Chapter 7: Crossing Borders: U.S. Foreign Policy in Latin America
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Abstract
This chapter focuses on cross-border flows, both legal and illegal, between the U.S. and Latin
America. People, goods, and services—from immigrants to automobiles to cocaine—all move
between the countries of Latin America and the U.S. The wealth of the U.S., as well as its
relatively high wages and standard of living, attract migration and business opportunities. In
other words, some of the same forces that lead the U.S. to maintain a trade deficit with Latin
America also make the U.S. a destination for immigrants as well as illicit drugs originating south
of the border.

Early twentieth-century Mexican dictator Porfírio Díaz once famously remarked to a

journalist, "Poor Mexico. So far from God, and so close to the United States." Díaz captured the

ambivalent familiarity of the relationship between the United States and its southern neighbors.

Since most of Latin America became independent in the early nineteenth century, U.S.-Latin

American relations have been marked by complex political maneuvering, with relationships

ranging from overt mistrust to deep friendship. Throughout, steadily growing economic

interdependence has increased U.S. political influence, as a hemispheric powerhouse.

As both candidate and president, Donald Trump has expressed views that aim to restrict

cross-border flows. Trump's general skepticism of the movement of people and goods between

the U.S. and Latin America at times leads him to diverge from prior administrations and at others

to continue earlier policies. Dating at least from the mid-twentieth century, prior administrations

sought to increase legal trade and support diversity in legal immigration from Latin America,

while vigorously opposing the illegal drug trade and illegal immigration. Trump, by contrast, has

taken a more isolationist and populist approach to U.S.-Latin American affairs. The next three

sections deal with U.S. policy toward three major types of cross-border flows: trade, immigration, and drugs.

Trade

President Donald Trump has brought protectionism back in, retreating from international trade agreements and aggressively erecting tariffs against U.S. closest allies. The Trump White House's zero-sum view of trade and its disdain for multilateral rules greatly differ from that of Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama. By forcing the renegotiation of major treaties under the threat of unilateral withdrawal, Trump has challenged the international order that Washington helped to create in the postwar era. In this context, U.S.–Latin American commercial relations have become deeply strained. The renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the establishment of barriers against Mexican steel and aluminum, the withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership are breaking with the pro-integration strategy of previous American administrations.

U.S.-Latin American Trade before Trump

Free trade has historically been a cornerstone of U.S. policy toward Latin America. Past Republican and Democratic administrations argued that lower tariffs and fewer restrictions on cross-border movement of goods and services made everyone better off. After World War II, a hegemonic United States exercised leadership in establishing the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), which created a system of rewards for member country cooperation and penalties for cheating. In the mid-1990s, the GATT was replaced with the World Trade Organization, which reinforced a system for adjudicating trade disputes.

Within this multilateral system, U.S. presidents from George H. W. Bush to Barack Obama have pushed for bilateral and regional free trade agreements, many involving Latin America. Although the Constitution grants Congress responsibility for trade policy, the legislature has repeatedly delegated authority to the executive branch. The president received "fast track" authority to negotiate agreements that Congress could reject but not amend in the Trade Act of 1974; this power was renewed in 1988, 1994, 2002 and 2015. The U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), who reports directly to the president, is America's chief trade negotiator and oversees treaty implementation. The Department of Commerce also participates by investigating foreign subsidies and dumping as well as patent, trademark, and copyright infringements, and by promoting American exports through the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

As noted in Table 7.1, of the fourteen free trade agreements (FTAs) that the U.S. has ratified, seven involve Latin America.[1] These instruments help to account for the $1.8 trillion in trade in goods and services between the United States and the Western Hemisphere (Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada). Many regional value chains are highly integrated, as when, say, a car, contains parts built in different countries. As a result, the top U.S. exports to Latin America are the also major Latin American exports to the U.S.: machinery, electrical machinery, vehicles, and mineral fuel and oil. Agriculture, though a perennial source of conflict, is a small component of bilateral trade. For instance, Latin American countries "only" export $8.9 billion in fresh fruit to the U.S.

