new infections and deaths in Jamaica and some smaller islands, such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica.⁴ In a briefing on September 1, 2021, PAHO highlighted high rates of infection in Belize, Costa Rica, St. Lucia, and Suriname.⁵

When the pandemic first began to surge in the region in May 2020, PAHO Director Dr. Carissa Etienne expressed concern about the poor and other vulnerable groups at greatest risk. These

¹ For further information, 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,” September 1, 2021, at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality> (hereinafter, Johns Hopkins, “Mortality Analyses,” September 1, 2021.) Data presented by Johns Hopkins reflect COVID-19 cases and deaths as reported by countries worldwide.

³ “Tracking COVID-19 Excess Deaths Across Countries,” *Economist*, August 19, 2021.

⁴ Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), “Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director’s Remarks,” August 25, 2021. For the most current PAHO weekly press briefing on COVID-19, see <https://www.paho.org/en/media/weekly-press-briefing-covid-19-situation-americas>.

⁵ PAHO, “Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director’s Opening Remarks,” September 1, 2021.

groups included those living in the Amazon Basin, particularly Indigenous communities; women, who make up 70% of the health workforce in the Americas; people of African descent; migrants in temporary settlements; and prisoners in crowded jails.⁶ In 2020, PAHO issued an alert urging countries to intensify efforts to prevent further spread of the virus among Indigenous communities in the Americas, and urged health authorities to provide better access to healthcare for populations of African descent in the region disproportionately affected by the pandemic.⁷ In April 2021, the PAHO director asserted that “the virus has deepened the inequities that have long divided this region” and noted that effectively fighting the pandemic “is impossible without addressing some of these inequalities and supporting the most vulnerable as they struggle to protect themselves.”⁸ In July 2021 remarks, the PAHO director again maintained that the pandemic has exacerbated long-standing inequities within and among countries. She noted that the pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in the region’s health, economic, and social sectors and has heightened disparities by gender, ethnicity, geographic location, access to affordable and quality health services, food insecurity, and housing.⁹

Vaccination Progress. The rollout of vaccines in Latin America and the Caribbean has varied considerably. Most countries in the region are not expected to achieve widespread vaccination coverage until mid-2022; for some countries, this could be delayed until 2023, making populations vulnerable to new waves of the virus and to more transmittable variants.¹⁰ On September 1, 2021, PAHO’s director reported that 75% of the Latin American and Caribbean population had not been fully vaccinated and that more than a third of countries in the region had “yet to vaccinate 20% of their populations,” with coverage in some countries far below that level.¹¹ At a press briefing in August, the director asserted that “vaccine inequity remains the Achilles’ heel of our response” and that “limited vaccine supplies continue to set us back.”¹²

As of September 1, 2021, according to Johns Hopkins University, Uruguay and Chile were vaccination-rate leaders in the region, with 72% of their respective populations fully vaccinated (see **Table 1**). Other countries with high numbers of COVID-19 deaths that have begun to make significant progress in vaccination rates include Ecuador (49%), the Dominican Republic and El Salvador (43%), Panama (38%), Cuba (33%), and Argentina (32%). In contrast, countries with less than 10% of their populations fully vaccinated include Guatemala, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Haiti, where reportedly less than 0.1% of the country’s population is fully vaccinated.¹³

⁶ PAHO, “PAHO Director Calls to Protect Vulnerable Groups from Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic,” press release, May 19, 2020.

⁷ 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.

⁸ PAHO, “Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director’s Remarks,” April 7, 2021.

⁹ PAHO, “Annual Report of the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, 2020, Director’s Remarks,” July 21, 2021.

¹⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), “Slow Vaccine Rollouts Raise Risks to Latam’s Recovery,” July 1, 2021, and “How Much Will Vaccine Inequity Cost?,” August 25, 2021.

¹¹ “PAHO, “Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director’s Opening Remarks,” September 1, 2021.

¹² PAHO, “Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director’s Remarks,” August 25, 2021.

¹³ Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, “Vaccination Progress Across the World,” September 1, 2021, at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/vaccines/international>. For Cuba and Haiti, the source for vaccinations is Josh Holder, “Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations Around the World,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2021, at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>.

Table 1. COVID-19 Cases, Deaths, and Vaccination Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

(countries with more than 100 deaths, as of September 1, 2021)

Country	Cases (millions)	Deaths	Deaths per 100,000	Population Fully Vaccinated (%)
Brazil	20.777	580,413	275.01	29.10
Mexico	3.352	259,326	203.27	26.59
Peru	2.150	198,263	609.84	25.10
Colombia	4.909	124,945	248.20	29.17
Argentina	5.186	111,812	248.81	32.02
Chile	1.639	36,937	194.90	72.06
Ecuador	0.501	32,244	185.59	49.28
Bolivia	0.491	18,452	160.27	23.04
Paraguay	0.459	15,767	223.82	23.59
Guatemala	0.470	11,926	71.83	7.21
Honduras	0.339	8,850	90.81	13.42
Panama	0.457	7,061	166.28	38.45
Uruguay	0.385	6,032	174.25	72.46
Costa Rica	0.464	5,506	109.08	24.16
Cuba	0.653	5,303	46.79	33.00
Venezuela	0.334	4,010	14.06	11.70
Dominican Republic	0.350	4,008	37.32	43.38
El Salvador	0.094	2,918	45.22	42.74
Jamaica	0.068	1,518	51.49	4.90
Trinidad and Tobago	0.045	1,291	92.55	28.61
Suriname	0.029	721	124.02	23.17
Guyana	0.026	622	79.46	20.57
Haiti	0.021	586	5.20	<0.1
Belize	0.016	362	92.74	16.63
Bahamas	0.018	354	90.89	14.79
Nicaragua	0.012	200	3.06	3.10
St. Lucia	0.008	104	56.90	15.19
Total LAC*	43.265	1,439,648	—	—

Sources: Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, “Mortality Analyses,” September 1, 2021, at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>, and “Vaccination Progress Across the World,” September 1, 2021, at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/vaccines/international>. For Cuba and Haiti, the source for vaccinations is Josh Holder, “Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations Around the World,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2021, at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html>.

Notes: Total LAC includes all independent countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region 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, which tripled the country’s reported death toll.

PAHO has helped countries prepare for vaccine rollout 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 have 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—are eligible to 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.¹⁴

Latin American and Caribbean countries have been acquiring COVID-19 vaccines from a variety of sources. As of September 1, 2021, PAHO reported that over 36 million doses had been delivered through COVAX.¹⁵ Vaccine deliveries through COVAX have been slower than expected due to supply problems and other challenges.¹⁶ Beyond COVAX, PAHO announced on August 11 that it would use its revolving fund to help Latin American and Caribbean countries procure additional vaccines.¹⁷ Many countries in the region also have signed commercial agreements with pharmaceutical companies. Both China and Russia have sold, and in some cases donated, COVID-19 vaccines to countries throughout the region. Before infections began to surge in India in March 2021, the Indian government donated thousands of doses to Caribbean countries. The United States significantly ramped up its donation of vaccines to the region beginning in June 2021, providing some 40 million vaccine doses as of late August (see “Biden Administration Policy” below).¹⁸

In terms of COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing in Latin America, Cuba has developed and currently manufactures two vaccines. On August 25, PAHO announced it would start a program to boost COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing in Latin America and the Caribbean and was analyzing about 30 proposals.¹⁹ Two Brazilian companies already manufacture some COVID-19 vaccines—AstraZeneca and China’s Sinovac—and another Brazilian company signed an agreement in August to manufacture the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in Brazil by 2022.²⁰ In early August 2021, China’s Sinovac Biotech also announced it would open a manufacturing plant in Chile in the first half of 2022.²¹

¹⁴ The COVAX Facility, “Committee Agreements; Confirmations of Intent to Participate, and AMC-Eligible Countries,” December 15, 2020.

¹⁵ PAHO, “Tracker COVAX Initiative—COVID-19 Deliveries in the Region,” August 29, 2021.

¹⁶ For example, see Benjamin Mueller and Rebecca Robbins, “Where a Vast Global Vaccination Program Went Wrong,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2021.

¹⁷ PAHO, “PAHO Will Begin Procuring COVID-19 Vaccine to Expand Access in Latin America and the Caribbean,” press release, August 11, 2021.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, “COVID-19 Vaccine Donations, Western Hemisphere,” accessed September 1, 2021, at <https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha>.

¹⁹ PAHO, “Weekly Press Briefing on COVID-19, Director’s Remarks,” August 25, 2021; Daniel Politi, “The W.H.O. Will Address Inequities by Making Vaccines in Latin America,” *New York Times*, August 25 2021; and PAHO, “PAHO Launches New Collaborative Platform to Produce COVID-19 Vaccines in Latin America and the Caribbean,” press release, September 1, 2021.

²⁰ Ludwig Burger and Manas Mishra, “Brazil’s Eurofarma to Make Pfizer COVID-19 Shots for Latin America,” Reuters News, August 26, 2021; and Reuters News, “Brazil Vaccination Pace Slows as Production Issues Halt Second Doses,” June 1, 2021.

²¹ “China’s Sinovac to Bottle COVID-19 Vaccine in Chile,” *La Prensa*, August 4, 2021.

Political Situation

In the early 1980s, authoritarian regimes (ideologically on both the left and the right) governed 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Today, observers consider three countries in the region—Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela—to be ruled by authoritarian governments.²² Most governments in the region are elected democracies.

Electoral Practices

Although free and fair elections have become the norm in Latin America and the Caribbean, recent elections for head of government in several countries have been controversial and contested, including elections in Honduras (2017) and Venezuela (2018). In 2019, Guatemala held two presidential election rounds that international observers judged successful, but several popular candidates were disqualified from the race for reasons many observers considered dubious.²³ In Bolivia, severe irregularities in October 2019 presidential elections ignited protests and violence that led to the resignation of incumbent President Evo Morales, who was seeking a fourth term. New presidential elections in Bolivia were postponed twice in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic but ultimately were held in October.

Eight Caribbean countries held general elections in 2020. In Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, incumbent governments were returned to power in free and fair elections. In Belize, the Dominican Republic, and Suriname, opposition parties came to power through similarly peaceful democratic means. In contrast, Guyana's March 2020 elections were marred by allegations of fraud; after a recount and multiple legal challenges, final results were announced in August 2020 and an opposition government took power.

Eight countries in the region have held or are scheduled to hold elections for head of government in 2021 (see text box). **Ecuador** held two presidential rounds in February and April, electing center-right candidate Guillermo Lasso, inaugurated on May 24. **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 on July 19, and he was inaugurated on July 28. **St. Lucia** held parliamentary elections in July in which Philip Pierre of the opposition 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. In the **Bahamas**, Prime Minister Hubert Minnis of the center-right Free National Movement announced general elections for September 16, eight months ahead of their constitutional due date, and will compete for power with the center-left Progressive Liberal Party. In **Chile**, multiple candidates will vie for the presidency in presidential elections scheduled for November to replace outgoing center-right

Latin America and the Caribbean: Scheduled 2021 Elections

Ecuador	Feb. 7 / April 11
Peru	Apr. 11 / June 6
St. Lucia	July 26
Bahamas	Sept. 16
Haiti	Nov. 7 / Jan. 23 (2022)
Nicaragua	Nov. 7
Chile	Nov. 21 / Dec. 19
Honduras	Nov. 28

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

²² See Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Democracy Index 2020*, February 2021 (hereinafter, EIU, *Democracy Index 2020*), which classifies all three governments as *authoritarian* based on some 60 indicators; and Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021*, March 2021, which classifies all three governments as *not free* based on their poor records on political rights and civil liberties.

²³ Sonia Pérez D. and Peter Orsi, "Court Ruling Puts Guatemala Vote, Anti-Graft Fight in Doubt," AP News, May 16, 2019.

President Sebastián, who is ineligible to run for a consecutive term; a second round is scheduled for December if no candidate receives a majority in the first round.

The conduct of elections in Haiti, Nicaragua, and Honduras, all scheduled for November, will be under close international scrutiny. In **Haiti**, presidential elections had been scheduled for September 2021 but, in the aftermath of the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse (who had been ruling by decree since January 2020), the elections were moved to November 7, with a second round scheduled for January 23, 2022. At this juncture, it remains unclear whether Haiti's August 14 earthquake will affect the election timetable.²⁴ In **Nicaragua**, the government of authoritarian President Daniel Ortega, running for a fifth term, has arrested more than 30 opposition figures and banned the participation of three opposition parties.²⁵ In **Honduras**, some analysts are concerned the 2021 election could be marred by a lack of transparency and by fraud allegations, as occurred in 2017. Political violence also has increased over the past several months.²⁶

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 abilities 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. Corruption scandals either caused or contributed to several presidents' resignations or removals—Guatemala in 2015, Brazil in 2016, and Peru in 2018. As noted, severe irregularities in the conduct of Bolivia's October 2019 elections ignited protests that led to the president's resignation.

Although the threat of direct military rule has dissipated, civilian governments in several countries have turned to their militaries or retired officers for support or during crises, raising concerns among some observers.²⁷ For example, in February 2020 in El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele used the military in what many observers saw as an effort to intimidate the country's legislature into approving an anti-crime bill; the action elicited strong criticism in El Salvador and abroad.²⁸

EIU Democracy Index. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU's) 2020 democracy index, issued in February 2021, shows a steady decline in democratic practices in Latin America since 2017.²⁹ 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

²⁴ *LatinNews*, "Devastating Earthquake Compounds Woes," Weekly Report, August 19, 2021.

²⁵ *LatinNews*, "Nicaragua: Main Opposition Party Excluded from Elections," Weekly Report, August 12, 2021.

²⁶ *LatinNews*, "Honduras: More of the Same?," Latin American Special Report, January, 2021; *LatinNews*, "Honduras: Electoral Concerns Persist Despite New Electoral Reforms," Security & Strategic Review, June 2021; and *LatinNews*, "Honduras: Political Violence Concerns Grow Ahead of Election," August 26, 2021.

²⁷ See AQ Editors, "Latin America's 21st-Century Militaries," *Americas Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), pp. 12-72.

²⁸ See Brian Winter, "Latin America's Armed Forces, Q&A: Why El Salvador's Crisis Is Different—and Worrying," *Americas Quarterly*, February 13, 2020; and Christine Wade, "Bukele's Politicization of the Military Revives Old Fears in El Salvador," *World Politics Review*, February 12, 2020.

²⁹ EIU, *Democracy Index 2020*.

violently repressed the political opposition. Nicaragua escalated authoritarian practices in 2018 under longtime President Ortega, as the government violently repressed protests.

