

"Si labor empeñosa exige los intereses materiales, empeño aún más valioso reclaman los intereses morales"
(Juan Zorrilla de San Martín)



LEGADO A LAS AMERICAS

OPIDATA

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“Reflexiones en un momento de inflexión”

NOTICIAS DESTACADAS OPIDATA POPULISMO

Reflexiones en un momento de inflexión

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Tipping Point Moment

Personal Introduction and Core Values

I write this essay on my own time, on my personal computer, strictly in my personal capacity, as an individual who has been both blessed and challenged to work with Latin America and the Caribbean over the majority of my professional career.

I have always tried to write frankly about the most important dynamics shaping the region. In recent weeks, and in particular with U.S. **immigrant** and **tariff policies**, the actions of my own government have arguably dominated the discourse, and are powerfully reshaping the **economic** and political dynamics of the region and its **relationships with the U.S.** In the spirit of academic candor with my friends and colleagues in both the U.S. and the region, I feel obliged to address the topic.

I grew up during the Cold War. At the core of my personal political and economic philosophy is the importance of limited government, checked by a separation of powers, adherence to the rule of law, and protection of certain rights of the individual to privacy and free expression. I believe that, while government is necessary for certain purposes such as the common defense and addressing the imperfections of markets, the empowerment and protection of the individual is fundamental for the effort and risk driving economic activity, innovation, and political liberty.

In the international realm, I believe that values, institutions, alliances and legal frameworks are not substitutes for the judicious application of national power, but that they do play fundamental role in shaping the strategic space in which national power is exercised. The U.S. could not have prevailed in the Cold War without attention to its military, economic and technical base, and active resistance to Soviet efforts to subvert imperfect democracies.

Still, it was not U.S. tanks and missiles that secured the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, but rather, the contagion of ideas represented by the West, including individual liberty and dignity, as counterpoints to oppressive authoritarian governments. I



Lessons from Latin America

In the early days of my Latin American work, I taught English as a Second Language (ESOL) to mostly Latin American immigrants. There, I came to know personally the difficulties and often unjust “world within a world” that many immigrants that come to the U.S. must endure to survive. I also worked with Venezuela from the late 1990s and watched the slow, painful hijacking of that nation’s democracy, permitted by a polarized people who had lost their faith in the ability of traditional parties and politicians to deliver results. I similarly saw how Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia leveraged frustrated people who had grown tired of defending the rules of a system that didn’t deliver, to hijack those governments for their own power and enrichment.

Each of those experiences alerted me to how the alienation of people with the poor performance of their politicians, facilitated the election of populists who connected with them, made those “excluded” people feel “seen” and respected, and gave them hope. Such populists have always argued that legal, judicial, and other constraints to their power had to be overcome, because the existing elite, that had “always” run the system for their personal benefit, had “weaponized” the rules to keep challengers such as the “populist,” and thus the people, down. In Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and elsewhere, I watched with disdain as populists there exploited the trust of the most vulnerable to accumulate power for themselves, while systematically destroying the legal, political, and economic basis for opposition, then implemented policies that were devastating for the national economy, yet created enormous opportunities for the self-enrichment of the populists themselves and their cronies.

The U.S. Parallel

On a personal level, I grew up in economically depressed southern Ohio. My honest, trusting, hard-working “MAGA” brethren long felt excluded by “progressive” governments in Washington that seemed unconcerned with the disappearance of their manufacturing jobs, an unchecked inflow of immigrants, and a plague of drugs that decimated communities, even while those same Washington politicians suggested to those “Maga’ that their religious beliefs, attitudes



As with MAGA in the United States, I understand the suffering and alienation that gave rise to Chavismo in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia. I understand why good people rallied around those leaders, even while they took actions that seemed to violate their own laws and constitutions, and while those populist leaders implemented statist economic agendas that proved devastating for their countries.

Ironically, I suspect that there are many in Latin America who can identify personally with the moment that the U.S. is living. That discomfoting parallelism is a reminder that we are all subject to the same defects, frustrations, and temptations that can lead to political choices that bring changes far different than what those who feel “seen by”-and who trust in-the populist leaders, hope for. It is a bond of shared tragedy that, someday, I hope, can bring us together.