Table 7.1: Free Trade Agreements with Latin America

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[1] In addition to FTAs, the United States has signed 42 bilateral investment treaties (9 with Latin American and Caribbean countries), which protect American overseas foreign direct investment from expropriation and other forms of property violations. Data from the Organization of American States' Foreign Trade Information System. Available at http://www.sice.oas.org/agreements_e.asp

Agreement/Partners	Date of Signature	US President	Date of Entry into Force		US President
NAFTA	12/17/1992	Bush, G. H. W.	1/1/1994		Clinton
Chile	6/6/2003	Bush, G. W.	1/1/2004		Bush, G. W.
DR-CAFTA	8/5/2004	Bush, G. W.	El Salvador, US	3/1/2006	Bush, G. W.
			Honduras, Nicaragua	4/1/2006	Bush, G. W.
			Guatemala	7/1/2006	Bush, G. W.
			Dominican Republic	3/1/2007	Bush, G. W.
			Costa Rica	1/1/2009	Bush, G. W.
Peru	4/12/2006	Bush, G. W.	2/1/2009		Obama
Colombia	11/22/2006	Bush, G. W.	5/15/2012		Obama
Panama	6/28/2007	Bush, G. W.	10/31/2012		Obama
Trans Pacific Partnership	2/4/2016	Obama	Withdrew 1/2017		Trump

U.S. trade policy with Latin America took a decisively pro-globalization turn with NAFTA. The George H. W. Bush administration began trilateral negotiations with Mexico and Canada in 1991. NAFTA entered into force under President Bill Clinton, on January 1, 1994. Tariffs, duties, and quantitative restrictions (except for some agricultural products) were eliminated by 2008. NAFTA also regulates investment, trade in services, and protection of intellectual property rights. The agreement includes legal innovations such as dispute settlement procedures and "rules of origin" discriminating against non-NAFTA members.

The NAFTA experience influenced President Clinton to advocate an FTA covering the entire Western Hemisphere from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Owing to the opposition of leftist Latin American leaders such as Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivia's Evo Morales, and Argentina's Nestor Kirchner, negotiations failed, leading to the demise of the proposed "Free Trade Areas of the Americas" in 2005. By the early 2000s, Washington was instead advancing bilateral treaties. A U.S-Chile Free Trade Agreement was written, signed, and ratified within six months in late 2003. This FTA eliminated Chilean duties on *all* American consumer and industrial products, facilitated the establishment of U.S. banks and insurance companies in Chile, and granted "improved market access" to American pork, beef, soybeans, grains, and potatoes.

Then came the U.S.--Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Combined, the six countries represent America's sixteenth largest trading partner, with $53 billion in total goods traded in 2015 (U.S. Department of Commerce 2016).[1] Although less aggressive in granting full liberalization than the Chilean FTA, the CAFTA-DR is important to the U.S. because it protects foreign direct investment (FDI). Central American countries benefit, too. For example, the agreement enabled unions to challenge Guatemalan labor law enforcement, leading to the first labor dispute ever filed under a FTA.

The Bush administration also developed three bilateral FTAs ratified during Barack Obama's presidency. The Peruvian FTA, for example, was the first agreement to incorporate environmental and labor protections, including regulations on the forest sector. The agreement eliminated duties on more than two-thirds of U.S. farm exports, as well as Peruvian requirements to hire local professionals and purchase local goods. Similarly, the Colombian and Panamanian FTAs eliminate tariffs for most U.S. consumer and industrial exports and guarantee American firms' access to large services markets.

Finally, in late 2009, the Obama White House unveiled a plan for a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which sought market access in eleven Pacific Rim countries (including Chile, Mexico, and Peru), balancing China's increasing economic and political role in the region. Together, the twelve partners account for thirty-six percent of world GDP and forty-three percent of world trade (World Bank 2016: 221).[2] The TPP would have slashed over 18,000 taxes on American exports, protected intellectual property, opened bidding for foreign suppliers in government procurement, and stimulated the digital economy. It also regulated fisheries, illegal logging, and wildlife trafficking. However, President Trump abandoned the TPP almost immediately after taking office.

U.S. Trade Policy under Trump

President Trump's approach to trade policy has broken sharply with the legacies of prior presidents. Trump has appointed critics of globalization to top government positions, bringing a zero-sum and protectionist vision of international trade. During the campaign, Trump declared his goal of reducing America's trade deficit, especially with China and Mexico. The U.S. annual trade deficit ran at $513bn from January to November 2017, an 11.6 percent increase compared to 2016 (Gillespie 2017).[3]

The rebirth of protectionism began with Trump's "America First" slogan and harsh rhetoric regarding U.S. trade partners and treaties. On the campaign trail, Trump labeled NAFTA a "disaster" and "the worst trade deal in history." Candidate Trump repeatedly threatened to establish a "border tax" for firms moving production outside the United States. Trump also bashed the TPP as a "job killer," forcing then-candidate Hillary Clinton to break with the Obama administration and criticize the deal. In a position that differed dramatically from the Republican Party's traditional free trade position, Trump argued that the TPP was "another disaster done and pushed by special interests who want to rape our country. The TPP would be the death blow for American manufacturing" (cited in Cirilli and Knowles 2016).[4]