The downward trend in democratic practices continued in 2020, according to the EIU, largely driven by the curbing of civil liberties in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and by democratic regressions in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti. In El Salvador, corruption allegations proliferated under the Bukele government, and the EIU questioned whether Bukele was “a dictator in the making.”³⁰ In Guatemala, social unrest broke out in November in response to the government’s attempt to enact an unpopular budget bill. In Haiti, President Moïse has ruled by decree since 2020 amid protests calling for new elections. 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.³¹

Freedom House. Much like the EIU, Freedom House cited Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela as *not free* in its 2021 annual report assessing political rights and civil liberties worldwide. The report expressed concerns about Cuba’s wave of intimidation against independent journalists and dissident artists; Nicaragua’s harsh cybercrime law, which mandated prison sentences for spreading “false information” online; and Venezuela’s extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary detentions targeting the political opposition.³²

Freedom House also spotlighted El Salvador and Peru for democratic backsliding. In Peru, Freedom House reported that many considered the grounds for the legislature’s impeachment of a popular president to be dubious and saw the action as a blow to anti-corruption efforts. Developments in Peru resulted in Freedom House downgrading Peru from classification as a *free* country to a *partly free* one. Freedom House also classified 10 other countries in the region as *partly free*: Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, and Paraguay. In addition, Freedom House reported that Mexico suffers from severe rule-of-law deficits that limit political rights and civil liberties; it cited organized-crime-related violence, public corruption, human rights abuses, and rampant impunity as the most visible of Mexico’s governance challenges.³³

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 2004.³⁴

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

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021*, March 2021.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Elizabeth J. Zechmeister and Noam Lupu, *LAPOP’s AmericasBarometer Takes the Pulse of Democracy*, Vanderbilt University, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2019.

the eruption of social protests in many countries throughout the region in 2019 was unsurprising to most observers, even though in each country a unique set of circumstances sparked the unrest.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of these economic factors, contributing to increased protests in the region since late 2020. In 2021, pandemic-related protests have erupted in several countries, notably in Colombia, Cuba, and Brazil. Human rights groups and other observers have expressed concerns about leaders in the region taking advantage of the pandemic to advance their own agendas and restrict freedom of expression. The Inter-American Dialogue published a report in 2020 with the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Organization of American States (OAS) expressing concern about the criminalization of free speech related to governments' responses to the pandemic, restrictions on pandemic-related reporting, and some leaders' stigmatization of media organizations for reporting on the pandemic.³⁵ In Venezuela, according to Human Rights Watch, the government and security forces have used a state of emergency imposed to curb the spread of the virus as an excuse to crack down on dissent and intensify their control of the population.³⁶ In December 2020, Human Rights Watch issued a report providing examples where it asserts the Cuban government has used regulations designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to harass and imprison government opponents.³⁷

Economic Situation

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken 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 IMF estimates a 7.0% economic contraction for the region in 2020.³⁸ Economic recovery may be a protracted process in countries that rely heavily on global trade and investment. Caribbean nations that depend on tourism face deep economic recessions, several with estimated gross domestic product declines of more than 15% in 2020. Likewise, experts estimate that several South American nations hard-hit by the pandemic had economic contractions of more than 10% in 2020.

Most countries in the region are projected to begin economic recovery in 2021. The IMF's most recent growth forecast of 5.8% for 2021 is fueled by expected growth in Mexico and Brazil, the region's two largest economies (see **Table 2**).³⁹ An important factor in the region's economic recovery is the course of the pandemic, including governments' responses and the availability and distribution of vaccines. A number of Latin American and Caribbean countries have implemented stimulus programs to help protect their economies and vulnerable populations, but many countries have needed external financing to respond to the pandemic and associated economic downturn. In response, international financial institutions have increased lending to countries throughout the region.

The decline in economic growth in 2020 has 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. According to the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and

³⁵ Catharine Christe, Edison Lanza, and Michael Camilleri, *COVID-19 and Freedom of Expression in the Americas*, Inter-American Dialogue, August 2020.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021*, January 2021.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Cuba: COVID-19 Rules Used to Intensify Repression," December 7, 2020.

³⁸ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2021, and *World Economic Outlook Update*, July 2021.

³⁹ IMF, *World Economic Outlook Update*, July 2021.

the Caribbean (ECLAC), even before the pandemic, the poverty-reduction gains 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 and increasing social tensions (including widespread social protests in 2019). With the pandemic-related economic recession experienced by most countries in the region in 2020, poverty increased to an estimated 33.7%. This accounted for an estimated 209 million people—an increase of 22 million people in poverty from 2019 to 2020.⁴⁰

Table 2. Latin America and Caribbean: Real GDP Growth, 2019-2022
(annual percentage change, constant prices)

Regional Average, Three Largest Economies, and World Output	2019	2020 Estimate	2021 Projection	2022 Projection
Region: Latin America and the Caribbean	0.1	-7.0	5.8	3.2
Brazil	1.4	-4.1	5.3	1.9
Mexico	-0.2	-8.3	6.3	4.2
Argentina	-2.1	-9.9	6.4	2.4
World Output	2.8	-3.2	6.0	4.9

Source: International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Update*, July 2021.

Likewise, according to ECLAC, extreme poverty increased to 12.5% of Latin America’s population in 2020 from 11.3% in 2019.⁴¹ This increase reflected 8 million more people in extreme poverty in 2020 than in 2019, for a total of 78 million people. According to ECLAC, estimates of poverty and extreme poverty were estimated to be highest in rural areas as well as among working-age women, indigenous people, the Afro-descendant population, children and adolescents, people with less education, and single-parent and extended households.

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

⁴⁰ ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2020*, March 2021; and Michael Stott, “Poverty Surge Set Latin America Back over a Decade, says UN,” *Financial Times*, March 4, 2021. The ECLAC study examines poverty and extreme poverty in 18 Latin American countries. As noted in the study, poverty rates differ considerably by country, with Uruguay having the lowest poverty rate in the region, just over 5%, and Honduras, the highest, over 58%.

⁴¹ ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2020*, March 2021. As noted, the ECLAC study examines extreme poverty in 18 Latin American countries. The United Nations defines extreme poverty as living on less than \$1.90 day, struggling to fulfill basic needs such as health and education. See United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, “Goal 1, End Poverty in all its forms everywhere,” at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>.

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

Trump Administration Policy

Under the Trump Administration, U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean generally moved toward a more confrontational approach, especially regarding efforts to curb irregular immigration from the region, compared with past 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. 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.⁴² According to Gallup and Pew Research Center polls, negative views of U.S. leadership in the region increased markedly during the Trump Administration.⁴³

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.

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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.

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.

During the Trump Administration, vehement anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration actions that shifted the burdens of interdicting migrants and offering asylum to Mexico 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 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 controversial 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.

As the situation in Venezuela deteriorated under President Maduro, the Trump Administration imposed numerous broader financial sanctions, including sanctions against the state oil company, the country's main source of income. In January 2019, the Administration recognized the head of Venezuela's National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as interim president. 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 2020.⁴⁴ Securing a clean energy future had been a key priority in U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean under the Obama Administration.⁴⁵

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. He vowed "to rebuild strong hemispheric ties based on respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law" when the United States hosts the next Summit of the Americas (expected in summer 2022).⁴⁶ He promised to "do away with the Trump Administration's draconian immigration policies and galvanize international action to address the poverty and insecurity driving migrants" from Central America's Northern Triangle, including by developing an assistance strategy for the region.⁴⁷ On Venezuela, Biden said, "the overriding goal in Venezuela must be to press for a democratic outcome through free and fair elections, and to help the Venezuelan people rebuild their country."⁴⁸ On Cuba, Biden maintained that he would reverse the "failed Trump policies that have inflicted harm on the Cuban people and done nothing to advance democracy and human rights."⁴⁹

In the Biden Administration's initial months, much of its focus in the region was on immigration and Central America. President Biden took executive actions revising some of the Trump Administration's restrictive immigration policies, while at the same time contending with a large increase in the number of undocumented Central American and Mexican migrants seeking to enter the United States. The President proposed comprehensive immigration legislation to Congress; among its provisions, this legislation would provide a pathway to citizenship for those with DACA and TPS status and would authorize a multiyear assistance program to address the root causes of migration from Central America. Vice President Kamala Harris, whom President Biden tasked with overseeing diplomatic engagement with Central America and Mexico, visited Guatemala, Mexico, and the Southwest border in June. In 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. (See "Migration Issues" and "Central America's Northern Triangle.")

The broad foreign policy objectives and outlook for U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean appear in the Administration's *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, issued by the White House in early March 2021, and in Secretary of State Antony Blinken's March 2021 address on U.S. foreign policy. President Biden's interim guidance, which provides broad foreign policy direction to U.S. agencies and departments, maintained that his Administration would "expand U.S. engagement and partnerships throughout the Western Hemisphere—and especially

⁴⁴ See CRS In Focus IF10668, *Potential Implications of U.S. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, by Jane A. Leggett.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign website, "The Biden Plan for Leading the Democratic World to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century," at <https://joebiden.com/americanleadership/>.

⁴⁷ Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign website, "The Biden Plan to Build Security and Prosperity with the People of Central America," at <https://joebiden.com/centralamerica/>.

⁴⁸ *Americas Quarterly*, "Joe Biden Answers 10 Questions on Latin America," March 2, 2020 (updated October 29, 2020), at <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/updated-2020-candidates-answer-10-questions-on-latin-america/>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

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 would include, according to the interim guidance, “working with Congress to provide Central America with \$4 billion over four years, and taking other steps to address the root causes of human insecurity and irregular migration, including poverty, criminal violence, and corruption.” The interim guidance also maintained that the Administration would “cooperate to confront the regional effects of climate change, while helping our neighbors invest in good governance and democratic institutions.”⁵⁰

Many of the foreign policy priorities laid out in Secretary Blinken’s March 2021 speech are relevant to U.S. relations with the region. These priorities include stopping the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthening global health security; turning around the economic crisis and building a more stable, inclusive global economy; renewing democracy, to counter rising authoritarianism and nationalism around the world; creating a humane and effective immigration system and addressing the root causes of migration that drive so many people to flee their homes; revitalizing ties with allies and partners; and tackling the climate crisis and driving a green energy revolution.⁵¹

The Biden Administration has reincorporated climate concerns into the U.S. policy approach toward Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵² The Administration invited seven Latin American and Caribbean heads of government to attend the April 2021 Leaders’ Summit on Climate.⁵³ 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 U.N. Climate Change Conference scheduled to be held in Glasgow in November. Globally, Latin America and the Caribbean is considered to face the second-greatest vulnerability from climate change, as a result of the region’s high rates of urbanization, its vulnerability to extreme weather events affecting tourism and agriculture, and some countries’ high levels of dependence on petroleum exports and carbon-intensive industries.

The Biden Administration’s FY2022 budget request for foreign assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean amounts to almost \$2.1 billion, nearly 16% over estimated FY2021 appropriations. The FY2022 request includes almost \$861 million for Central America, funding the first year of the Administration’s plans to address the root causes of irregular migration. (See “U.S. Foreign Aid.”)

With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Administration has committed to providing 580 million vaccine doses globally through mid-2022, including to Latin American and Caribbean countries, through multilateral mechanisms and bilaterally. To date, the United States has provided almost \$218 million in assistance to support the region’s pandemic response and has donated almost 40 million vaccine doses to 26 countries in the region, both bilaterally and through COVAX.⁵⁴ Top recipients of U.S. vaccine doses in the region include Colombia

⁵⁰ 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>.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of States, 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/>.

⁵² 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.

⁵³ The seven leaders were from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Jamaica, and Mexico.

⁵⁴ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), “COVID-19 – Latin American and the Caribbean Response, Fact Sheet #1, Fiscal Year 2021, June 29, 2021; and U.S. Department of State, “COVID-19 Vaccine Donations, Western Hemisphere,” August 29, 2021, at <https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha>.

(6 million), Mexico (5.8 million), Guatemala (4.5 million), Argentina (3.5 million), Brazil (3 million), Honduras (3 million), El Salvador (3 million), Paraguay (2 million), Peru (2 million), Ecuador (2 million), and Bolivia (1 million).⁵⁵

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. In a shift from the Trump Administration, in March 2021, the Secretary of Homeland Security granted TPS to Venezuelans already in the United States. The Biden Administration also maintains it is committed to “robust multilateralism aimed at increasing pressure on Venezuela in a coordinated fashion making clear that the only outcome of this crisis is negotiation that leads to a democratic solution.”⁵⁶ (See “Venezuela.”)

On Cuba, the Biden Administration has not taken action to reverse policies from the previous Administration. Officials have stated that the Administration is committed to carefully reviewing past policy decisions, including the designation of Cuba as a state sponsor terrorism. The Administration maintains that human rights will be a pillar of its policy toward Cuba.⁵⁷ In the aftermath of the Cuban government’s suppression of mass protests on July 11, 2021, the Biden Administration expressed solidarity with the protesters and took several actions, including the imposition of targeted sanctions against the Cuban security officials and entities involved (see “Cuba”).

On Nicaragua, the Biden Administration imposed targeted sanctions on several Nicaraguan officials in response to its arbitrary detentions of opposition leaders. Secretary of State Blinken asserted in early August 2021 that Nicaragua’s electoral process “has lost all credibility.”⁵⁸ (See “Nicaragua.”)

In the aftermath of the July 7, 2021, assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, the United States provided assistance to support the Haitian authorities in conducting an investigation into the attack and expressed support for continued security assistance, elections assistance, and health and humanitarian assistance.⁵⁹ In a July 22 call with new Haitian Prime Minister Dr. Ariel Henry, Secretary of State Blinken underscored the need to establish conditions necessary for Haitians to vote in free and fair legislative and presidential elections as soon as possible.⁶⁰ Following an August 14, 2021, earthquake in Haiti that resulted in at least 2,207 deaths, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed a disaster response team, with the support of U.S. military transportation assets, and announced \$32 million in humanitarian assistance.⁶¹ (See “Haiti.”)

⁵⁵ Chase Harrison, “Tracker: U.S. Vaccine Donations to Latin America,” Americas Society/Council of the Americas, August 24, 2021, at <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/tracker-us-vaccine-donations-latin-america>.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on Venezuela,” press briefing, March 8, 2021.

⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, “The Lack of Prospects for Free and Fair Election in Nicaragua,” press statement, August 7, 2021.

⁵⁹ White House, “Fact Sheet, U.S. Assistance to Haiti,” July 13, 2021.

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Blinken’s Call with Haitian Prime Minister Henry,” readout, July 22, 2021.

⁶¹ USAID, “Haiti Earthquake, Fact Sheet #8, FY2021,” August 26, 2021.

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 areas of immigration and trade.

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 and humanitarian assistance worldwide, including to Latin America and the Caribbean.

In March 2021, the House approved H.R. 6, which would provide a pathway to citizenship for those brought to the United States as children and those from countries with TPS designations (currently including El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela). A comprehensive immigration bill, the U.S. Citizenship Act (S. 348/H.R. 1177), was introduced in the Senate and the House, respectively, in February and April 2021 on behalf of the Biden Administration; the bill would provide a pathway to citizenship for certain migrants and would authorize \$4 billion over four years to address the root causes of migration from Central America.

In June 2021, the Senate passed S. 1260, the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021, which seeks to improve the United States' ability to compete with China worldwide. As approved, the bill included numerous Latin America and Caribbean provisions (which had originated in S. 1169, reported by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in May 2021). These provisions would require a strategy to increase the export of U.S. goods and services to the region; another strategy to strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness and promote good governance, human rights, and the rule of law; a report assessing China's engagement in international organizations and the defense sector in the region. They also would authorize a capital increase for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (another introduced measure, S. 616, also would authorize an IDB capital increase); support U.S. defense cooperation; and increase engagement with civil society regarding accountability, human rights, and the risks of pervasive surveillance technologies.