Like a child who discovers the imperfections of his or her parent, for much of the world, recognition of the new dynamic in the US is also terrifying, not only because of the global economic consequences and other impacts on their country, but also because at some psychological level, it breaks one’s sense of trust and how the world is supposed to work. It abruptly imposes an a sense of vulnerability, and a new imperative that one must take care of one’s self

The Cost of Populism

I also worry deeply that the perception of U.S. actions in the region resemble that of a wife whose otherwise reliable husband, has suddenly and consistently started beating her. In my conversations with colleagues in the region, I sense deep shock and confusion, denial, attempts to accommodate, and growing disillusionment and anger. Although some current U.S. policy actions are temporary, or misrepresented in the international press, I fear there is an underappreciation in Washington of the image in the region of a United States threatening military action against Panama and Greenland, turning Canada into the 51st U.S. state, rounding up and deporting immigrants to a Salvadoran prison, eliminating temporary protected status to a half-million living in the U.S., cutting off media programs such as VOA, and USAID programs, impacting partners throughout the world, as well as kicking out students protesting against U.S. government policies.



government is “declaring war on everybody,” including its closest democratic friends and partners. In my conversations, I sense that beyond their frustration with the suffering it will cause, the perceived arbitrary and capricious logic of U.S. actions, and perceived lack of consideration for longstanding friendships and special circumstances, has led to a particularly bitter response to U.S. actions.

At the same time, the harsh U.S. response to those who have defied U.S. policies in recent weeks, including toward the [Petro administration in Colombia](#) and the [Maduro regime in Venezuela](#), prevent leaders in the region from expressing the true depth of bitterness they may be feeling.

Ironically, in economic terms, the new U.S. tariffs may wreak the most harm on the U.S., while advancing the economic and political penetration of the PRC in Latin America. [125% tariffs](#) on Chinese goods, and possible further escalation will likely rapidly increase U.S. prices on retail goods, such as those imported by Walmart, as well as increasing prices and destroying the business of on-line sellers such as Shein, Temu, and Amazon. As a complement, the loss of access to a young immigrant population will likely push up U.S. labor costs, especially in the service sector, while the tariff war with Canada [could increase U.S. energy prices](#). Together, the dramatic increase in U.S. prices for factor inputs, diminished access to export markets, questions about the stability of the U.S. dollar, and stability and non-partisan character of the U.S. administrative and legal system, may combine to significantly depress investment in the U.S.

Meanwhile, the [relative exemption of Mexico](#) from such tariffs will expand incentives to import such products into the U.S. through Chinese distributors there. At the same time, the PRC is likely increasingly turn to South American countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay to purchase agricultural goods and strategic metals it stops importing from the United States. Tariffs may strengthen trade integration between Europe, Asia, and Latin America, with less incentive by each of those actors to heed pressures to limit China’s presence by a U.S. whose new trade and security policies are perceived as prejudicial by both.

Leadership and the Civic Voice





unprecedented current moment will play out in U.S. politics, or through the array of legal challenges to the Administration's policies within the **U.S. judicial system**. As elsewhere, the residual strength of U.S. institutions and defense of the rule of law will play a decisive role, as struggles play out between branches of the U.S. government, as the founding fathers of our system intended.

For the U.S., as elsewhere, beyond checks and balances involving the legislature and judicial branches, the willingness of those in government and civil society to speak out against policies they see as harmful, illegal or immoral, will also continue to be vital.

Some may convince themselves that it is better to continue in leadership positions, even if it obliges them to remain silent on, or defend policies they themselves have publicly opposed. At lower levels, there may be some who fear that expressing their concerns could lead to the elimination of their employment, to legal investigations against them, or other sanctions. In the United States, the existence of such fear, in itself should be a call to action.

Conclusion: Democratic Courage

In the U.S., Latin America and elsewhere, the trajectory of democracies depend, at the end of the day, on finding in ourselves the courage that we should never have to find, and to speaking out on what we know is right. Even if we as individuals do not impact worrisome trends, we can never know who will be moved to action by our voice, or by our silence.

► Este artículo forma parte de la **Edición Especial de Opidata**, la plataforma editorial de Legado a las Américas para el análisis de temas clave en la región.

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2 DE NOVIEMBRE Se realizó el primer evento presencial de Legado a las Américas en la ciudad de Lima, Perú



Primer evento de Legado a las Américas en Colombia

📅 febrero 8, 2024



📅 noviembre 29, 2023



Inauguración de las actividades de Legado a las Américas en Ecuador

📅 noviembre 1, 2023



Quiénes Somos



Quienes hemos decidido constituir el Movimiento Legado a las Américas, somos asociaciones nacionales y continentales, así como ciudadanos de 15 naciones, a los que nos motiva el unirnos para bregar juntos en una acción centrada en una Carta de Principios que nos son comunes, a fin de alcanzar la meta que nos hemos propuesto, la cual es un reavivamiento ético y cívico, y como resultado de este, una renovación y reforma en el campo político, económico y social. Podemos definirnos como un movimiento de conciencia.

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