The Trump White House quickly moved to appoint free trade skeptics. Industrialist Wilber Ross, who thinks the WTO system is "broken," was appointed Secretary of Commerce. Robert Lighthizer, an experienced steel industry lawyer and former trade official in the Reagan administration, was appointed as the U.S. Trade Representative and tasked with renegotiating trade deals. Peter Navarro, a heterodox professor of economics who had authored anti-China books and documentaries, was appointed to head a new White House Trade Council. Finally, former banker and conservative commentator Larry Kudlow was brought in as Director of the

National Economic Council. The Trump White House developed the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), which denounced "[u]nfair trade practices" that "weakened our economy and exported our jobs overseas." It also claimed that the U.S. helped "expand the liberal economic trading system to countries that did not share our values," and demanded that trade partners do more "to address trade imbalances" (*National Security Strategy* 2017: I, 17, 4).[5]

Protectionism soon became official policy.. Three days after his inauguration, President Trump issued a memorandum withdrawing from the TPP. This unilateral action infuriated Mexico, Chile, and Peru. Nonetheless, the remaining eleven countries, including key U.S. allies in the Pacific Rim, moved forward signing a definitive deal in March 2018. Agricultural associations, representing business interests in rural states that Trump had won in the 2016 election, acknowledged that U.S. withdrawal would miss an opportunity for access to key growing economies.

After threatening to withdraw unilaterally from NAFTA in early 2017, Trump ordered America's trade representative to renegotiate the agreement. As of mid-2018 and after eight official negotiation rounds, the U.S., Canada, and Mexico have not reached a deal. Although the discussions remain confidential, the Trump administration publicly prioritizes rewriting rules of origin to prevent countries like China from avoiding existing tariffs by exporting components to Mexico duty-free, and then arranging for those components to be exported in finished products. Officials also want to eliminate NAFTA's procurement chapter, which prohibits members from favoring domestic companies in giving out government contracts.

. The major challenge to U.S. - Mexican relations, however, came on June 1, 2018, when Trump imposed high tariffs on steel and aluminum imported from Mexico and other major U.S. allies, such as Canada and the European Union. The unprecedented action, grounded on

"national security" executive powers, was mainly targeted at China over accusations of flooding the international market with cheap metals and dragging down prices. The Mexican government quickly announced "appropriate and proportional" retaliatory measures, erecting tariffs on American products from steel to pork from key congressional districts (Reuters 2018).[6] Other major Latin American producers of steel and aluminum (Argentina and Brazil) were excluded from Trump's aggressive move after voluntarily restricting the exports shipped to the United States.

Immigration

Immigration policy is arguably the area of foreign policy in which President Trump's rhetoric and policies have created the most controversy. Though Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama were partisan rivals, their immigration policies appear reasonably similar when contrasted with Trump's. Both of Trump's predecessors accepted the normative value of diversity in legal immigration from Latin America, while emphasizing the need to reduce illegal immigration. Trump's approach to immigration from Latin America is different than that of his predecessors in several ways including rhetorical tone about immigrants, policy substance toward illegal immigration, and attitude toward legal immigration.

How U.S. Immigration Policy Affects Foreign Affairs

Immigration is considered a part of both domestic and foreign policy. When U.S. immigration policy affects individuals living in the United States, it is considered domestic policy. However, immigration policy also affects foreign governments in several ways.

First, immigrants from Latin America typically maintain dual citizenship in, and family and cultural ties to, their home countries. Millions of Latin Americans living in the U.S. send home "remittances," or financial transfers, on a monthly or weekly basis. Remittances are critical

sources of income in some countries. As Table 2 shows, in 2016 remittances constituted 29.4

percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Haiti, 18.0 percent of Honduras's GDP, 17.1

percent of El Salvador's, 10.9 percent of Guatemala's, and 9.6 percent of Nicaragua's.

Remittances dwarf U.S. foreign aid in every country in Latin America. Even in 2016 during the

Obama administration, U.S. foreign aid constituted far less than one percent of GDP in every

country in the region except Haiti. Thus, immigration policy shapes the economies of many Latin

American countries.