In the House, H.R. 3524, the Ensuring American Global Leadership and Engagement Act (EAGLE Act), ordered reported by the House Foreign Affairs Committee in July 2021, has some of the same Latin America and Caribbean provisions found in S. 1260 but includes two additional provisions to strengthen U.S. engagement with the Caribbean. One section would require the Administration to submit to Congress a multiyear strategy to promote regional cooperation with the Caribbean on energy issues as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (a similar provision also was included in S. 1201). Another provision would authorize assistance for the U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership from FY2022 to FY2024 and would require the Administration to submit to Congress a multiyear strategy aimed at helping Caribbean countries increase resilience and adapt to both natural disasters and the impacts of severe weather events and a changing environment.

In June 2021, the House passed H.R. 2471, the Haiti Development, Accountability, and Institutional Transparency Initiative Act, which would promote the sustainable rebuilding and development of Haiti and would prioritize U.S. support for anti-corruption efforts and human rights. A similar Senate bill, S. 1104, was introduced in April.

In July 2021, the House approved its version of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022, H.R. 4373 (H.Rept. 117-84). As passed, the bill

would provide assistance to several key countries and programs in the region for FY2022 at levels either matching or exceeding the Administration's budget request, including assistance to Central America, Colombia, Mexico, and regional assistance to the Caribbean. The report to the bill included numerous directives, recommendations, and reporting requirements for the Administration regarding U.S. assistance to, and policy toward, Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In August 2021, the Senate passed S. 1041 the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform Act of 2021 (RENACER Act). Among its provisions, the bill would direct the U.S. government to use its diplomatic tools and targeted sanctions to support the realization of free, fair, and transparent elections in Nicaragua. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs ordered reported a similar, although not identical, measure (H.R. 2946) in July.

To date, the Senate has approved five resolutions on U.S. relations with the region. In April, the Senate passed S.Res. 22, reaffirming the U.S. partnership with Ecuador, and S.Res. 37, expressing solidarity with the San Isidro Movement, a Cuban civil society protest group. In May, the Senate passed S.Res. 81, honoring *Las Damas de Blanco*, a women-led nonviolent Cuban human rights group, and S.Res. 120, recognizing the forthcoming Summit of the Americas and reaffirming the U.S. commitment to a more prosperous, secure, and democratic Western Hemisphere. In August, the Senate passed S.Res. 310, expressing solidarity with Cubans demonstrating peacefully, condemning the Cuban government's repression, and calling for the release of those detained. (In July, the Senate also approved S. 2045, which would rename the street in front of the Cuban Embassy after a Cuban democracy activist.)

Several other bills and resolutions have been reported out of committee. In March 2021, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported S.Res. 44, which would denounce fraudulent legislative elections in Venezuela. In May, the House Foreign Affairs Committee ordered reported H.Res. 408, which would urge the government of El Salvador to respect the country's democratic institutions. In July, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee reported S. 688, which would prohibit federal agencies contracting with persons who have business operations with Venezuela's Maduro government, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee ordered reported H.Res. 549, which would condemn the assassination of the Haitian president and urge U.S. and global support of Haitian-led solutions.

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. In recent years, top U.S. funding priorities in the region have included addressing the underlying drivers of migration from Central America, combatting drug production and supporting peace accord implementation in Colombia, and strengthening security and the rule of law in Mexico. U.S. agencies also have dedicated significant resources to combatting HIV/AIDS and fostering long-term stability in Haiti; addressing security concerns in the Caribbean; and providing humanitarian assistance to the nearly 5.7 million Venezuelans who have fled their home country, as well as to their host communities.

Assistance needs in Latin America and the Caribbean have increased in conjunction with deteriorating conditions in 2020. As noted, the region's economy as a whole contracted by an

estimated 7.0% in 2020, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶² The downturn pushed an estimated 22 million people into poverty and 8 million into extreme poverty, increasing the regional poverty (33.7%) and extreme poverty (12.5%) rates to levels not seen for 12 and 20 years, respectively.⁶³ Economic recovery may be protracted, as the region remains an epicenter of new infections and some countries may not achieve widespread vaccination until 2023.⁶⁴ Political and security conditions also have deteriorated in some Latin American and Caribbean countries during the pandemic, as governments have rolled back political rights and civil liberties and criminal organizations have extended their territorial control and influence.

The Biden Administration has requested nearly \$2.1 billion of foreign assistance for Latin America and the Caribbean in FY2022, 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 \$278.2 million (15.5%) compared with FY2021 estimated levels (see **Table 3**). The Administration’s FY2022 budget request also would provide \$38 million to the Inter-American Foundation—a small, independent U.S. foreign assistance agency that promotes grassroots development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2016-FY2022
(billions of U.S. dollars)

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (est.)	2022 (req.)
1.69	1.67	1.67 ^a	1.69	1.72 ^d	1.80 ^d	2.07

Sources: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations*, FY2018-FY2022; and U.S. Department of State, “FY2021 Estimate Data,” June 2021.

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.

The Administration would use the vast majority of the increased funding to begin implementation of its four-year, \$4 billion plan to foster systemic reform and address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America (see “Central America’s Northern Triangle”). The FY2022 request includes \$860.6 million for Central America—a \$298 million (53%) increase compared with the FY2021 estimate.⁶⁵ With regard to other regional priorities, the Administration’s FY2022 request would provide \$453.9 million for Colombia, \$187.9 million for Haiti, \$116.6 million for Mexico, \$66.0 million for the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, and \$55 million for Venezuela.

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 builds on nearly \$6.3 billion appropriated during the 116th Congress to support global vaccine procurement and delivery and other pandemic-related foreign assistance programs.

⁶² IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2021.

⁶³ ECLAC, *Social Panorama of Latin America 2020*, March 2021, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁴ Economist Intelligence Unit, *How Much Will Vaccine Inequity Cost?*, August 2021.

⁶⁵ \$27.2 million of the \$860.6 million requested for Central America would be provided through global accounts that are not included in the regional total for Latin America and the Caribbean.

As of late August 2021, the United States had provided Latin American and Caribbean countries with at least \$217.6 million of pandemic response aid and almost 40 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines.⁶⁶

Congress is now considering the Biden Administration's FY2022 budget request. In July 2021, the House passed the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 (H.R. 4373, H.Rept. 117-84). The bill and the accompanying report do not specify comprehensive appropriations levels for every Latin American and Caribbean country, but the amounts they designate for several U.S. initiatives match or exceed the Administration's request. The measure would provide \$860.6 million for the countries of Central America, \$461.4 million for Colombia, \$158.9 million for Mexico, and \$80 million for the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. The Senate has yet to consider FY2022 foreign aid appropriations legislation.

For additional information, see CRS Report R46514, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean: FY2021 Appropriations*, by Peter J. Meyer and Rachel L. Martin; CRS Insight IN11657, *The FY2022 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Budget Request*, by Cory R. Gill, Marian L. Lawson, and Emily M. Morgenstern; 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 U.S. relations with these countries' governments. 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.⁶⁷ As a result, immigration policy changes implemented by President Trump, many of which President Biden has sought to reverse, have affected countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

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),⁶⁸ rescinded DACA through a process that the Supreme Court ruled in June 2020 did not follow proper procedures and had to be vacated,⁶⁹ and restricted access to asylum. 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.⁷⁰ The Administration also signed what it termed *asylum cooperative agreements* (ACAs) with

⁶⁶ USAID, "COVID-19—Latin American and the Caribbean Response," Fact Sheet #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, June 29, 2021; and U.S. Department of State, "COVID-19 Vaccine Donations," at <https://www.state.gov/covid-19-recovery/vaccine-deliveries/#wha>.

⁶⁷ Temporary protected status (TPS) is a discretionary, humanitarian benefit granted to eligible nationals after the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determines that a country has been affected by armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary conditions that limit the country's ability to accept the return of its nationals from the United States. TPS designations began for Nicaragua and Honduras in 1999, for 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.

⁶⁸ As legal challenges to the termination of TPS for these countries continue, DHS has extended the validity of TPS documents for current beneficiaries through October 4, 2021.

⁶⁹ U.S. Dep't of Homeland Sec. v. Regents of the Univ. of Cal.,—S. Ct.—, 2020 WL 3271746, at *3 (2020).

⁷⁰ DHS, "Migrant Protection Protocols," at <https://www.dhs.gov/migrant-protection-protocols>.

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 December 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. As an example of how changing factors may influence migration, Venezuela, a historically stable country with limited emigration to the United States, has become the top country of origin among those who seek U.S. asylum affirmatively due to Venezuela's ongoing crisis.⁷¹ Recent turmoil in Cuba and in Haiti, which was hit by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in mid-August, could fuel future migration flows.⁷²

Migrant apprehensions at the Southwest border reached a 45-year low in 2017 but began to rise in FY2018. In FY2019, DHS apprehended 851,508 migrants, with unaccompanied children and families from the Northern Triangle, many of whom were seeking asylum, comprising a majority of apprehensions.⁷³ In FY2020, apprehensions declined by more than half, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020.⁷⁴ In response to the pandemic, DHS largely suspended asylum processing at the U.S.-Mexico border in March 2020 under a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention public health order (Title 42); most migrants without valid travel documents were expelled into Mexico or returned to their home countries as quickly as possible.⁷⁵ More than 846,100 migrants were expelled to Mexico through July 2021.⁷⁶ Thus far in FY2021, both apprehensions and expulsions have been increasing. In March 2021, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas predicted that total encounters (apprehended or expelled) in FY2021 could reach a level not seen in 20 years.⁷⁷

President Biden has announced executive actions on immigration, many of which revise restrictive policies implemented by the Trump Administration. Pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14010, which called for the development of a collaborative migration management strategy, the Administration has suspended the 2019-2020 ACAs, reestablished the Central American Minors program to allow children with parents who have status in the United States to

⁷¹ In FY2018, Venezuela ranked first among countries of origin for those seeking affirmative asylum in the United States. Guatemala and El Salvador ranked second and third, respectively. See DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Annual Flow Report: Refugees and Asylees: 2018*, October 2019.

⁷² Adam Taylor and Claire Parker, "Cuba and Haiti Upheaval Could Mean Twin Migration Crises," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2021.

⁷³ DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), "Southwest Border Migration FY2019."

⁷⁴ 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.

⁷⁵ The Biden Administration has exempted unaccompanied children and some families from this policy. See CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10582, *Asylum Processing at the Border: Legal Basics*, by Ben Harrington.

⁷⁶ CBP, "FY2020 Nationwide Enforcement Encounters: Title 8 Enforcement Actions and Title 42 Expulsions; U.S. Border Patrol Monthly Enforcement Encounters 2021: Title 42 Expulsions and Title 8 Apprehensions," accessed August 23, 2021.

⁷⁷ DHS, "Statement by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas Regarding the Situation at the Southwest Border," March 16, 2021. Hereinafter Mayorkas, March 2021.

apply for asylum in their country, and begun processing asylum-seekers previously returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols.⁷⁸ In July 2021, pursuant to E.O. 14010, the Biden Administration released two new strategies: the Collaborative Management Migration Strategy, aimed at building a regional framework for safe, orderly, and humane migration in North and Central America, and the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America (see “Central America’s Northern Triangle,” below.) President Biden also proposed a comprehensive immigration reform bill, introduced as the U.S. Citizenship Act (S. 348/H.R. 1177). Among other measures, the bill as introduced would provide a pathway to citizenship for certain farmworkers and those with DACA and TPS status. The bill also would authorize \$4 billion over four years to address the root causes of migration from Central America. On March 8, 2021, DHS Secretary Mayorkas designated Venezuela for TPS. DHS terminated MPP on June 1, 2021, but the Supreme Court later ruled that the Biden Administration must comply with lower court rulings that ordered the program’s reinstatement.⁷⁹

The Biden Administration has exempted unaccompanied children and some families from the Title 42 policy but otherwise extended the Title 42 order on August 1, 2021; it is facing a legal challenge.⁸⁰ The Administration has begun flying some migrants expelled from the United States to southern Mexico, after which the Mexican government buses them to remote areas in Guatemala, raising humanitarian concerns.⁸¹ Vice President Harris is leading U.S. diplomatic efforts to engage the governments of Mexico and Central America on migration and border security issues. She traveled to Mexico and Guatemala in June 2021 for talks with both presidents.

Congressional Action: Congress may consider comprehensive immigration measures (S. 348/H.R. 1177) or piecemeal legislation to address specific issues, such as border security, immigration enforcement, legalization of unauthorized immigrants, temporary and permanent immigration, and humanitarian admissions. In March 2021, the House passed H.R. 6, which would modify the legal pathways available to those in the region and adjust the status of some Central American immigrants in the United States. Amid an increase in child and family arrivals at the Southwest border, Congress may consider legislation to address the sheltering of child migrants, as well as additional appropriations as needed to respond to families. Congress is likely to continue 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.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10371, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: An Overview*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10574, *Recent White House Actions on Immigration*, by Hillel R. Smith and Kelsey Y. Santamaria; CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10582, *Asylum Processing at the Border: Legal Basics*, by Ben Harrington; CRS Insight IN11638, *Increasing Numbers of Unaccompanied Alien Children at the Southwest Border*, by William A. Kandel; CRS In Focus IF11799, *Child Migrants at the Border: The Flores Settlement*

⁷⁸ Executive Order 14010, “Creating a Comprehensive Regional Framework to Address the Causes of Migration, to Manage Migration Throughout North and Central America, and to Provide Safe and Orderly Processing of Asylum Seekers at the United States Border,” February 2, 2021.

⁷⁹ DHS, “Migrant Protection Protocols,” at <https://www.dhs.gov/migrant-protection-protocols>; Eileen Sullivan and Adam Liptak, Robert Barnes, “Supreme Court Says Biden Administration Must Comply with Ruling to Restart ‘Remain in Mexico’ Program for Asylum Seekers,” August 24, 2021.

⁸⁰ CDC, “CDC Extends Order at the Southern and Northern Land Borders,” August 2, 2021; Sabrina Rodriguez, “Biden Administration Renews Title 42 Order, as ACLU Fights Back,” *Politico*, August 2, 2021.

⁸¹ Sonia Pérez D., “Mexico Deports Central Americans After Being Flown in by U.S.,” AP, August 11, 2021; The U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “UNHCR Concerned Over U.S. Expulsion Flights Under COVID-19 Asylum Restrictions,” August 11, 2021.

Agreement and Other Legal Developments, by Kelsey Y. Santamaria; 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 (plant-based and synthetic)—as well as for precursor chemicals used in the production of illicit drugs. 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 cocaine overdoses frequently linked to the presence of synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl.

Drug demand in the United States and changes in the international drug market continue to drive drug production in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Opium poppy cultivation and heroin production rose in Mexico through 2017 but have since declined. However, the production of fentanyl (a synthetic opioid) and methamphetamine has surged. Over 90% of heroin seized and sampled in the United States comes from Mexico and increasingly includes fentanyl (a synthetic opioid). Since the Chinese government implemented strict controls on all forms of fentanyl, including fentanyl analogues, in mid-2019, Mexico has become a more important source of fentanyl.⁸² Despite restrictions on imports of some precursor chemicals, Mexican TCOs continue to be the primary producers and traffickers of low-cost, high-purity U.S.-bound methamphetamine. Coca cultivation and cocaine production in Colombia, which supplies roughly 89% of cocaine in the United States, reached record levels in 2020.⁸³ Estimated coca cultivation and production in Peru also surged, while coca cultivation fell and potential production increased slightly in Bolivia.⁸⁴

Whereas Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and most other source and transit countries in the region work closely with the United States to combat drug production and interdict illicit flows, the Venezuelan and Bolivian governments do not. In March 2020, the Department of Justice indicted Venezuela's leader, 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.⁸⁵ U.S. antidrug cooperation with Bolivia decreased under former President Evo Morales (2006-2019) and remains limited under his successor, President Luis Arce.

