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A year of Biden, changes and permanences

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A year into the Biden administration, there are chiaroscuros and several criticisms regarding the expectations generated by his victory. The return to multilateralism, the treatment different from that of the Donald Trump Government with its "historical allies" (Europe and NATO), the return to the Paris Agreement and the WHO are notorious. But also continuities, not only rhetorical but [strategic](#), regarding China and Russia as threats to (declining) US hegemony.



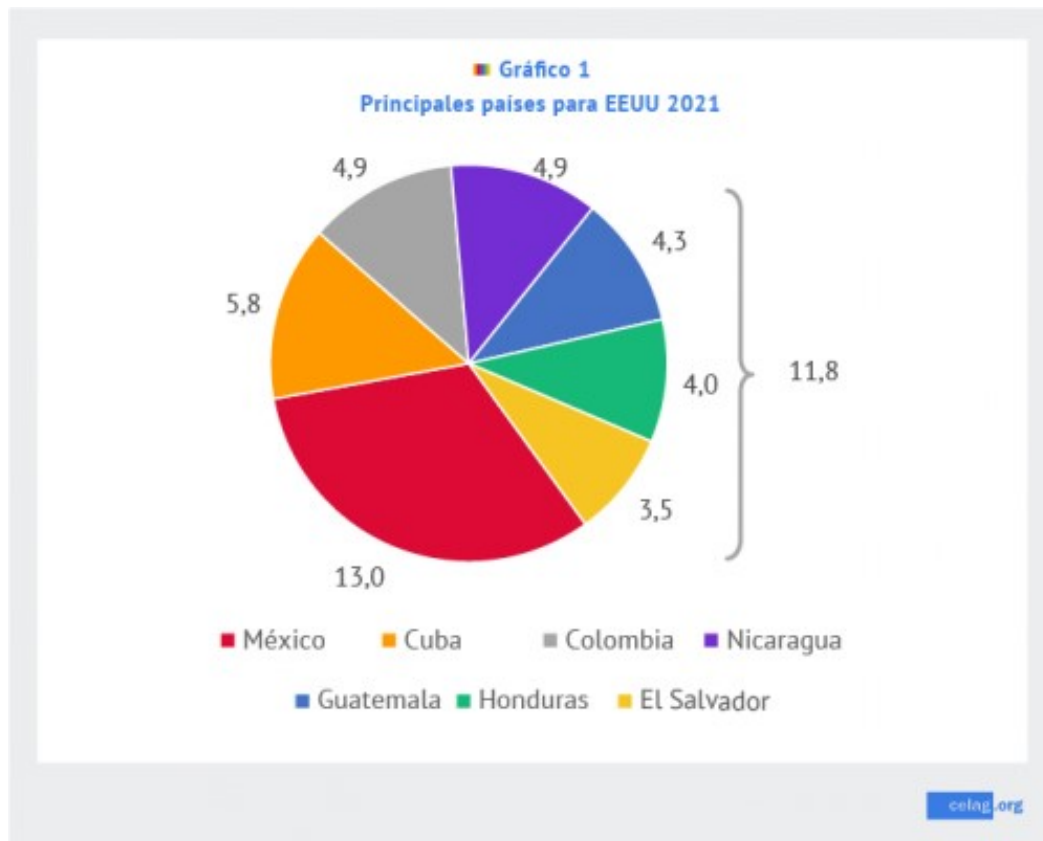
As for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the first year of the Biden administration shows elements of a "[hegemonic return](#)" focused on the attention of the pandemic and the "geopolitics of the vaccine." But it also shows tensions such as migration, aggravated by the economic crisis, the pandemic and climate collapse.

This report aims to take stock of the main continuities and differences between this and the previous government on issues such as the pandemic, priority countries, migration, as well as the follow-up of a year of travel, calls, meetings and dialogues of different members of the Biden Cabinet with their COUNTERPARTS in LAC. Also of the sanctions and restrictions towards countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

A Year of Biden

About 22 trips were made to Latin America and the Caribbean. The main visits were by members of the State Department to Mexico and the Northern Triangle of Central America. In South America, trips to Colombia stand out.

Phone calls with presidents and members of Latin Caribbean governments also show that Mexico and Central America are in the first circle of relevance. Of the approximately thirty calls, those made with the presidents of Mexico, the Northern Triangle of Central America, Colombia stand out, precisely where changes are being made in the main security strategies and the fight against drug trafficking. In second level are Peru, Argentina, Ecuador and Paraguay.



Source: own elaboration with data from the Department of State, January 2021- January 2022

The main aspect of relevance for the Biden administration was migration, especially from Central America and Mexico, but towards the end of 2021 the region showed changes in migratory patterns, an aspect that was intertwined with the pandemic and its consequences.

Sanctions on Latin American government officials also continued under Biden, especially for Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. Several sanctions were added to Paraguayan officials, in line with the global and regional anti-corruption strategy.