Table 7.2. US Foreign Aid and Remittances to Latin America, 2016

	US Foreign Aid, 2016 (thousands US$)	GDP, 2016 (millions US$)	US Foreign Aid as % of GDP	Remittances as % of GDP, 2016
Argentina	550	545,476.10	0.0001%	0.1%
Bolivia	0	33,806.40	0.0000%	3.6%
Brazil	12,865	1,796,186.59	0.0007%	0.2%
Chile	700	247,027.91	0.0003%	0.0%
Colombia	300,095	282,463.00	0.1062%	1.7%
Cuba	20,000	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dominican Republic	22,209	71,583.55	0.0310%	7.7%
Ecuador	2,000	98,613.97	0.0020%	2.6%
El Salvador	67,900	26,797.47	0.2534%	17.1%
Guatemala	132,515	68,763.26	0.1927%	10.9%
Haiti	199,413	8,022.64	2.4856%	29.4%
Honduras	98,250	21,516.94	0.4566%	18.0%
Mexico	161,160	1,046,922.70	0.0154%	2.7%
Nicaragua	10,000	13,230.84	0.0756%	9.6%
Panama	3,350	55,187.70	0.0061%	0.9%
Paraguay	8,611	27,424.07	0.0314%	2.4%
Peru	72,700	192,207.34	0.0378%	1.5%
Uruguay	500	52,419.72	0.0010%	0.2%
Venezuela	6,500	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sources: US Foreign Aid: Meyer 2017, Table 2: p. 9.[7]
Gross Domestic Product and Remittances as Percent of GDP: World Bank DataBank 2017[8]

Second, U.S. immigration policy also affects Latin American economies by easing

pressure on domestic labor markets, especially in countries with rapidly growing populations.

Thus, scholars predict that the rapid return of Haitian and Salvadoran emigrants owing to Trump's policies (see below) may throw both economies into recession owing to the inability of their homelands to absorb returning workers.

Third, migrants from Latin America to the United States also affect their home countries through "cultural" or "social remittances." Migrants' changing attitudes can influence friends and families back home in ways that are compatible with U.S. foreign policy goals. Latin Americans living in the U.S. become emissaries of what are sometimes called "American values," including belief in capitalism, free trade, and democracy and dislike of corruption.

Fourth, Latin Americans living in the U.S. can also be the source of what one might call "negative remittances:" the spread of gangs and guns to Latin America. U.S. gun laws are less restrictive than those in most countries in Latin America, and the market for firearms in the United States is very large. A recent report found 730 licensed firearm dealers in U.S. counties along the Mexican border (the number of unlicensed dealers may be larger) (Ingraham 2016).[9] Almost three-quarters of the guns seized in Mexico by Mexican police had originated in the United States.

Immigration Policy before Trump

U.S. immigration policy under Presidents Bush and Obama was largely conducted by the legislation they inherited. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (henceforth INA 1965), signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, dramatically rewrote U.S. immigration policy, which after 1920 had relied on quotas prioritizing immigrants from Northern Europe. The INA 1965 instituted a total cap as well as per-country limits for visas. It also created privileged categories of immigrant visas for high-skilled workers and relatives of U.S. citizens and permanent residents. These family preferences inadvertently remade the demographic profile of the U.S.,

tripling the foreign-born percentage of the population and dramatically increasing the number of Latin Americans in the U.S. When the legislation's sponsors instituted family preferences, they believed that the policy would maintain the predominance of Northern European immigrants (Gielten 2015).[10] Unexpectedly, however, it instead fostered immigration from developing countries by creating a mechanism for "chain migration," in which an adult who gets permanent residency in turn sponsors siblings and parents.

The Immigration Act of 1990, signed by President George H. W. Bush, in some ways, further liberalized U.S. immigration policy. Not only did the act substantially raise the cap on visas, but it created "Temporary Protected Status" (TPS) to provide "temporary safe haven" for nationals from countries experiencing national disasters or civil strife. Salvadorans were granted TPS in the act itself; TPS would later also be granted to Haitians, Hondurans, and Nicaraguans.