⁸² U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), *National Drug Threat Assessment, 2020*, February 2021. Hereinafter, DEA, *NDTA 2020*.

⁸³ Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), "ONDCP Releases Data on Coca Cultivation and Production in the Andean Region," June 25, 2021.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Douglas Farah, *The Maduro Regime's Illicit Activities: A Threat to Democracy in Venezuela and Security in Latin*

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 and Central America—a region through which roughly 90% of cocaine bound for the United States from South America transited in 2019—continue to suffer from weak criminal justice systems and law enforcement agencies.⁸⁶ 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 has lowered violence in most countries, but drug trafficking-related violence remains 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 in Central America. Gang-related violence has been particularly acute in El Salvador, Honduras, and 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.

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, provided more than \$10 billion (current dollars) to help Colombia combat both drug trafficking and rebel groups financed by the drug trade from FY2000 to FY2016. After Colombia signed a historic peace accord with the country’s largest leftist guerrilla group, the FARC, the United States provided assistance to help implement the agreement. In addition to concerns about cocaine production, some U.S. policymakers have expressed concern that parts of the peace accord remain unimplemented (see section on “Colombia” below).

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. During the Obama Administration, those initiatives combined U.S. antidrug and rule-of-law assistance with economic development and violence prevention programs. The Trump Administration sought to focus on security and antidrug efforts while also attempting to reduce overall funding for each of the programs.

In a March 2021 posture statement, then-Commander of U.S. Southern Command Admiral Craig Faller stated that violent transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) pose a national security threat to the Southern Command’s area of responsibility.⁸⁷ The Biden Administration’s first-year drug policy priorities focus on domestic treatment and harm reduction but also include a focus on working with “key global partners such as China, Colombia, and Mexico to curb illicit drug production and trafficking.”⁸⁸ The Administration’s regional drug policy may be further informed by the findings of the congressionally mandated Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission (WHDPCC); the commission’s report, released in December 2020, recommended the State

America, Atlantic Council, August 12, 2020.

⁸⁶ Drug transit data are from U.S. Government, Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement, based on 2019 data from the Consolidated Counterdrug Database as cited in DEA, *NDTA 2020*.

⁸⁷ Admiral Craig S. Faller, *U.S. SOUTHCOM Posture Statement*, Senate Armed Services Committee, March 16, 2021.

⁸⁸ The White House, “Biden-Harris Administration Announces First-Year Drug Policy Priorities,” April 1, 2021.

Department take the lead in regional drug policy and replace the annual drug certification process with compacts negotiated with countries to identify bilateral priorities.⁸⁹

Congressional Action: Congress is considering the Biden Administration’s FY2022 budget request. The House-passed version of the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill, H.R. 4373, would, among other provisions, require additional human rights conditions on International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) assistance to Colombia and cut INCLE assistance to Mexico, while focusing that assistance on combating opioid production and trafficking. H.Rept. 117-84 accompanying H.R. 4373 would require a report on bilateral (with Mexico) and multilateral efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the United States, as well as several reports and evaluations on broader aspects of U.S. drug policy recommended by the WHDPC.⁹⁰ Congress also may convene oversight hearings, request Government Accountability Office reports, and draft legislation to influence U.S. anti-crime and counterdrug programs in the Western Hemisphere. Issues of concern may include whether or not to support a resumption of aerial eradication in Colombia, how to address drug flows emanating from Venezuela, how to resume antidrug cooperation with Mexico after strains in bilateral relations, and how to improve anti-crime efforts as part of a broader strategy to address the root causes of unauthorized migration from Central America. Newer issues may focus on how to interdict precursor chemicals from China and India that are being used to produce fentanyl in Mexico, as well as how to combat the role of money launderers from China in supporting TCOs in the region.

For additional information, see CRS Insight IN11535, *Mexican Drug Trafficking and Cartel Operations amid COVID-19*, by June S. Beittel and Liana W. Rosen; CRS In Focus IF10578, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2021*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF10400, *Trends in Mexican Opioid Trafficking and Implications for U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, by Liana W. Rosen and Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R41576, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*, 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 Report 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 2020. Most of this trade is with Mexico, which accounted for 78% of U.S. imports from the region and 62% of U.S. exports to the region in 2020. In 2020, total U.S. trade with the region declined 14%, with U.S. merchandise exports declining from \$413.0 billion in

⁸⁹ Report of the Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission, *Charting a New Path Forward*, December 2020.

⁹⁰ H.Rept. 117-84 also would require a report on whether relevant U.S. sanctions, such as the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act of 1999, effectively target the most dangerous criminal organizations; an evaluation of the efficacy of the designation procedures on major illicit narcotics producing and transit countries; a strategy for working with international partners to develop new guidelines to reduce the manufacturing, trafficking, and use of illicit narcotics; and an assessment of alternative tools for drug trafficking control.

2019 to \$336.7 billion in 2020 and U.S. merchandise imports declining from \$464.7 billion to \$416.0 billion (see **Table 4**).

The United States has strengthened economic ties with Latin America and the Caribbean over the past 27 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.

Table 4. U.S. Trade with Key Trading Partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013-2020

(in billions of current U.S. dollars)

Partner Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<i>U.S. Exports</i>								
Mexico	226.0	241.0	236.5	230.2	243.6	266.0	256.3	211.5
Brazil	44.1	42.4	31.6	30.2	37.3	39.4	42.9	34.6
Chile	17.5	16.5	15.4	12.9	13.6	15.3	15.7	12.5
Colombia	18.4	20.1	16.3	13.0	13.4	15.1	14.8	11.9
Total LAC	404.3	418.9	383.4	360.7	388.8	424.0	413.0	336.7
World	1,578.5	1,621.9	1,503.3	1,451.5	1,547.2	1,665.8	1,642.8	1,424.9
<i>U.S. Imports</i>								
Mexico	280.6	295.7	296.4	293.5	312.7	343.7	356.2	325.2
Brazil	27.5	30.0	27.5	26.0	29.5	31.2	30.9	23.4
Colombia	21.6	18.3	14.1	13.8	13.6	13.8	14.2	10.8
Chile	10.4	9.5	8.8	8.8	10.6	11.4	10.4	10.1
Total LAC	438.3	445.3	411.6	400.6	428.2	465.5	464.7	416.0
World	2,268.0	2,356.4	2,248.8	2,186.8	2,339.6	2,536.1	2,493.7	2,336.0

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 (replaced by the USMCA). The GSP, first authorized in the 1970s, has provided duty-free tariff treatment to certain products imported from 120 designated developing countries throughout the world, including Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In the 15-20 years after NAFTA, some of the largest economies in South America, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, resisted the idea of forming comprehensive FTAs with the United States. That opposition has shifted as some countries, including Brazil and Ecuador, have taken steps to enhance their trade relationships with the United States through “mini” bilateral trade agreements on trade facilitation, regulatory cooperation, and anti-corruption.

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. On June 28, 2019, after 20 years of negotiations, the European Union and Mercosur reached a political agreement in principle for an ambitious and comprehensive trade agreement. On April 28, 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.

The Trump Administration made renegotiation and modernization of NAFTA a priority of the Administration’s trade policy. 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 NAFTA’s market opening provisions but modernizes NAFTA with new provisions on digital trade, state-owned enterprises, currency manipulation, anti-corruption, enforcement of workers’ rights, and the environment. The USMCA’s tighter rules-of-origin requirements for the motor vehicle industry, removal of government-procurement provisions for Canada, and lessening of investor-state dispute settlement provisions are significant, because they scale back previous Administrations’ U.S. trade policy goals.

In 2018, President Trump issued two proclamations imposing tariffs on U.S. imports of certain steel and aluminum products, including products from Latin America, using presidential powers granted under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 (P.L. 87-74; 19 U.S.C. §1862). The proclamations outlined the President’s decisions to impose tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum imports, with some flexibility on the application of tariffs by country. In May 2018, President Trump proclaimed Argentina and Brazil permanently exempt from the steel tariffs in exchange for quota agreements. On May 31, 2018, the United States imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Mexico, prompting Mexico to impose retaliatory tariffs on 71 U.S. products, covering an estimated \$3.7 billion worth of trade. By May 2019, President Trump had exempted Mexico from steel and aluminum tariffs and Mexico had agreed to terminate its retaliatory tariffs. In August 2020, after Brazil’s tariff-rate quota on ethanol imports from the United States expired, President Trump tightened the cap on allowable steel imports from Brazil, stating that the decision was made under Section 232.

The United States’ January 2017 withdrawal from the proposed TPP, an FTA that included Mexico, Peru, and Chile as signatories, signified another change to U.S. trade policy. In March 2018, all remaining TPP parties signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP, or TPP-11), which essentially brought into effect a modified TPP. The TPP-11 has entered into force among seven countries—Canada, Australia, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam. Chile and Peru expect to ratify the agreement eventually. Colombia has expressed plans to request entry into the agreement after it enters into force among all partners.

Key Policy Issues: Congress may examine how the United States could enhance trade relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, whether through bilateral FTAs or a broader regional FTA such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement, which was pursued in the mid-1990s but never concluded.⁹¹ Congress also may 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 using 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 human rights, the environment, and workers’ rights in these countries. President Biden has said he does not plan any new trade agreements at this time and he will prioritize domestic economic recovery.

The 117th Congress may take an interest in the expiration of Trade Promotion Authority (Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015, or TPA; P.L. 114-26) on July 1, 2021. Although the Biden Administration is not prioritizing trade agreements, lawmakers may consider whether to include new priorities or consultation requirements in TPA renewal. Members may consider how the USMCA could affect U.S. industries, especially the auto industry, as Mexico has requested USMCA consultations with the United States on USMA auto rules of origin. They also may consider the USMCA’s overall effects on the U.S. and Mexican economies, North American supply chains, and trade relations with the Latin American and Caribbean region. In addition, policymakers may continue to monitor Mexico’s implementation of labor USMCA commitments, the effects of COVID-19 on U.S. supply chains with countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, bilateral trade consultations with Brazil concerning the country’s restrictions on imports of ethanol from the United States, and China’s increasing economic influence in the region.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10997, *U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) Trade Agreement*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson; CRS Report R44981, *The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson; and CRS In Focus IF10038, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA)*, by Ian F. Fergusson.

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

⁹¹ 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.

Suriname are located on the northern coast of South America, but all three are members of CARICOM (see **Figure 2**).

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.

In recent years, U.S. policy toward the Caribbean often has been eclipsed by attention to foreign policy crises elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, 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 has not received large amounts of U.S. development assistance.⁹² 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.

⁹² World Bank, "World Bank Country and Lending Groups," at <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.

In December 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. 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.

In 2019, the State Department issued a report to Congress on the implementation of its multiyear strategy. The report maintained that limited budgets and human resources have constrained opportunities for deepening relations, but funding for the strategy's security pillar has supported meaningful engagement and produced tangible results for regional and U.S. security interests.⁹³

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 FY2021, Congress appropriated a total of \$751 million (current dollars) for the CBSI. These funds benefitted 13 Caribbean countries.⁹⁴ 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 FY2022, the Biden Administration is requesting \$66 million for the CBSI, 10% more than appropriated in FY2020 and about 12% less than appropriated for FY2021.

Caribbean Energy Security 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.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶

⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *2019 Report to Congress on Progress of Public Law (P.L.) 114-291: Efforts to Implement the Strategy for U.S. Engagement with the Caribbean Region*, July 2019.

⁹⁴ 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.

⁹⁵ 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/>.

⁹⁶ 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/>.

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. Recent scientific studies suggest climate change may be increasing the intensity of such events.⁹⁷ In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian caused widespread damage to the northwestern Bahamian islands of Grand Bahama and Abaco, with 70 confirmed deaths and many missing.⁹⁸ The United States responded with nearly \$34 million in humanitarian assistance, including almost \$25 million provided through USAID. Prior to the hurricane, the State Department had launched a U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership in April 2019, with the goal of increasing regional disaster response capacity and promoting resilience to natural disasters. In December 2019, USAID announced it was providing \$10 million to improve local resilience to disasters in the Caribbean. 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 on April 22-23, 2021.

Pandemic and Vaccine Access. CARICOM leaders issued a statement in February 2021 expressing deep concern about inequitable access to vaccines for small, developing states. The leaders urged developed countries, especially those in the neighborhood "whose populations travel frequently to our region, and who host our largest diaspora populations," to make available some vaccines to CARICOM as an interim supply, given the immediacy of the need.⁹⁹ In June 2021, the Biden Administration announced that, as part of a plan to share 80 million vaccine doses globally, it would be donating vaccines to CARICOM countries.¹⁰⁰ As part of this effort, the State Department announced on August 12, 2021, that it would donate nearly 5.5 million Pfizer vaccine doses, along with ancillary kits, to CARICOM countries; a first tranche of the vaccine doses was delivered to several Caribbean countries in August.¹⁰¹ Separately, in July 2021, Haiti received its first COVID-19 vaccines when the United States donated half a million doses.¹⁰²

Small Islands Initiative. In March 2021, the Biden Administration launched the Small and Less Populous Island Economies (SALPIE) Initiative, an economic cooperation framework to strengthen U.S. collaboration with island countries, including in the Caribbean. The initiative's goals are to counter COVID-19 economic challenges, promote economic recovery, respond to the climate crisis, and advance longer-term shared interests.¹⁰³

Congressional Action: Over the past several years, Congress rejected budget requests that would have cut CBSI funding and appropriated foreign assistance to address other challenges in the Caribbean, including disaster resilience, energy security, and climate change. Such support for Caribbean regional programs is continuing in the 117th Congress during consideration of the Biden Administration's FY2022 foreign aid request.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Kieran T Bhatia et al., "Recent Increases in Tropical Cyclone Intensification Rates," *Nature Communications*, vol. 10, no. 635 (2019).

⁹⁸ The Government of the Bahamas, Cabinet & Disaster Management (NEMA), "Hurricane Dorian, NEMA Update," November 29, 2019.

⁹⁹ Caribbean Community (CARICOM), "Communique—Issued at the Conclusion of the Thirty-Second Inter-sessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community," February 25, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ White House, "Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Allocation Plan of 55 Million Doses to be Shared Globally," June 21, 2021.

¹⁰¹ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Donation of 5.5 Million Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine to CARICOM Countries," press statement, August 12, 2021.

¹⁰² "Haiti Gets First Half Million Doses of COVID-19 Vaccine," VOA News, July 15, 2021.

¹⁰³ White House, "Fact Sheet: Small and Less Populous Island Economies (SALPIE) Initiative," March 22, 2021.

The House-passed version of the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations measure, H.R. 4373 (H.Rept. 117-84), would provide not less than \$80 million for the CBSI (about 21% more than requested), \$3 million for the CESI, and \$5 million for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. The report to the bill also recommended \$15 million for strengthening resilience to natural disasters in the Caribbean and \$10 million for inclusive economic growth in the region, with a primary focus on small grants that advance entrepreneurship efforts of women, youth, and other disadvantaged populations. The report also recommended that \$2 million of increased funding for the Inter-American Foundation be targeted at building disaster resiliency in the Caribbean and that the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation prioritize investments in the Caribbean, especially investments that support minority- and women-owned businesses and promote women's economic empowerment.

