U.S. POLICY ON LATIN AMERICA

AQ tracks major moments in U.S. relations with the region under the Trump and Biden administrations.

NOTE: TIMELINE COVERS EVENTS FROM 2017 TO JUNE 2024, WHEN THIS ISSUE WENT TO PRINT.

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TRUMP
Jan 2017-Jan 2021

JAN 2017
U.S. WITHDRAWS FROM THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP (TPP)
In his first week in office, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 12-nation TPP trade deal that included Mexico, Peru and Chile.

JUNE 2017
TRUMP REVERSES OBAMA POLICY ON CUBA
The U.S. reinstated some travel and commercial restrictions that the Obama administration had loosened. Later, in Trump’s final weeks in office, the U.S. tightened sanctions on Cuba.

FEB 2017
SANCTIONS AGAINST VENEZUELA
New U.S. sanctions on the Nicolás Maduro regime designated then-Vice President Tareck El Aissami under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. Many more sanctions would follow.

JUNE 2017
U.S. INTRODUCES "ZERO TOLERANCE" BORDER POLICY
The U.S. cracked down on illegal border crossings with a deterrence-first approach. After Trump threatened tariffs on all Mexican goods, Mexico agreed to enforce and detentions on its soil. The U.S. expanded controversial policies, including family separation.

JAN 2018
U.S. BACKS HISTORIC IMF ARGENTINA BAILOUT
Argentina became the IMF’s biggest debtor after receiving an emergency $57 billion loan, in a deal sought by then-President Mauricio Macri and supported by the U.S.

JAN 2019
U.S. RECOGNIZES GUAIDÓ
The U.S., Canada, many Latin American and some European governments recognized Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s interim president.

JAN-FEB 2019
BORDER WALL DISPUTE CAUSES U.S. GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN, REMAIN IN MEXICO PROGRAM TAKES EFFECT
Trump and Congress failed to pass a budget after the White House demanded $5 billion for a border wall. The ensuing 35-day government shutdown, the longest in U.S. history, slowed federal agencies until Trump dropped the demand. The Remain in Mexico program took effect, immediately sending tens of thousands of migrants to Mexico to await U.S. court hearings.

SEPT 2019
GUATEMALA EXPELS ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION
The White House did not contest President Jimmy Morales’ campaign to oust the Commission Against Corruption and Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which was funded in part by the U.S., after striking deals on migration and international policy.

JULY-SEPT 2019
SAFE THIRD COUNTRY AGREEMENTS SIGNED
The U.S. signed deals with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras that required these nations to receive asylum applicants who would have to first seek protection in these countries. The U.S. began immediately to deport asylum seekers to the so-called Northern Triangle countries.

NOV 2018
USMCA SIGNED
After the U.S. imposed new tariffs on Mexico and Canada, the three nations signed a trade deal replacing NAFTA. It includes stricter intellectual property, labor and environmental protections and raised minimum limits for cars to qualify as North American-made.

TOP: JOSE CARUCCI/AFP/GETTY; YURI CORTEZ/AFP/GETTY.
BOTTOM: CARLOS BUCERAS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY; CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY; JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/GETTY.
The Biden administration played a key role in dissuading former President Jair Bolsonaro and parts of the Brazilian military from trying to overturn President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s presidential election victory.

Biden signed an executive action that deports asylum seekers when 2,500 or more people illegally cross the U.S.-Mexico border per day, with some exceptions. The move came after encounters neared 180,000 in April. This represented a dramatic decline from December 2023, when they topped 300,000 and Mexico agreed to increase migrant detentions.

The initiative committed to investing $4 billion in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras over four years to improve conditions and stem migration from the Northern Triangle.

Jernández, Honduras’ former president and a U.S. ally while in office from 2014-22, was extradited on drug and weapons trafficking charges. He was found guilty in a U.S. court in March 2024.

The Venezuelan government and the opposition signed the Barbados Agreement to carry out free and fair elections in 2024. The next day, the U.S. lifted most sanctions on Venezuela’s oil and gold mining industries for a six-month period.

Biden supported the transfer of power as the president-elect’s opponents attempted to derail his inauguration.

The Summit of the Americas was held in Los Angeles while the summit saw several absences, the U.S. and 20 other countries in the hemisphere endorsed the Los Angeles Declaration for Migration and Protection. Biden announced the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, a 12-country initiative aimed at bolstering investment and growth.