Meanwhile, other legislation dramatically restricted illegal immigration. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 upped deportations, increasing the number of crimes for which legal residents could be deported, restricting detainees' access to attorneys, and allowing immediate deportation of immigrants apprehended within 100 miles of the U.S. border. All told, the 1996 statute led to a tripling of deportations by 2000 (Massey 2011: 14).[11]

Despite their partisan differences, Bush and Obama took similar approaches to immigration. On the one hand, they accepted the goal of diversity in legal immigration to the United States, and spoke forcefully of the U.S. as a country of immigrants. On the other hand, both worked to tighten border security and reduce illegal immigration. It was illegal immigration that consumed most legislative energy during the two administrations, both of which failed to pass "comprehensive immigration reform." In the parlance of contemporary debates, the term

"comprehensive" signals mixed objectives: to enable some illegal immigrants currently in the U.S. to remain legally, while also reducing the rate of future illegal immigration. Both presidents championed various proposals that would have created a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

Nonetheless, as Figure 7.1 shows, deportations increased rapidly under Bush and Obama, initially stimulated by a desire to increase security following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Deportations soared from 188,000 in 2000, Bush's first year in office, to 360,000 in his last year, and then peaked at 406,000 in 2014 under Obama, before falling again to 340,000 in 2016. At the same time, what the Department of Homeland Security terms "returns"—that is, when unauthorized immigrants voluntarily leave or are removed from the U.S. without formal deportation proceedings—fell more than ninety percent across the two administrations, from 1,700,000 during Bush's first year to 106,000 in Obama's last year. Overall, total removals plus returns fell by about three-quarters, from 1,900,000 in 2000 to 447,000 in 2016.
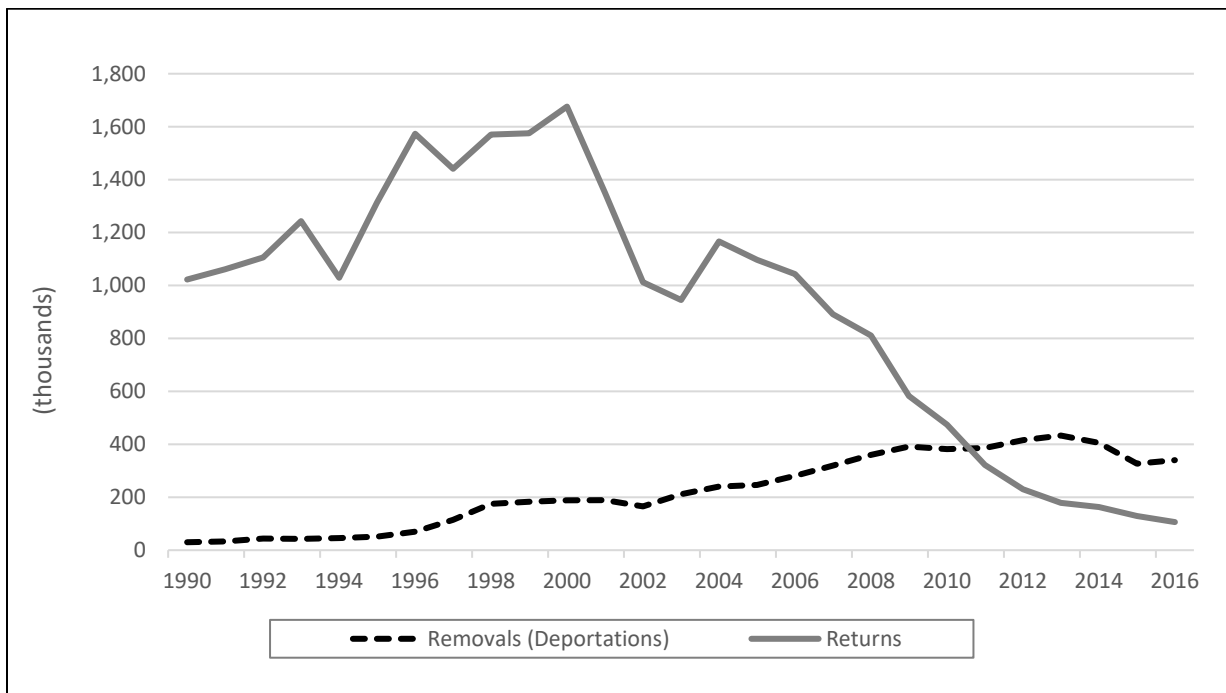

Figure 7.1. Number of U.S. Alien Removals and Returns[12]

These intersecting trends reflect the two administrations' changing approaches. The high numbers of "returns" in the 1990s and early 2000s was a result of the revolving-door nature of much immigration enforcement during that era. Would-be undocumented immigrants caught in the U.S. were frequently simply dropped on the Mexican side of the border, only to attempt the crossing once again—a practice critics called "catch and release." Both administrations sought to make illegal crossings into the United States harder and riskier. Not only was border security substantially improved, but immigrants were often driven hundreds of miles into Mexico, decreasing the ease of returning.