Two other bills introduced in the 117th Congress would affect U.S. policy toward the Caribbean. H.R. 3524, the EAGLE Act, reported by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in July 2021, would, among its provisions, require a multiyear strategy to promote regional cooperation with the Caribbean on energy issues and would authorize assistance for the U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership from FY2022 to FY2024. Another bill, H.R. 4133, 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.

For additional information, see CRS In Focus IF10789, *Caribbean Basin Security Initiative*, by Mark P. Sullivan; and CRS In Focus IF10407, *Dominican Republic*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Rachel L. Martin.

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. Current Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel succeeded Raúl Castro in 2018. Castro continued to head the Cuban Communist Party until April 2021 when he stepped down as planned and Díaz-Canel was elected party leader. Cuba adopted a new constitution in 2019 that introduced some political and market-oriented reforms but continued the state's dominance over the economy and the Communist Party's predominant political role. A November 2020 government crackdown on the San Isidro Movement, a civil society group opposing restrictions on artistic expression, spurred a protest by several hundred Cubans. Motivated by the repression of the MSI, in February 2021, a group of Cuban recording artists released a song and music video, *Patria y Vida*, critical of the government; it became an instant hit.

On July 11, 2021, widespread anti-government demonstrations broke out in Havana and in cities and towns throughout the country, with thousands of Cubans protesting shortages of food and medicine, daily blackouts, slow progress on COVID-19 vaccinations, and long-standing concerns about the lack of freedom of expression and assembly. The government responded with harsh measures, including widespread detentions of hundreds of protesters, activists, and journalists, according to Cuban human rights groups, which reported summary trials for some of those detained. The government blocked access to social media and messaging platforms that had been instrumental in bringing Cubans to the streets.

The Cuban economy is being hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced support from Venezuela, and U.S. economic sanctions. The Cuban government reports the country's economy contracted 11% in 2020, and the Economist Intelligence Unit projects 2.2% growth in 2021.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ EIU, *Cuba Country Report*, 2nd quarter 2021.

Over the past decade, Cuba has implemented gradual market-oriented economic policy changes, but the slow pace of these reforms has not fostered sustainable growth and development. In January 2021, Cuba eliminated its dual currency system; the long-debated reform has spurred inflation, but economists maintain it should boost productivity in the long term.

Cuba's public health response to the pandemic initially kept cases and deaths low, but both began to increase in late 2020 and have surged since June 2021. As of September 1, 2021, the country reported over 5,300 deaths, with a mortality rate of 46 per 100,000 people.¹⁰⁵ Cuba has developed two vaccines and, as of September 1, 2021, had fully vaccinated 33% of its population, far from its original goal of having 70% vaccinated by the end of August.¹⁰⁶

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 that strengthens—and at times eases—U.S. economic sanctions. In 2014, the Obama Administration initiated a policy shift away from sanctions and toward a policy of engagement. This shift included the restoration of diplomatic relations; the rescission of Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism; and an increase in travel, commerce, and the flow of information to Cuba implemented through regulatory changes. President Trump unveiled his Administration's Cuba policy in 2017, issuing a national security presidential memorandum that introduced new sanctions, including restrictions on transactions with companies controlled by the Cuban military. By 2019, the Trump Administration had largely abandoned engagement and had significantly increased sanctions, particularly on travel and remittances, to pressure Cuba on human rights and for its support of the Maduro government in Venezuela government.

The Biden Administration has been reviewing policy toward Cuba. During the U.S. election campaign, Biden said he would reverse Trump Administration policies that harmed the Cuban people without advancing democracy and human rights.¹⁰⁷ The White House press secretary said on March 9, 2021, that although a Cuba policy shift was not among the President's top priorities, the Administration was “committed to making human rights a core pillar” of policy and would review policy decisions made in the prior Administration, including the decision to designate Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism.¹⁰⁸ Sanctions imposed under the Trump Administration remain in place. In May 2021, the State Department renewed Cuba's designation as a country not cooperating fully with U.S. anti-terrorism efforts. On July 1, it cited Cuba for labor abuses associated with its foreign medical missions and continued to rank Cuba as Tier 3, the worst ranking, in its 2021 *Trafficking in Persons* report.

In the aftermath of the July 11 protests, the Biden Administration took several actions. President Biden and other Administration officials expressed solidarity with the protesters and strongly criticized the Cuban government for its repressive response. The Treasury Department imposed four rounds of targeted financial sanctions, from July 22 to August 19, on three Cuban security entities and eight security officials involved in actions to suppress peaceful, democratic protests in Cuba. As part of the Administration's efforts to engage the international community on Cuba, on July 26, the State Department joined with 20 countries to condemn the Cuban government's mass arrests and detention of protesters. Among other actions, the Administration established a

¹⁰⁵ Johns Hopkins, “Mortality Analyses,” September 1, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Josh Holder, “Tracking Coronavirus Vaccinations Around the World,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ *Americas Quarterly*, “Joe Biden Answers 10 Questions on Latin America,” March 2, 2020 (updated October 29, 2020), at <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/updated-2020-candidates-answer-10-questions-on-latin-america/>.

¹⁰⁸ 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.

working group to identify the most effective ways to get remittances directly to the Cuban people, held engagement sessions with members of the Cuban American community, began reviewing plans to increase staffing at the U.S. Embassy in Havana to facilitate consular services and engagement with civil society, and stated it was actively collaborating with the private sector to identify creative ways to ensure Cuban citizens have internet access.

Congressional Action: Past Congresses supported U.S. funding for human rights and democracy programs in Cuba and for U.S.-government sponsored broadcasting to Cuba, as well as resolutions expressing concern about human rights, but views among Members often diverged regarding the best approach to influence the Cuban government's behavior.

The 117th Congress is considering the Administration's FY2022 foreign operations request of \$20 million for Cuba democracy programs (same as appropriated annually since FY2014) and \$12.973 million for Cuba broadcasting (same as appropriated in FY2021). On July 28, the House approved its version of the foreign aid appropriations bill, H.R. 4373 (H.Rept. 117-84), which would fully fund both programs at the requested amounts. Of the \$20 million for Cuba democracy programs in the bill, not less than \$5 million would be made available for programs to support free enterprise and private business organization and people-to-people educational and cultural activities. The report to the bill also contains a reporting requirement on the results of the Administration's Cuba policy review.

In April and May 2021, the Senate approved two Cuba human rights resolutions: S.Res. 37, expressing solidarity with the MSI, and S.Res. 81, honoring *Las Damas de Blanco*, a woman-led nonviolent human rights group. After the July 11 protests, the Senate passed S.Res. 310 on August 3, expressing solidarity with Cubans demonstrating peacefully, condemning the government's repression, and calling for the release of those detained. On July 30, the Senate approved S. 2045, which would rename the street in front of the Cuban Embassy after a Cuban democracy activist, Oswaldo Payá, who died in 2012.

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

In July and August 2021, a presidential assassination, an earthquake, and a tropical storm multiplied Haiti's political, social, and economic woes. The aftermath of these events, on top of several preexisting crises in Haiti, likely points to a period of major instability, presenting challenges for U.S. policymakers and for congressional oversight of the U.S. response and assistance.

Armed assailants assassinated Haitian President Jovenel Moïse in his private home in the capital, Port-au-Prince, early on July 7, 2021. Many details of the attack remain under investigation. Haitian police have arrested more than 40 people, including former Colombian soldiers, several members of Moïse's security detail, two Haitian Americans, and a Haitian with long-standing ties

to Florida.¹⁰⁹ A Pentagon spokesperson said the U.S. military helped train a “small number” of the Colombian suspects in the past.¹¹⁰

Under the administration of the late President Moïse, who was inaugurated in February 2017, Haiti experienced political and social unrest, high inflation, and resurgent gang violence. Government instability increased after May 2019, when the Superior Court of Auditors delivered a report to the Senate alleging Moïse had embezzled millions of dollars, which Moïse denied. Since that time, periodic mass demonstrations have called for the provision of government services, an end to corruption, and Moïse’s resignation; Moïse had said he would not resign.

Political gridlock between the executive and legislative branches led to the government not organizing scheduled October 2019 parliamentary elections. The terms of the entire lower Chamber of Deputies and two-thirds of the Senate expired in January 2020, as did the terms of all local government posts, without newly elected officials to take their places. Moïse had been ruling by decree since then. The lack of elected officials makes the question of presidential succession and the organization of elections difficult, as officials are not in place to carry out the procedures outlined in various articles of the Haitian constitution.

In the assassination’s immediate aftermath, interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph was in charge, as recognized by U.S. and U.N. officials, and he said the police and military were in control of Haitian security.¹¹¹ Joseph became interim prime minister in April 2021. The day before the assassination, Moïse named Ariel Henry to be prime minister, but Henry had yet to be sworn in. On July 9, one-third of the Haitian Senate, acting without a quorum, declared Senate president Joseph Lambert provisional president. A Biden Administration delegation met with all three claimants to power on July 11 in response to Haiti’s request for security and investigative assistance.¹¹² On July 17, U.S. and U.N. officials changed their position and, along with other diplomats, expressed support for Henry as prime minister, calling for the formation of a consensus government and the holding of credible elections as soon as possible.¹¹³ Joseph agreed to step down as prime minister.

U.N. and U.S. officials previously pressed Haiti to hold overdue legislative and municipal elections as soon as possible. Instead, the Moïse government announced it would hold a referendum on a new constitution and simultaneous legislative and presidential elections on September 19. Moïse generated controversy when he appointed by decree, without broad political consensus, a Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) to organize the referendum and elections. The moves were arguably unconstitutional; the constitution stipulates that all three branches of government are to choose electoral council members (Article 192), two consecutive legislatures are to approve constitutional changes (Articles 282-283), and constitutional amendment by referendum is “strictly forbidden” (Article 284.3). The Biden Administration said in mid-July that it expects Haiti to hold elections,¹¹⁴ and its FY2022 request includes \$8 million to strengthen

¹⁰⁹ Widlore Mérancourt, Samantha Schmidt, Shawn Boburg, “In Haiti, a Clouded Assassination Probe Prompts Fears of Political Crackdowns,” *Washington Post*, August 7, 2021.

¹¹⁰ Deirdre Shesgreen, Tom Vanden Brook, “U.S. Military Trained ‘Small Number’ of the Colombian Suspects in Haiti Assassination, Pentagon Says,” *USA Today*, July 15, 2021.

¹¹¹ Constant Méheut, Michael Crowley, Natalie Kitroeff, Anatoly Kurmanaev and Catherine Porter, “Political Crisis in Haiti Deepens over Rival Claims to Power,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2021.

¹¹² “U.S. Delegation to Haiti Met All Three Claimants to Power—White House,” Reuters, July 12, 2021.

¹¹³ “Communiqué du Core Group,” Bureau intégré des Nations Unies en Haïti (BINUH), Centre de presse, July 17, 2021.

¹¹⁴ Emily Horne, “Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on U.S. Government Delegation to Haiti,” July 12, 2021.

electoral and other institutions, promote political party competitiveness, and protect human rights. The CEP postponed elections, scheduling votes for president, the legislature and the constitutional referendum for November 7 and runoff national and single-round municipal and local elections for January 23, 2022.¹¹⁵

According to U.N. reports, gangs challenge the Haitian state's authority.¹¹⁶ Violent crime has increased: in 2020, kidnappings increased by 200% over 2019, murders increased by 20%, and reported rapes increased by 12%.¹¹⁷ The Haitian National Police (HNP) force, which became increasingly professional with the support of U.N. peacekeeping forces (2004-2017) and U.S. and other international assistance, has been unable to maintain control. According to the U.N., the HNP has committed human rights abuses, including 19 extrajudicial killings in fall 2019.¹¹⁸ The HNP is underfunded and smaller than international standards for the country's population. According to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti, gangs are often better armed and better equipped than law-enforcement authorities.¹¹⁹ According to the U.S. Treasury Department, gangs operate with the support of some Haitian politicians, receiving money, political protection, and firearms in exchange for carrying out attacks designed to create instability and suppress protests over living conditions.¹²⁰

Political instability and extreme vulnerability to natural disasters contribute to Haiti being the poorest and one of the most unequal countries in the Western Hemisphere. According to the World Bank, a weak economy, political turmoil, and the COVID-19 pandemic reversed modest reductions in poverty, leaving almost 60% of Haitians in poverty in 2020. Over 96% of the population is vulnerable to natural disasters.¹²¹ On August 14, 2021, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, resulting in over 2,000 deaths and affecting about 1.2 million people, mostly in the southwestern peninsula.¹²² The quake destroyed 84,000 homes and many hospitals, schools, and crops. Three days later, Tropical Storm Grace hit Haiti, causing mudslides and flooding. The combined damage worsened conditions and continues to make delivery of humanitarian aid difficult. Haiti already had one of the highest levels of food insecurity in the world, with 42% of the population facing acute food insecurity in September 2020. In the areas hardest hit by the recent earthquake, according to the World Food Programme, the number of people urgently needing food assistance has increased by one-third.¹²³

The Biden Administration requested \$188 million in U.S. assistance for Haiti in FY2022, \$51 million of which would be for development assistance. The United States donated 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines that arrived on July 14; Haiti's first vaccination program began on July

¹¹⁵ Samuel Celine, "New Date Set for Haiti Elections, Opposition Wants New Electoral Council," *Haitian Times*, August 13, 2021.

¹¹⁶ "SRSG La Lime Statement to the Security Council," BINUH News, October 5, 2020.

¹¹⁷ U.N. Security Council Provisional report S/PV.8729, February 20, 2020.

¹¹⁸ Marta Hurtado, "Press Briefing Note on Haiti Unrest," Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 1, 2019.

¹¹⁹ U.N. Security Council Provisional report S/PV.8729, February 20, 2020.

¹²⁰ U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Serious Human Rights Abusers on International Human Rights Day: Designations Target Human Rights Abusers in Haiti, Yemen, and Russia," press release, December 10, 2020.

¹²¹ "The World Bank in Haiti: Overview," April 26, 2021, accessed August 31, 2021, at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>.

¹²² Amanda Coletta and Ellen Francis, "Stranded by Tropical Storm Grace, Haiti Earthquake Survivors Seek Shelter," *Washington Post*, August 19, 2021.

¹²³ Laura Gottesdiener, "Haiti's Hunger Crisis Bites Deeper After Devastating Quake," Reuters, August 30, 2021.

16.¹²⁴ On July 22, the State Department appointed Ambassador Daniel Foote to serve as its Special Envoy for Haiti. Although President Biden said the United States is ready to help work for a secure Haiti, he also said sending in U.S. troops was not currently on the agenda.¹²⁵ Following the August earthquake, USAID deployed a disaster response team, with U.S. military transportation support, and announced \$32 million in humanitarian assistance.¹²⁶

Congressional Action. On March 12, 2021, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing on policy recommendations for the Biden Administration on Haiti.¹²⁷ The House passed the Haiti Development, Accountability, and Institutional Transparency Initiative Act (H.R. 2471) on June 29, 2021. The bill was received in the Senate and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations on July 12. The bill would measure the progress of post-disaster recovery and efforts to address corruption, governance, rule of law, and media freedoms in Haiti. On July 29, 2021, the House Foreign Affairs Committee ordered reported H.Res. 549, which would condemn the assassination of the Haitian president and urge U.S. and global support of Haitian-led solutions.