Precisely the pandemic is another of the central issues, from the donation of vaccines to several Latin Caribbean countries, in clear dispute with China and Russia, through the adoption of measures at the national, subregional level (with Mexico and Central America) and in multilateral instances such as the WHO and THE UN.

Policy restructuring in the Wider Caribbean

According to the [Western Hemisphere Drug Policy Commission](#) published in December 2020, it was intended to combat drug trafficking through other strategies, strengthening military-police assistance and implementing more mechanisms against corruption.

- [Mexico](#): it was proposed to resume the [High Economic Level Dialogue](#) (DANS). He addressed three axes: regional security, public health, and safe communities between Mexico and the U.S. The result was the end of the Merida Initiative and the implementation of the [Bicentennial Understanding](#). This restructuring is accompanied by the TMEC, already in operation, and the financing projects on the southern border of Mexico in [infrastructure](#) are added.
- Colombia: resumed the [High Economic Level Dialogue](#) (DANS) that focused on economic and social aspects as well as education, environment, health, energy and infrastructure, security and the fight against drug trafficking and democracy and human rights. Since 2017, the [Colombia Peace Plan](#) (of which Biden was a participant) was implemented without changing the security policy, reducing the transfer of narcotics and, above all, stopping violating human rights. In 2021 alone, [145 leaders](#) were killed
- Central America: A meeting with all the presidents of the region has not been held. However, there are 12 trips by different members of the Biden administration. [Ricardo Zúñiga](#) was appointed as special envoy for Central America. At least nine calls with Central American presidents and officials are known. Among the main topics covered are migration, development assistance and corruption.

Migration, a regional challenge

- Although Biden has tried to reverse Trump's immigration policy, the efforts are overwhelmed by a humanitarian crisis. The transit of migrants did not stop increasing in 2021 and reached [1.7 million migrants](#)
- It has applied an emergency order known as [Title 42](#) that, citing the pandemic, allows the expulsion of migrants. In 2021, just over a million migrants were expelled under this measure, which had been banned by a district judge (although with the pandemic it was reactivated).

- On December 6, they reactivated the ["Stay in Mexico"](#) program, imposed by the Trump administration. In addition to [a court ruling](#) to prohibit further increases in beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

The restructuring of anti-migration policies focused on the ["U.S. Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Migration in Central America."](#) It is based on five pillars: 1) addressing economic insecurity and inequality, 2) [combating corruption](#) and strengthening democratic governance and promoting the rule of law, 3) promoting respect for human rights, labour rights and freedom of the press, 4) countering and preventing violence, extortion and other crimes perpetrated by criminal gangs, trafficking networks and other organized criminal organizations and (5) combating sexual, gender-based and domestic violence.

Continuity for Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua

For Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, most of the economic sanctions and restrictions have gone, both for economic sectors and for officials in clear continuity with the policies of Obama (of which Biden was part) and Trump.

For Cuba, despite [Biden's promises, restrictions](#) and sanctions were added that strengthen the measures of the economic blockade; many of these were in the context of the protests in June 2021 and beyond. The [softpower pressures](#) involve funding several human rights organizations, as well as [media outlets](#), which are mostly in the United States.

For Nicaragua, sanctions and restrictions had a high point in the face of the arrests of probable candidates and ahead of the elections.

Finally, in Venezuela, the recognition of Juan Guaidó is striking, with whom Biden had a conversation in March and later. Biden continues the blockade against the Venezuelan economy and continues to finance several organizations. In April they announced \$2 million for the [BetterTogether/JuntosEsMejor](#) strategy and in September [they announced \\$247](#) million and \$89 million in economic assistance for development.

Pandemic and geopolitics of vaccines

The pandemic has marked the Biden administration and left great havoc on the American economy: the [highest inflation in thirty years](#), rising unemployment, problems in global value chains, and also the deepening of [society's internal divisions](#). The [Build Back Better](#) program has not been fully approved by Congress.

Geopolitical disputes over the vaccine caused the Biden administration to increase donations of vaccines developed in the US, given the advance of vaccination in the world with vaccines produced by China and Russia. There are at least two key dimensions in the impact of the pandemic in the region and that intersects with previous problems and crises: 1) the materialization of center-periphery relations in the development and distribution of vaccines and the use of them as "soft power" on the side of those who produce and the pragmatism of the recipient countries; 2) as we announced in the "Geopolitical Keys of 2021", a kind of renewed anti-communism that reveals the historical interests of the American public and private sector.

In Latin America, [under the COVAX scheme](#) (led by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) they receive vaccines without paying: Bolivia, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Although it has become clear that deliveries have delays so these countries and others in the region have resorted to the Russian vaccine.

The [Sputnik vaccine](#) has been distributed in Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela.

China has exported (as of October) 1.1 billion doses of its vaccines to 123 countries. In Latin America, China donated only 2 million doses, while it has sold 388 million doses, with 241 million doses delivered.

For its part, [the United States. USA. announced on June 10](#) the donation of 500 million doses from Pfizer through COVAX to low- and lower-middle-income countries, including Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

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