Finally, one important effort under Obama contravened the tendency toward rising enforcement. Frustrated by his inability to pass comprehensive immigration reform, in June 2012 Obama established Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which as of 2017 protected about 800,000 individuals who had been brought illegally to the United States as children (called "Dreamers," after the name of failed legislative proposals). This executive order provided a pathway for Dreamers to live and work legally in the U.S. When additional legislative attempts to legalize Dreamers' status failed in the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives, in November 2014, Obama announced his intention to expand DACA. He was immediately sued by several states, and the expansion was blocked in the courts.

Data depict the magnitude of these efforts and their impact. Budgets for U.S. Border Patrol more than tripled between 2000 and 2016. Meanwhile, budgets for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) nearly doubled between 2003, the year the agency was established, and 2016. Nonetheless, the overall impact was modest. Pew Research Center estimates that the number of Mexicans living illegally in the U.S. fell from 6,950,000 in 2007 to 5,850,000 in

2014. During the same time period, growing violence in Central America triggered increased

illegal immigration from that region from an estimated 1,350,000 to 1,700,000. Overall, the

number of illegal residents from Latin America and the Caribbean is estimated to have fallen

from 9,700,000 in 2007 to 8,600,000 in 2014 (Passell and Cohn 2016: 45).[13] Moreover, part of

this drop may be due to "push" factors in would-be immigrants' home countries beyond

American control. In addition, a declining gap in wages between the United States and Mexico

diminished the attraction of illegal crossings.

U.S. Immigration Policy under Trump

Trump's approach to immigration from Latin America has veered sharply from the

policies of Bush and Obama. Trump's rhetoric, which critics hold has been disrespectful toward

Latin American immigrants. For example, Trump officially launched his presidential campaign

in a speech in which he implied that most Mexicans in the United States were rapists. And in

January 2018, he caused an international scandal by referring to Haiti, El Salvador, and other

low-income countries sending immigrants to the United States as "shithole countries," indicating

that he would rather have immigrants from countries like Norway.

Trump has also differed from his predecessors on policy. He stepped up enforcement of

illegal immigration, while broadening the categories of illegal immigrants to be targeted.

Trump's proposed 2018 budget for the Department of Homeland Security included a 22 percent

increase for Customs and Border Protection, as well as a 29 percent increase for ICE. Moreover,

in a February 2017 executive order, Trump gave immigration officials broader latitude to target

non-criminal illegal immigrants. As a result, ICE arrests for civil immigration violations rose by

30 percent; arrests of non-criminal immigrants rose by 250 percent; and arrests in "community

settings" (i.e., venues other than prisons) rose by nearly 50 percent. Overall, there was a 25

percent jump in "interior" deportations, meaning those based on arrests within the United States beyond the border zone (U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement 2017).[14] Nonetheless, total deportations during the administration's first year fell, which many observers believe was the result in a drop in numbers of illegal crossings at the Mexican border.

Finally, Trump has been skeptical of *legal* immigration from Latin America as well. First, he has rescinded several programs that had created protected categories of immigrants. Most controversially, in a September 2017 executive order he rescinded DACA, while allowing a six-month window for Congress to legalize the status of DACA recipients. He also rescinded TPS protection for Haitians and Salvadorans living in the country under the Immigration Act of 1990.

Trump is skeptical about the goal of promoting diversity in legal immigration to the United States. The White House, along with immigration hawks in Congress, seek to end the policy of "chain migration." In place of a family-centered model of immigration, Trump and his legislative allies are promoting a "points-based" system that would restrict immigration overall, while favoring individuals based on merit-based criteria such as income, skills, and earning potential.

Drugs

Illicit drugs have been a major issue in U.S.-Latin American relations for decades. Most of the prohibited drugs that Americans consume come from Latin America. Massive demand for drugs such as heroin and cocaine is largely met by production in and trafficking from México and Colombia, respectively. Other areas of production and trafficking include Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, El Salvador, and the Caribbean. The U.S. government has approached this problem by a policy of military cooperation with allied countries to eradicate the crops like coca from which narcotics are made, destroy the factories that are needed to make them, and interdict the

movement of illegal drugs into the U.S. Contrary to other areas of foreign policy, President Trump's anti-drug policy in Latin America reflects continuity with regard to his predecessors. However, the consequences of failed policies and the changing landscape of the illicit drug trade still present challenges to the United States.