See also CRS Insight IN11699, *Haiti: Concerns After the Presidential Assassination*, by 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 complicated relationship. In recent decades, U.S.-Mexican relations have improved, as the countries have become close trade partners and have worked to address migration, crime, and other issues. Nevertheless, the history of U.S. military and diplomatic intervention in Mexico and the asymmetry in the relationship continue to provoke periodic tensions.

Mexico has undergone significant changes under the populist rule of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the 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. In addition to combating corruption, he pledged to build infrastructure in southern Mexico, revive the poorly performing state oil company, address citizen security through social programs, and adopt a noninterventionist foreign policy.

López Obrador's approval ratings have remained relatively high (59% in June 2021), even as his government has struggled to address rising organized crime-related violence and the health and

¹²⁴ Chase Harrison, "Tracker: U.S. Vaccine Donations to Latin America," Americas Society/Council of the Americas, August 24, 2021, and "Start of the COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign in Haiti: First Persons Vaccinated Less Than 48 Hours After the Arrival of the First Vaccines," Pan American Health Organization, July 17, 2021.

¹²⁵ Joseph Biden and Angela Merkel, "Remarks by President Biden and Chancellor Merkel of the Federal Republic of Germany in Press Conference," The White House, July 15, 2021.

¹²⁶ USAID, "Haiti Earthquake, Fact Sheet #8, FY2021," August 26, 2021.

¹²⁷ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Policy Recommendations on Haiti for the Biden Administration*, hearing, March 12, 2021, at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2021/3/policy-recommendations-on-haiti-for-the-biden-administration>.

economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had resulted in more than 259,000 deaths as of September 1, 2021.¹²⁸ 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, autonomous institutions, and judicial independence, as well as his government's overly austere budgets, which have spared his priority infrastructure projects from cuts. Since López Obrador took office, prosecutors have not pursued allegations of corruption involving the president's allies.¹²⁹

U.S.-Mexico relations have remained generally cordial under López Obrador. Nevertheless, tensions have emerged over issues including border security, U.S. investigations of Mexican officials, and policies Mexico has adopted that have negatively affected U.S. energy investors.¹³⁰ The López Obrador government enacted labor reform measures (May 2019), which helped lead to U.S. congressional approval of implementing legislation (P.L. 116-113) for the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The government accommodated the Trump Administration's restrictive border and asylum policy changes, which shifted more of the burden of interdicting migrants and offering asylum from the United States to Mexico. The October 2020 arrest of former Mexican Defense Minister Salvador Cienfuegos in the United States on drug trafficking charges deeply angered the Mexican government. Despite Cienfuegos's subsequent release, Mexico enacted legislation to limit U.S. law enforcement operations and U.S.-Mexican intelligence sharing in the country.¹³¹ Security cooperation under the Mérida Initiative, a security and rule-of-law partnership for which Congress has appropriated more than \$3.3 billion since FY2008, has stalled at the federal level in Mexico, but state and local cooperation continues.

Despite some lingering tension in relations, Mexico is directly involved in addressing several challenges facing U.S. policymakers. President López Obrador and President Biden have committed to collaborate on bilateral and regional migration issues and on COVID-19 response and recovery, while reaffirming the importance of the security partnership. High-level talks have continued, including an in-person meeting between Vice President Harris and President López Obrador in Mexico in June 2021.¹³² National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas, and other top U.S. national security officials met with President López Obrador and several of his Cabinet secretaries in August 2021.¹³³ A High-Level Economic Dialogue is scheduled for September 2021, and a Cabinet-level security dialogue also is planned to occur this year. The August 2021 Supreme Court ruling ordering the Biden Administration to reinstate the MPP policy has prompted new discussions on how and under what conditions Mexico would agree to restart the program. The Biden Administration has provided Mexico with more than 5.8 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, some of which Mexico has used in northern border states in hopes of hastening the reopening of the U.S.-Mexico border.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Carrin Zissis, "Approval Tracker: Mexico's President AMLO," *Americas Society/Council of the Americas*, August 18, 2021; and Johns Hopkins University, Coronavirus Research Center, "Mexico," September 1, 2021, at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/mexico>.

¹²⁹ Americas Society/Council of the Americas and Control Risks, *The Capacity to Commit Corruption Index: 2021*.

¹³⁰ Reuters, "U.S. Voices Concern to Mexico About 'Deteriorating Climate' for Energy Investors," April 2, 2021.

¹³¹ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "A Dangerous Backtrack on the US-Mexico Security Relationship," Brookings Institution, December 21, 2021.

¹³² The White House, "Fact Sheet: U.S. -Mexico Bilateral Cooperation," June 8, 2021.

¹³³ The White House, "Readout from NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on Senior Administration Official Travel to Mexico," August 11, 2021.

¹³⁴ Chase Harrison, "Tracker: U.S. Vaccine Donations to Latin America," *Americas Society/Council of the Americas*, August 24, 2021.

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, supply chain disruptions, and USMCA implementation.

Congress is considering the Biden Administration's FY2022 foreign assistance request for Mexico of \$116.5 million, which is nearly 27% lower than the estimated FY2021 appropriation of \$158.9 million. The Administration's FY2022 request for INCLE aid for Mexico is \$44 million less than the FY2021 estimated appropriation. The House-passed version of the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill (H.R. 4373, H.Rept. 117-84) would provide \$158.9 million for assistance to Mexico. It would require a comprehensive review of funds provided through the Mérida Initiative and a report on any funds appropriated to Mexican agencies involved in migration management within 90 days of the bill's enactment. The measure also would require reports on plans to improve data collection on synthetic drug trafficking, crimes committed along Mexico's northern highways, combating fentanyl flows, and the efficacy of U.S. drug control tools such as sanctions.

Other legislation would affect U.S. relations with Mexico, including H.R. 3524, the EAGLE Act, reported by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in July 2021, which would require a report on how the United States, Mexico, and Canada could work together to reduce methane and other emissions and implement Article 23.6 of the USMCA, which prohibits importation of goods produced by forced labor. S. 1201, the U.S. Climate Act, 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 Insight IN11635, *Mexico: Challenges for U.S. Policymakers in 2021*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R42917, *Mexico: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report RL32934, *U.S.-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications*, by M. Angeles Villarreal; CRS In Focus IF10997, *U.S.-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) Trade Agreement*, by M. Angeles Villarreal and Ian F. Fergusson; CRS In Focus IF10578, *Mexico: Evolution of the Mérida Initiative, 2007-2021*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS Report R41576, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, by June S. Beittel; CRS In Focus IF10215, *Mexico's Immigration Control Efforts*, by Clare Ribando Seelke; CRS In Focus IF10400, *Trends in Mexican Opioid Trafficking and Implications for U.S.-Mexico Security Cooperation*, by Liana W. Rosen and Clare Ribando Seelke; and CRS In Focus IF11669, *Human Rights Challenges in Mexico: Addressing Enforced Disappearances*, 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, in some years, has surpassed Mexico as the largest source of irregular migration to the United States. In the first 10 months of FY2021, for example, U.S. authorities encountered approximately 250,000 Hondurans, 221,000 Guatemalans, and 75,000 Salvadorans at the Southwest border.¹³⁵ These narcotics and migrant flows are the latest symptoms of deep-rooted challenges in the region, including widespread insecurity, fragile political and judicial systems, and high levels of poverty and unemployment. The COVID-19 pandemic and three tropical storms exacerbated conditions in the region in 2020, contributing to a sharp increase in

¹³⁵ CBP, "Southwest Land Border Encounters," August 12, 2021.

food insecurity while creating opportunities for criminal organizations to extend their reach and for governments to curtail civil liberties and engage in corruption.

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 annual foreign assistance for the region. From FY2016 to FY2021, Congress appropriated a total of more than \$3.7 billion to implement the strategy, allocating most of the funds to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

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.

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 million to other foreign policy priorities and withheld most of the remaining assistance for more than a year while it negotiated a series of border security and asylum agreements with the Northern Triangle governments. The aid suspension forced U.S. agencies to scale back projects significantly and cancel planned activities. In Honduras, for example, the number of beneficiaries of USAID programs fell from 1.5 million in March 2019 to 640,000 in January 2021.¹³⁶

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

¹³⁶ USAID data provided to CRS, March 2021.

criminal organizations; and (5) combatting sexual, gender-based, and domestic violence.¹³⁷ The new strategy is similar to the prior U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, but Administration officials assert they will incorporate lessons learned over the past six years. In addition to using migration data to better target programs, the Administration intends to place greater emphasis on host country governance, enhance partnerships with local organizations, and increase the scale of U.S. efforts.¹³⁸ The Administration has proposed allocating \$4 billion to the region over four years and has requested \$860.6 million to begin implementing the strategy in FY2022.

The Biden Administration also developed, pursuant to E.O. 14010, a new Collaborative Migration Management Strategy 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.¹³⁹ As of August 26, 2021, the Administration had allocated nearly \$252 million of humanitarian assistance to address the needs of vulnerable populations in Central America and Mexico.¹⁴⁰ The Administration also has reestablished and expanded the Central American Minors program, which reunites eligible minors in the Northern Triangle with parents in the United States, and has made available 6,000 supplemental H-2B temporary nonagricultural worker visas for Northern Triangle nationals in FY2021.¹⁴¹

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. For example, the House-passed foreign aid appropriations measure (H.R. 4373, H.Rept. 117-84) would fully fund the Administration's \$860.6 million request for Central America. Likewise, the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 (S. 348/H.R. 1177) 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 tackle extreme poverty and advance economic development in the region. Other legislative measures would authorize more limited assistance efforts. For example, 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.

Nevertheless, many Members of Congress remain concerned about widespread corruption and impunity in Central America. H.R. 4373, like previous foreign aid appropriations measures, would require the State Department to withhold most assistance for the Northern Triangle governments until it certifies those governments are combatting corruption, protecting human rights, and addressing other congressional concerns. The measure would provide \$60 million for

¹³⁷ 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>.

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of State, "On the Collaborative Migration Management Strategy and Root Causes Strategy Toward Migration," Special Briefing, July 29, 2021.

¹³⁹ White House, "Collaborative Migration Management Strategy," July 2021, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Collaborative-Migration-Management-Strategy.pdf>.

¹⁴⁰ USAID, "El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—Regional Response," Fact Sheet #10, FY2021, August 26, 2021.

¹⁴¹ White House, "Collaborative Migration Management Strategy," July 2021.

“entities and activities to combat corruption and impunity” in Central America and \$500,000 to increase staff focused on Central America within the State Department’s Office of Economic Sanctions Policy and Implementation. Other legislative proposals focus specifically on the situation in Honduras. The Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act of 2021 (S. 388/H.R. 2716) would restrict U.S. security cooperation with Honduras and direct the Administration to impose asset blocking and visa sanctions on President Juan Orlando Hernández for his alleged involvement in narcotics trafficking. The Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1574) also would restrict U.S. security assistance to Honduras.

For additional information, see CRS Insight IN11603, *Central America’s Northern Triangle: Challenges for U.S. Policymakers in 2021*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS In Focus IF11151, *Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS In Focus IF10371, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: An Overview*, by Peter J. Meyer; CRS Report R44812, *U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress*, 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; and CRS Report RL34027, *Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Peter J. Meyer.

Nicaragua

Increasing government crackdowns in Nicaragua against the opposition, journalists, and government critics in 2021 have elevated international concerns, including among Members of Congress, about political developments, human rights violations, and the erosion of democracy in Nicaragua, especially leading up to elections scheduled for November 2021.

President Daniel Ortega has been suppressing popular 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 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. Nonetheless, the FSLN and Ortega gradually consolidated control over the country’s institutions. Ortega reclaimed the presidency in 2007 and has served as president for the past 14 years, creating what the State Department calls “a highly centralized, authoritarian system.”¹⁴² 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 control of the government began to unravel in 2018, when his proposal to reduce social security benefits triggered protests led by a wide range of Nicaraguans. The government’s repressive response included an estimated 325-600 extrajudicial killings, as well as torture, political imprisonment, and suppression of the press, and led to thousands of citizens going into exile.¹⁴³ The government says it was defending itself from coup attempts.

¹⁴² U.S. Department of State, *Nicaragua 2020 Human Rights Report*, March 20, 2021.

¹⁴³ Organization of American States (OAS), *Report of the High-Level Commission on Nicaragua of the Organization of American States*, November 19, 2019.

The 2018 crisis undermined economic growth in Nicaragua, the hemisphere's second-poorest country. Government repression has continued, and international economic sanctions, the COVID-19 pandemic, and hurricane damage have worsened conditions in the country. Nicaragua's economy contracted by 3.9% in 2019 and by an estimated 3.0% in 2020; the IMF projects it will contract by 0.2% in 2021, with unemployment nearly doubling from 6% to 11% between 2019 and 2021.¹⁴⁴

The international community has sought to hold the Ortega government accountable for human rights abuses and to facilitate the reestablishment of democracy in Nicaragua. An Inter-American Commission on Human Rights team concluded in 2018 that the Nicaraguan security forces' actions could be considered crimes against humanity. The OAS has stated multiple times that the Ortega government has violated the rule of law, altered constitutional order, and violated human rights. In June 2021, the OAS passed a resolution expressing alarm at Nicaragua's deteriorating human rights situation, "unequivocally condemn[ing]" the arrest and arbitrary restrictions on candidates and the press and calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners and the implementation of measures for transparent and fair elections.¹⁴⁵ At a U.N. Human Rights Council meeting on June 22, 59 countries, including the United States, made a similar statement, also calling on Nicaragua "to re-establish dialogue and renew trust in democracy."¹⁴⁶

Dialogue between the government and the opposition collapsed in 2019. Elements of the opposition tried to unite behind a single candidate for the scheduled November 7, 2021, general elections, but internal divisions persisted. In addition, as Ortega's popularity has declined, the Sandinista-controlled legislature has passed a series of repressive laws that require individuals or groups that receive funding from foreign entities to register as "foreign agents," ban such individuals from running for public office, and make them subject to imprisonment. The FSLN has used these laws to eliminate electoral competition. According to the State Department's Nicaragua 2020 Human Rights Report, published in March 2021, "government restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and assembly precluded any meaningful choice in elections."

Since May 2021, the Ortega government has launched a new period of increased oppression, arresting dozens of government critics, including several revolutionary leaders who once fought alongside Ortega. Many others, including journalists, have fled the country, citing safety concerns. Ortega recently defended his actions, saying opposition figures were being used by the United States, which he referred to as "the empire," to boycott elections and "re-sow terrorism in our country."¹⁴⁷ According to Amnesty International, "The enforced disappearance of people is the latest tactic that authorities in Nicaragua have adopted to silence any criticism or dissenting voices."¹⁴⁸

By July 2021, the government had arrested seven of the most likely presidential candidates.¹⁴⁹ The whereabouts of most of these individuals are unknown, and they were not released in time to

¹⁴⁴ International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database*, April 2021.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, OAS, "Statement from the General Secretariat on the Situation in Nicaragua," press release E-102/20, October 15, 2020; and OAS, "Resolution Restoring Democratic Institutions and Respect for Human Rights in Nicaragua Through Free and Fair Elections," press release S-019/20, October 22, 2020. OAS, "The Situation in Nicaragua," CP/RES. 1175/21, June 15, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, "Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Nicaragua: Joint Statement on Nicaragua at the Human Rights Council, Presented by the Nicaragua Core Group on Behalf of 59 Countries Including the United States," June 22, 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Reuters, "Nicaragua's Ortega Arrests Another Rival, Says U.S. Aims to Undermine Vote," July 26, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Amnesty International, "Nicaragua: Enforced disappearance is the new tactic for repression," August 25, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Reuters, "Nicaragua's Ortega Arrests Another Rival, Says U.S. Aims to Undermine Vote," July 26, 2021.

meet the candidate registration deadline of August 2. On August 6, Nicaragua banned one of the only remaining opposition parties from participating in the elections. Ortega registered his candidacy for a fourth consecutive term, with his wife, Rosario Murillo, again running as his vice president. Six other presidential candidates are registered; within two days of registering, the government expelled vice presidential candidate Berenice Quezada, a former Miss Nicaragua, from the race, and detained her.¹⁵⁰ On August 9, one of Nicaragua's two main political opposition alliances, the National Coalition, called on the public to reject the November general election.¹⁵¹

U.S. policy toward Nicaragua focuses on strengthening civil society and promoting respect for human rights and free and fair elections. The Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-335) instructed U.S. representatives at the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to oppose new multilateral lending to Nicaragua, except for basic human needs and democracy promotion. The Trump Administration imposed targeted financial sanctions on high-level officials and organizations, including Vice President and First Lady Rosario Murillo, three of the president's sons, and the Nicaraguan National Police, for corruption and serious human rights abuses. Under the Biden Administration, in June 2021, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on four more government officials, including one of the president's daughters, who support the Ortega regime.¹⁵² In July 2021, the State Department imposed visa restrictions on 100 members of the Nicaraguan legislature and judiciary who "helped to enable the Ortega-Murillo regime's attacks on democracy and human rights."¹⁵³ Secretary of State Blinken asserted in early August 2021 that Nicaragua's "electoral process, including its eventual results, has lost all credibility."¹⁵⁴

Congressional Action: In August 2021, the Senate passed S. 1041, the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform Act of 2021 (RENACER Act), which, among its provisions, would take measures to advance the strategic alignment of U.S. diplomatic tools and targeted sanctions to support the realization of free, fair, and transparent elections in Nicaragua. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs ordered reported a similar, although not identical measure, H.R. 2946, in July. The House-passed version of the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill, H.R. 4373 (H.Rept. 117-84), would make assistance to Nicaragua available under regional programs for Central America. The House Appropriations Committee's report to the bill recommended \$15 million for programs in Nicaragua that promote democracy and the rule of law and would prohibit providing funds for the central government of Nicaragua or for security assistance. The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a hearing on human rights violations in Nicaragua in July 2021, with an emphasis on the plight of political prisoners (see **Appendix**).

For additional information, see CRS Report R46860, *Nicaragua in Brief: Political Developments in 2021, U.S. Policy, and Issues for Congress*, by Maureen Taft-Morales.

¹⁵⁰ *LatinNews*, "Nicaragua: Ortega and Murillo Confirm Reelection Bid," Weekly Report, August 5, 2021.

¹⁵¹ *LatinNews*, "Nicaragua: Further Blow to Credibility of Election," Daily, August 10, 2021.

¹⁵² U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Nicaraguan Officials for Supporting Ortega's Efforts to Undermine Democracy, Human Rights, and the Economy," press release, June 9, 2021.

¹⁵³ U.S. Department of State, Antony J. Blinken, "The United States Restricts Visas of 100 Nicaraguans Affiliated with Ortega-Murillo Regime," press statement, July 12, 2021.

¹⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, "The Lack of Prospects for Free and Fair Election in Nicaragua," press statement, August 7, 2021.

South America

Bolivia

Bolivia experienced relative stability and prosperity from 2006 to 2019, but governance standards weakened and relations with the United States deteriorated during this period under populist President Evo Morales. Morales was the country's first indigenous president and leader of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. In November 2019, Morales resigned and went into exile amid nationwide protests against a disputed presidential election in which he had claimed victory. An interim government was established. Luis Arce, Morales's former finance minister, took office a year later, after winning 55% of the vote in October 2020 elections in which the MAS maintained a legislative majority.

President Arce is an economist who worked in Bolivia's central bank prior to serving as minister of finance. He pledged to govern in a conciliatory fashion, but his government's arrest and jailing of conservative Interim President Jeanette Añez has prompted international concern about its respect for due process and an apolitical judiciary.¹⁵⁵ Prosecutors initially cited Añez's role in what they described as a "coup" against Morales as the justification for her detention. They have added "genocide" charges based on the findings of an August 2021 report by a Group of Experts from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).¹⁵⁶ The U.S. and many other governments have called for Añez's rights to be respected, even as they have commended the IACHR-backed report regarding violence and human rights violations in late 2019.¹⁵⁷ The Arce government's actions could discourage donors and investors whose help Bolivia likely will need to help its economy recover from a 7.9% contraction in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Responding to COVID-19 remains a key challenge; the pandemic had caused over 18,400 deaths in Bolivia as of September 1, 2021.¹⁵⁸

U.S.-Bolivian relations are likely to remain challenging. Secretary of State Blinken issued a statement condemning actions taken against interim government officials; Bolivia dismissed this statement as interventionist.¹⁵⁹ Long-standing differences over drug policy and geopolitics also could prove difficult to overcome. With limited bilateral trade and investment ties, the possibility of a resumption in U.S. foreign assistance could encourage cooperation on some issues. USAID provided \$5 million to support the 2020 elections, 200 ventilators and related technical assistance to address COVID-19, and another \$926,000 in health and sanitation support. The Biden Administration also has delivered 1 million COVID-19 vaccines to Bolivia, as of July 2021.¹⁶⁰

Congressional Action: As Congress continues to monitor the situation in Bolivia, it may seek to influence the Biden Administration's policy through the appropriations process, oversight hearings, legislation, or letters to the Administration. Some Members of Congress have congratulated Arce on his victory and expressed hope for improved bilateral relations; others have expressed concerns about the return of a socialist government in Bolivia. H.Rept. 117-84

¹⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, "Arrest of Bolivian Former Interim Government Officials," press statement, March 27, 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Samantha Schmidt, "Genocide Prosecution of Former President Tests Bolivia's Justice System," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid; "Chargé d'Affaires to the United States Calls for Justice for the 2019 Deaths in Bolivia Through Due Process," *Pen Media Inc.*, August 17, 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Johns Hopkins, "Mortality Analyses," September 1, 2021.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, "Arrest of Bolivian Former Interim Government Officials," press statement, March 27, 2021.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Embassy in Bolivia, "United States Delivers More Than One Million Free Vaccines to Bolivia," July 9, 2021.

accompanying H.R. 4373 urges the Secretary of State to solicit information from “independent, internationally recognized experts” regarding the legality of Bolivia’s 2019 elections, the role of the OAS in the elections, and investigations into human rights violations during and after the elections; this information is to be provided to appropriators.

For more information, see CRS In Focus IF11325, *Bolivia: An Overview*, by Clare Ribando Seelke.

Brazil

Occupying almost half of South America, Brazil is the fifth-largest and sixth-most-populous country 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 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 for right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro to win the presidency in 2018.

Since taking office in January 2019, President Bolsonaro has implemented some fiscal reforms favored by international investors and Brazilian businesses and has proposed measures to ease firearms regulations and promote development in the Brazilian Amazon. Rather than building a broad-based coalition to advance his agenda, Bolsonaro has sought to keep his political base mobilized by taking socially conservative stands on cultural issues and verbally attacking perceived enemies, such as the press, nongovernmental organizations, and other branches of government. This confrontational approach to governance has alienated potential allies within the conservative-leaning Brazilian congress and placed additional stress on the country’s already-strained democratic institutions. It also has hindered Brazil’s ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the Brazilian government has enacted significant economic support measures to help households, businesses, and state governments during the pandemic, Bolsonaro’s resistance to public health restrictions and recommendations has undermined Brazil’s efforts to slow the spread of the virus. As of September 1, 2021, Brazil had recorded more than 580,000 deaths, giving it one of the highest COVID-19 mortality rates in the world.¹⁶¹

In international affairs, the Bolsonaro Administration has moved away from Brazil’s traditional commitment to autonomy and 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 and sought to strengthen U.S.-Brazilian relations. In 2019, the Trump Administration took steps to bolster bilateral cooperation on counternarcotics and counterterrorism efforts and 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 the Protocol on Trade Rules and Transparency, concluded in October 2020, which aims to foster cooperation on trade facilitation and customs administration, good regulatory practices, and anti-corruption measures.

The Biden Administration has sought to maintain a cooperative relationship with the Bolsonaro Administration, recognizing Brazil’s importance for addressing global challenges. President

¹⁶¹ Johns Hopkins, “Mortality Analyses,” September 1, 2021.

Biden invited Bolsonaro to attend the April 2021 Leaders Summit on Climate, during which Bolsonaro pledged to double funding for environmental enforcement efforts, reiterated Brazil's commitment to end illegal deforestation by 2030, and stated that Brazil would reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050—10 years earlier than the country's previous goal.¹⁶² The Biden Administration has requested \$17 million to support conservation in the Brazilian Amazon in FY2022 but has stated more extensive financial support for Brazil would be contingent on the country making demonstrable progress toward its environmental commitments. The Biden Administration also has continued to engage with Brazil on security matters, expressing support for Brazil's participation as a NATO global partner while reiterating concerns regarding the potential use of Chinese equipment in Brazil's telecommunications infrastructure.¹⁶³

Congressional Action: U.S.-Brazilian cooperation on environmental issues has remained a subject of interest in the 117th Congress. Some Members have called on the Biden Administration to condition U.S. relations with Brazil, including U.S. assistance and bilateral economic and security cooperation, on the Brazilian government's efforts to reduce deforestation and combat environmental crimes.¹⁶⁴ The U.S. CLIMATE Act of 2021 (S. 1201), introduced in April 2021, would express the sense of Congress on the importance of conservation of the Amazon River Basin, including support for U.S. engagement with Brazil on efforts to reduce deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions.

Congress also has continued to express concerns about human rights in Brazil. The report accompanying the House-passed FY2022 foreign aid appropriations measure (H.Rept. 117-84 to H.R. 4373) stated that any funding provided for programs in the Brazilian Amazon "should protect the rights of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities and support the prosecution of violations of such rights." The report also directed the Secretary of State to work with the Brazilian government to ensure it consults with Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities regarding projects and policies that affect them and to prioritize preventative actions to protect threatened community leaders and environmental human rights defenders.

For additional information, see 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 is a key U.S. ally in Latin America, and the United States is Colombia's top trading partner. Because of Colombia's prominence in illegal drug production, the United States and Colombia have forged a close relationship over the past two decades. Plan Colombia, a U.S.-Colombian program that began in 2000, focused initially on counternarcotics and later on counterterrorism, and laid the foundation for an enduring security partnership with the United States.

Colombia's 2016 peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) resulted in the demobilization of 13,000 insurgents and the transformation of the FARC from a

¹⁶² "Confirma Discurso do Presidente Bolsonaro na Cúpula do Clima," Agência Brasil, April 22, 2021.

¹⁶³ U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Brazil, "Statement by U.S. Embassy Spokesperson, Tobias Bradford, on Advisor Sullivan's Visit to Brazil," August 6, 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from U.S. Senators Patrick Leahy, Robert Menendez, and Chris Van Hollen, et al. to President Joseph Biden, April 16, 2021, at <https://www.leahy.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Letter%20to%20Biden%20re%20Amazon%204-15-21.pdf>.

leftist guerrilla army to a political party. However, neither the government nor the rebels have upheld all of their commitments under the agreement, and some guerrillas have re-armed and formed new groups known collectively as *FARC dissidents*.¹⁶⁵ These challenges have been compounded by a pandemic-driven 6.8% economic contraction in 2020, spikes in coca cultivation and cocaine production, violence against human rights defenders and activists, and instability and violence spilling over from neighboring Venezuela. Absent a renewed focus on peace accord implementation, some predict Colombia's half-century internal armed conflict, which produced some 8 million victims and 262,000 deaths, could resume.¹⁶⁶

President Iván Duque of the conservative Democratic Center party has served three years in office as of August 2021. Duque campaigned as a critic of the peace accord and quickly suspended peace talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN), now Colombia's largest leftist guerrilla group. The administration put in place a "peace with legality" program, which the President asserts encompasses the most essential of the 2016 peace accord commitments. In February 2021, the Colombian government announced it would provide 10-year temporary protection status (TPS) to Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, allowing Venezuelans to obtain work permits and receive health and other services. Given the humanitarian debacle in Venezuela, regional governments and the international community welcomed the move.

Although Colombia initially fared well with the COVID-19 pandemic because of the Duque administration's measures to contain the virus, cases surged in May and June 2021. As of September 1, 2021, COVID-19 deaths approached 125,000, and over 29% of the population was fully vaccinated.¹⁶⁷ As the first recipient of vaccines in the Americas through the COVAX Facility mechanism and the government's pursuit of other vaccine sources (including U.S. donations), the Duque government set an ambitious goal of vaccinating 70% of the population by the end of 2021.¹⁶⁸ Due to logistics and supply constraints, some analysts warn that goal may not be attained until mid- to late 2022.¹⁶⁹

Duque's popularity has plummeted since protests broke out in Colombia in April 2021, in response to a proposed tax increase to cover pandemic-driven budget deficits. While the Duque administration modified and then discarded the tax increase, the protests continued as frustrations with other issues surfaced. Protesters' grievances expanded to include slow implementation of the 2016 peace accords, police brutality, economic inequality, crime, and corruption. While many protests were peaceful, blockades and vandalism by some demonstrators resulted in an estimated \$3 billion of damage to the Colombian economy. President Duque's handling of the protests received national and international criticism, as riot police and other law enforcement clashes with protesters resulted in 34 killings and thousands of injuries, casting doubt on the prospects for

¹⁶⁵ "Four Years Later, Colombia's Peace Agreement Advances at a Snail's Pace," *Open Democracy*, January 6, 2021. Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's Peace Deal Promised a New Era. So Why Are These Rebels Rearming?," *New York Times*, May 17, 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Romero, Cesar, "262,197 Muertos Dejó el Conflicto Armado." Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, August 2, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, "Colombia," September 1, 2021, at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/colombia>.

¹⁶⁸ President Duque remarks from Atlantic Council, "Transcript: A Conversation with President of Colombia Iván Duque and U.S. Senators Roy Blunt and Ben Cardin," March 25, 2021.

¹⁶⁹ EIU, *Colombia Country Report*, July 2021.

Duque's party and his allies in the 2022 national elections.¹⁷⁰ The IACHR issued a report in June 2021 denouncing the excessive use of force by Colombian law enforcement.¹⁷¹

Colombia has been a key U.S. security partner, training regional security counterparts and interdicting roughly half of all illicit drugs seized in the Western Hemisphere. For the past two years, Colombia has led a multination antidrug operation called Campaign Orion.¹⁷² While the U.S. government has praised the competence of Colombia's police during past collaborations on counternarcotics efforts, some Members of Congress have called for a pause in U.S. support for the Colombian National Police, given their response to recent protests.¹⁷³

In 2019, according to U.S. estimates, Colombia's cocaine production reached 936 metric tons of pure cocaine—its highest level ever reported by the U.S. government. U.N. estimates, released in June 2021, show 2020 production exceeding 2019 production levels by 8%.¹⁷⁴ In 2018, President Duque and then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reaffirmed a commitment to work together to lower coca crop levels and cocaine production to 50% of 2017 levels by 2023. President Duque campaigned on resuming forced aerial eradication (i.e., spraying) of coca crops with the herbicide glyphosate; in 2020, his government accelerated forced manual eradication. In its oversight over many years, the U.S. Congress has examined the efficacy of aerial spraying. Some Members back voluntary eradication and alternative development for eliminating coca crops (which is prioritized in the Colombian-FARC peace accord), and others support use of targeted aerial eradication.