Military Cooperation

Since the 1980s, the U.S. has launched regional and bilateral initiatives to deal with transnational criminal organizations. The Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Coast Guard participate in drug interdiction at the border and in international waters; crop eradication efforts; undercover infiltration; and intelligence gathering. They also lead special operations to target and capture drug lords from the Peruvian *sierras* to the streets of Bogotá (Colombia) and beach resorts in Cancún (Mexico). Most U.S. funding and personnel for these activities come from military training and arms supply programs. Washington allocates billions of dollars annually to train Latin America's armed forces and law enforcement agencies through the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. In addition, the Department of Defense supplies the security forces of partner countries with arms and ammunition, vehicles, aircraft, and other military equipment. America's armed forces involved in training and counter-trafficking operations include elements of the Southern Command and the Navy's Fourth Fleet.

Although as of early 2018, Trump had not appointed a "Drug Tsar" (as the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy is popularly known), the White House is continuing programs inherited from the Obama administration. The 2017 National Security Strategy describes the administration's aim of "supporting local efforts to professionalize police and other security forces; … and improve information sharing to target criminals and corrupt leaders and

disrupt illicit trafficking" (*National Security Strategy* 2017: 51). Concluding his first official trip to Latin America, Vice-President Mike Pence declared that "the United States is firmly committed to Latin America's security…. [W]e'll continue to work with all the nations across our region to combat drug production and transnational criminal syndicates."[15] U.S. military and law enforcement agencies continue to focus on major drug transit and producing countries. In September 2017, Trump issued a memorandum noting that seventeen Latin American and Caribbean countries accounted for almost eighty percent of the world's major drug producing states that the administration's policies sought to curb.

Following his predecessors, President Trump renewed support for three major regional initiatives. First, the administration is continuing Peace Colombia, which was launched in 2000 as Plan Colombia, which aims to reduce that country's cocaine production and trafficking. Colombia has suffered from five decades of civil strife with irregular armed groups such as the left-wing *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) and right-wing para-military groups. The low intensity civil wars eroded state capacity and fueled the expansion of drug production that financed such groups. Infamous drug gangs such as the *Cartel de Cali*, *Cartel de Medellín*, and *Autodefensas Unidas* exercised control of much of the world's cocaine production. Under Plan Colombia, the U.S. sent thousands of "military consultants" and private contractors to train local security forces and capture drug lords. In September 2015, after years of counterinsurgency, Colombia announced a strategy that reduces the emphasis on coca eradication and focuses on local policing, judicial reform, and rural development. The new policy constitutes a key component of the 2016 Colombian peace accord with the FARC. The Trump administration, which has declared that Colombia remains America's "closest ally in the region," continued to provide aid requested by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

The second major initiative that is being continued under the Trump administration is the Mérida Initiative. For years, Mexico has been a major source and transit country for heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and synthetic drugs destined for the United States. The Mérida Initiative was initially approved by Presidents George W. Bush and Felipe Calderon in 2008, but U.S. cooperation grew after brutal murders of American citizens by drug gangs in Ciudad Juárez in 2010. The Obama administration delivered about $1.8 billion in military equipment, training, and other support to build Mexican law enforcement capacity, reform the country's judicial system, and foster crime prevention. U.S. cooperation helped México arrest leading drug lords, including the capture (twice) of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, who was sent to the U.S. for trial. American assistance also focused on modernizing border protection, even before this issue entered the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

Finally, the State Department is continuing the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) on the grounds that, Secretary Rex Tillerson's words, "a secure and prosperous Central America contributes to a safer, more prosperous United States" (U.S. Department of State 2017).[16] CARSI seeks to curb drug trafficking and neutralize gangs, which are fueling violence and a migration crisis in the region (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama). A related program is the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, which supports law enforcement, including maritime security, border control, and criminal justice. Partners include the Dominican Republic and the fifteen members of the Caribbean Community. In contrast to the Colombian and Mexican plans, the U.S. Agency for International Development is providing financial assistance to reeducate those in rural communities whose livelihood depends on coca and marijuana cultivation.

Balance and New Challenges of the War on Drugs

Despite spending $39 billion in Latin America between 2010 and 2015, America's anti-drug policy has had little success in meeting its targets. The most immediate outcomes are usually shifts in where illicit drugs are produced and trafficked. Opioid abuse has emerged as the greatest drug threat to the United States. To meet demand yet avoid law enforcement efforts, drug cartels have used increasingly sophisticated techniques to smuggle drugs including submarines, aircraft, and tunnels, and periodically relocate within countries and across the region. Estimated flows of drugs from the region have risen, and Mexico has registered a spike in the supply and purity of heroin it sends northward.