Colombia continues to face severe crime and terror threats, complicating security. The ELN supports its anti-government campaign in Colombia by deriving revenue from drug trafficking, gold mining, and other illicit activities conducted in Venezuela.¹⁷⁵ In June 2021, the Colombian government asserted that the ELN bombed a Colombian military base, injuring 36 people, and attacked President Duque's helicopter.¹⁷⁶ In August 2021, for the first time, Colombia extradited ELN fighters to the United States on drug trafficking charges.¹⁷⁷ The Duque government has faced accusations that it is unable to protect social activists and labor leaders, including 78 human rights defenders and other social activists reported killed by mid-2021.¹⁷⁸ Colombian former military serving as mercenaries are implicated in the assassination of the Haitian president in July 2021 (see "Haiti").

U.S. government assistance to Colombia over the past 20 years has totaled nearly \$12 billion, with funds appropriated mainly to the U.S. Departments of State and Defense and to USAID. The

¹⁷⁰ Nathaniel Parish Flannery, "Political Risk Analysis: What Do Investors Need to Know about Colombia's 2022 Election?," *Forbes*, July 12, 2021.

¹⁷¹ "Observaciones y Recomendaciones de la Visita de Trabajo de la CIDH a Colombia," *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, June 2021.

¹⁷² INCSR, vol. 1, 2021.

¹⁷³ Dr. Jarrod Sadulski, "Colombian National Police: Combating Human and Drug Trafficking," American Military University, *Edge*, April 29, 2020; Office of Representative Jim McGovern, "Reps. McGovern, Pocan, Schakowsky, Grijalva Lead 55 Members of Congress Urging State Department to Clearly and Unambiguously Denounce Police Brutality in Colombia," May 14, 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Juan Diego Posada and Seth Robbins, "Colombia's Cocaine Keeps on Reaching New Heights," *InSight Crime*, July 30, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ R. Evan Ellis, *The Reinforcing Activities of the ELN (National Liberation Army) in Colombia and Venezuela*, Air University, July 30, 2021.

¹⁷⁶ "Biden Offers Colombia 'Support' After Attack on Duque Chopper," *AFP*, June 28, 2021.

¹⁷⁷ Luis Jaime Acosta, "Colombia Extradites ELN Rebel Fighters to U.S. for First Time," Reuters, August 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁸ Luis Jaime Acosta, "Murders of Colombia Activists Fell in First Half, but Violence Persists- Ombudsman," Reuters, August 28, 2021.

Trump Administration's focus in U.S.-Colombian relations was largely on containing impacts from Venezuela and reducing drug flows. In FY2021, Congress provided \$463.3 million in assistance for Colombia, the highest level of bilateral foreign assistance appropriated for Colombia in a decade. In addition, the United States provided \$201.8 million in humanitarian assistance for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia in FY2021.¹⁷⁹ To date, the United States has donated 6 million COVID-19 vaccines to Colombia, which will allow the government to vaccinate some of the many Venezuelan refugees it is hosting.¹⁸⁰

Colombia, with U.S. financial support, has trained more than 29,200 individuals from 13 countries in the region in counternarcotics and anti-crime measures between 2013 and August 2021.¹⁸¹ Although some policy groups have called for Congress to reconsider this program in light of the role of alleged police abuses against protesters, Colombian officials maintain that the anti-riot police squad involved in responding to the protests have not trained foreign, third-country forces since 2018.¹⁸²

In recent years, many Members of Congress praised Colombia's continued leadership role in promoting a democratic transition in Venezuela and responding to the humanitarian crisis of migrants fleeing the country. U.S. policy may continue to be shaped by the Biden Administration's regional aims of democratic strengthening through building the rule of law and protecting human rights. The Administration is likely to sustain a close relationship with Colombia, despite some areas of tension. The State Department has urged more complete peace accord implementation and an expansion of government presence in Colombia's remote rural zones to curb criminal and armed groups, including dissident guerrilla units.

Congressional Action: The Biden Administration's FY2022 foreign aid budget request for Colombia is \$453.9 million. The House-passed foreign aid appropriations measure, H.R. 4373, would provide \$461.4 million and stipulated that 30% of funding under the INCLE and Foreign Military Financing programs would be obligated only after the Secretary of State certifies that certain human rights conditions are met; these conditions include a provision that Colombian security forces involved in gross violations of human rights during the mass protests are held accountable.

For additional information, see CRS Insight IN11631, *Colombia: Challenges for U.S. Policymakers in 2021*, by June S. Beittel; and CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by 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 de facto control of the National Assembly, the last independent branch of government, in January 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. sanctions and resist

¹⁷⁹ USAID, Venezuela Regional Response, Fact Sheet #3, June 22, 2021.

¹⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Colombia, "U.S. Donates 3.5 Million Moderna Vaccines to Colombia," press release, July 23, 2021.

¹⁸¹ CRS electronic correspondence with staff at the Embassy of Colombia in Washington, DC, August 8, 2021.

¹⁸² Ibid.

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic, low oil prices, and years of economic mismanagement and corruption have taken a toll. Venezuela's economy has collapsed. The country is plagued by hyperinflation, severe shortages of food and medicine, and a dire humanitarian crisis that worsened since 2020 due to gasoline shortages. Maduro has blamed U.S. sanctions for the economic crisis, but U.S. officials note that current sanctions include broad exemptions for the delivery of humanitarian goods. U.N. agencies estimate that 5.7 million Venezuelans had fled the country as of July 2021, primarily to neighboring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Seeking sanctions relief and international recognition of his government, Maduro and the opposition (including Guaidó's supporters and other factions) agreed to resume Norway-led negotiations that had been suspended in September 2019. According to a preliminary agreement reached in August 2021, negotiations are set to begin in Mexico in September 2021. Negotiators may discuss political prisoners, human rights conditions, humanitarian relief, and conditions for electoral contests, beginning with scheduled November 2021 state and local elections.

The U.S. government ceased recognizing Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate president in January 2019. Although the Trump Administration initially discussed the possibility of using military force in Venezuela, it ultimately sought to compel Maduro to leave office through diplomatic, economic, and legal pressure. Biden Administration officials have stated that their approach toward the crisis in Venezuela is focused on supporting the Venezuelan people and engaging in multilateral diplomacy to press for a return to democracy and hold Maduro officials and supporters accountable for their actions.¹⁸³ On March 8, 2021, the Biden Administration designated Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), granting certain Venezuelan nationals residing in the United States without authorization relief from removal and authorization to work. This came after President Trump ended removals of Venezuelans eligible for deferred enforced departure on January 19, 2021. The Biden Administration also is reviewing the humanitarian impacts of U.S. sanctions. The State Department issued a joint statement with Canada and the European Union expressing support for "time-bound and comprehensive negotiation process"¹⁸⁴ but remains wary of Maduro's intentions and appears unlikely to lift U.S. sanctions in the short term.

Congressional Action: The 117th Congress has continued close oversight of U.S. policy toward Venezuela, through oversight hearings, legislation, and letters to the Administration. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported S.Res. 44 in March 2021, which would denounce fraudulent legislative elections in Venezuela. The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee reported S. 688 in March, which would prohibit contracting with persons who have business operations with Venezuela's Maduro government. In July, the House passed its version of the FY2022 foreign aid appropriations bill, H.R. 4373; the bill would provide \$50 million in Economic Support Funds for democracy programs in Venezuela. H.Rept. 117-84 accompanying the bill recommends humanitarian and development aid to countries sheltering Venezuelan migrants and the provision of aid to support a democratic transition in Venezuela if conditions permit.

Oversight has focused on the Biden Administration's actions to sanction human rights abuses, corruption, and antidemocratic actions by the Maduro government and its backers. Many

¹⁸³ U.S. Department of State, "Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on Venezuela," press briefing, March 8, 2021.

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-EU-Canada: Joint Statement on Venezuela," June 25, 2021.

Members of Congress praised the March 2021 designation of TPS for Venezuela. Although some in Congress support continued pressure on the Maduro government, others favor a more targeted approach, arguing that broad sanctions have not prompted political change but have hurt the Venezuelan people. Some Members have advocated for an end to any sanctions that have worsened the humanitarian crisis, whereas others have called for more targeted sanctions relief, such as ending an October 2020 ban on oil-for-diesel fuel swaps that likely have contributed to fuel shortages in the country.¹⁸⁵

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 In Focus IF11216, *Venezuela: International Efforts to Resolve the Political Crisis*; 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 was facing 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 has multiplied the region’s challenges and negatively affected its future 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 is projected to resume in 2021, recovery in some countries may be slow, and could jeopardize the economic and social progress that the region has made over the past two decades. Vaccine accessibility has been a significant problem for a number of countries and could delay economic recovery.

In addition to the pandemic and its economic fallout, the Biden Administration and the 117th Congress are facing a variety of other policy challenges in the Latin American and Caribbean region. For example, as the Biden Administration has taken actions to revise the Trump Administration’s more restrictive immigration policies, irregular migration from Central America and Mexico has increased. The political, economic, and humanitarian crises in Venezuela remain a challenge not only for the United States but also for the entire Western Hemisphere and could be an important test for multilateral diplomacy. The Biden Administration continues to review U.S. policy toward Cuba, including the previous Administration’s designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of international terrorism, although the Cuban government’s violent suppression of anti-government protests in July could make it difficult for the Administration to take policy actions perceived as easing pressure on the Cuban government. These and many other policy challenges discussed in this report may continue to be subjects of legislative initiatives, debate, and oversight in the 117th Congress.

The ninth Summit of the Americas, originally to be hosted by the United States in 2021 but now postponed to summer 2022, could serve as an opportunity for the Biden Administration to set forth its policy agenda for the region and deepen U.S. diplomatic engagement with hemispheric leaders on regional and global issues.

¹⁸⁵ U.S. Congressmen Jesús G. “Chuy” García, “Grijalva, García, 17 Members of Congress call for Biden Administration to Change Failed Trump-Era Venezuela Policy,” press release, August 13, 2021; Timothy Gardner, “Democratic Senator Urges Biden Admin to Allow Diesel Swap in Venezuela,” Reuters, March 23, 2021.

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

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

Country	Area (square miles)	Population (2020 estimated, thousands)	GDP (2020 est., U.S. \$ billions, current)	GDP per capita (2020 est., U.S. \$, current)	Leader (elected/next election)
Caribbean					
Antigua & Barbuda	171	98	1.4	14,168	Gaston Browne (Mar. 2018/by Mar. 2023)
Bahamas	5,359	385	11.3	29,221	Hubert Minnis (May 2017/ Sept. 16, 2021)
Barbados	166	288	4.4	15,163	Mia Mottley (May 2018/ by May 2023)
Belize^a	8,867	419	1.7	3,945	Juan Antonio “Johnny” Briceño (Nov. 2020/by 2025)
Cuba	42,803	11,333 (2019)	100.0 (2018)	8,822 (2018)	Miguel Díaz-Canel (Apr. 2018/ Apr. 2023) ^b
Dominica	290	75	0.5	6,904	Roosevelt Skerrit (Dec. 2019/by Mar. 2025)
Dominican Republic	18,792	10,455	78.7	7,530	Luis Abinader (July 2020/May 2024)
Grenada	133	113	1.0	9,186	Keith Mitchell (Mar. 2018/by Mar. 2023)
Guyana^a	83,000	787	5.8	7,327	Irfaan Ali (Mar. 2020/by 2025)
Haiti	10,714	11,403	14.3	1,253	Ariel Henry (Nov. 2016/Nov. 7, 2021) ^c
Jamaica	4,244	2,737	13.9	5,096	Andrew Holness (Sept. 2020/by 2025)
St. Kitts & Nevis	101	57	0.9	14,919	Timothy Harris (June 2020/by 2025)
St. Lucia	238	181	1.7	9,351	Philip Pierre (July 2021/by 2026)
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	150	111	0.8	7,122	Ralph Gonsalves (Nov. 2020/by 2025)
Suriname^a	63,251	604	2.4	3,988	Chandrikapersad “Chan” Santokhi (May 2020/2025)
Trinidad & Tobago	1,980	1,399	21.5	15,384	Keith Rowley (August 2020/by 2025)

Country	Area (square miles)	Population (2020 estimated, thousands)	GDP (2020 est., U.S. \$ billions, current)	GDP per capita (2020 est., U.S. \$, current)	Leader (elected/next election)
Mexico and Central America					
Mexico	758,449	127,792	1,076.2	8,421	Andrés Manuel López Obrador (July 2018/July 2024)
Costa Rica	19,730	5,128	61.5	11,982	Carlos Alvarado (Feb. & Apr. 2018/Feb. 2022)
El Salvador	8,124	6,486	24.6	3,794	Nayib Bukele (Feb. 2019/Feb. 2024)
Guatemala	42,042	17,971	77.1	4,289	Alejandro Giammattei (June & Aug. 2019/ June 2023)
Honduras	43,278	9,942	23.7	2,383	Juan Orlando Hernández (Nov. 2017/Nov. 28, 2021)
Nicaragua	50,336	6,496	12.1	1,870	Daniel Ortega (Nov. 2016/Nov. 7, 2021)
Panama	29,120	4,279	52.9	12,373	Laurentino Cortizo (May 2019/May 2024)
South America					
Argentina	1,073,518	45,388	388.3	8,555	Alberto Fernández (Oct. 2019/Oct. 2023)
Bolivia	424,164	11,722	39.4	3,360	Luis Arce (Oct. 2020/2025)
Brazil	3,287,957	211,422	1,434.1	6,783	Jair Bolsonaro (Oct. 7 & 28, 2018/Oct. 2022)
Chile	291,932	19,458	252.8	12,990	Sebastián Piñera (Nov. & Dec. 2017/Nov. 21, 2021)
Colombia	439,736	50,878	271.5	5,336	Iván Duque (May & June 2018/May 2022)
Ecuador	109,484	17,511	96.7	5,520	Guillermo Lasso (Feb. 7 & Apr. 11, 2021/Feb. 2025)
Paraguay	157,048	7,253	35.9	4,946	Mario Abdo Benítez (Apr. 2018/Apr. 2023)
Peru	496,225	33,494	203.8	6,084	Pedro Castillo (Apr. 11 & June 6, 2021/Apr. 2026)
Uruguay	68,037	3,531	55.7	15,778	Luis Lacalle Pou (Oct. & Nov. 2019/Oct. 2024)
Venezuela	352,144	27,951	47.3	1,691	Nicolás Maduro (May 2018/May 2024) ^d

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*, April 2021. 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. See CRS Insight IN11699, *Haiti: Concerns After the Presidential Assassination*, by Maureen Taft-Morales.
- d. Venezuela's May 2018 elections were characterized by widespread fraud. The United States recognizes Juan Guaidó, president of Venezuela's National Assembly, 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 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 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

Committee and Subcommittee	Date	Title
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 Prisoner
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

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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