Similarly, cocaine production in and trafficking from Colombia has increased significantly. This is due to production migrating to areas inaccessible to crop eradication, favorable terms of trade from currency depreciation, and reduction in illicit mining and greater security owing to the peace settlement with the FARC (Miroff 2015).[17] Colombian authorities acknowledge this alarming trend, which risks destabilizing the peace agreement. The U.S. government is also deeply concerned, and President Trump has considered designating Colombia as a country that has not met its obligations to curb the manufacture and export of narcotics.

Among the effects of the militarization of anti-drug operations are increased violence, corruption, and human rights abuses in Latin America. Policing by armed forces, mainly trained and armed by the U.S., has claimed thousands of lives and weakened state capacity. Since the Mexican armed forces became involved, 200,000 people have been killed and 31,000 individuals are missing (Malkin 2017).[18] This is not likely to change in the near future. In the run up to Mexico's 2018 elections, that country's legislature authorized its army to police anywhere in the country that the president designates. In Colombia, the militarization of anti-narcotics operations in the context of protracted civil war led to thousands of extrajudicial killings, disappearances,

and displacements, as paramilitary groups targeted both suspected rebel sympathizers and drug operations (Paley 2015).[19]

In sum, President Trump is continuing several past administrations' policies despite their material and human costs. Concern over the consequences of U.S. anti-narcotics policies in Latin America led Congress to create a Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission in late 2016. As yet, however, there has been no change in America's anti-drug strategy toward Latin America.

Conclusion

The Trump White House represents both change from and continuity with earlier policies toward Latin America. Trump has advanced efforts underway since the presidency of Ronald Reagan and continued under subsequent Democratic and Republican presidents, to crack down on the illicit drug trade and illegal immigration. Mexico, Colombia, and many Central American and Caribbean nations continue to receive police training as well as American arms and equipment to prevent illicit drugs from entering the U.S.. Border security and deportation remain central to U.S. efforts to curtail undocumented immigration from Latin America.

Nevertheless, in some ways Trump is viewed in the region as an anomaly. Rescinding TPS and DACA potentially leaves millions of migrants vulnerable to deportation. On trade, Trump has abandoned the vision long embodied by his own political party. He has erected tariffs and is renegotiating NAFTA to protect American businesses he considers threatened by trade and to reduce trade deficits that he believes reflect "unfair" practices.

In large measure, though, the sense that Trump is an anomaly is significantly related to his rhetoric and style. His administration views globalization with suspicion; and immigration with revulsion. The Trump White House portrays trading partners as "unfair," and as "raping" and "destroying" American firms and jobs. Recurrent tweets offer insults and threaten to break

international agreements. Trump's apparent desire to distance the U.S. from Latin America is symbolized perhaps most strongly by his campaign promise to build a wall on America's southern border and his modification of Obama's opening to Cuba. Bellicose language and shifting positions undermine bilateral relationships with countries like Mexico and El Salvador. Latin American leaders met Trump's threat of military intervention in Venezuela with a combination of disbelief and concern, fearing a return to an earlier era in which U.S. military intervention in the region was common. And Mexican leaders' plain refusal to discuss a border wall, led Trump to cease speaking of his insistence that Mexico would pay for such a wall.

What does the future hold? To some extent Latin American skepticism toward U.S. intentions is nothing new. However, shutting down trade and immigration could have major long-term negative implications for the U.S.'s regional "soft power," which has been based on those two major cross-border flows. The Trump administration's insistence on building walls and limiting imports and people not only fosters anti-American sentiments in previously friendly neighbors, but also harms U.S. interests in the region, by restricting business and cultural opportunities.

Essay Questions

1) How has support for free trade with Latin America risen and fallen over the past three decades?

2) How has President Trump's policies with respect to free trade differed from those of his predecessors? In what ways have they exhibited continuities?

3) How is immigration from Latin America changing? What social and political forces are driving those changes?

4) In what ways do President Trump's policies with respect to immigration from Latin America continue policies of previous administrations? In what ways do they differ?

5) How have President Trump and his predecessors used military and civilian intervention to try to stop the flow of drugs from Latin America? Compare and contrast the Trump, Bush, and Obama administrations.

Short Answer Questions

Define and describe the importance of the following:

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
Steel tariffs
Remittances
"Comprehensive immigration reform"
Peace Colombia/Plan Colombia
Mérida Initiatve
The Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)

Suggested Readings

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