

# Latin american relationships



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The national politics in most of Latin America has taken a strong turn to the left. A decade ago, under the leadership of Bill Clinton, Latin American chiefs-of-state met in Miami for the Summit of the Americas. At this point, trade deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and talk of the Central American Free Trade Agreement had many Latin America countries forging the most positive relationship with the United States the world had seen for many years. This happy meeting, rather than being a view of things to come, was actually the end of a fleeting era of improved relations between the region and the United States.

The George W. Bush presidency brought a new type of foreign policy to the United States, no doubt tempered by the events of September 11, 2001. The if you're not with us, then you're against us temperament of this policy did not play well in Latin America. One nation after another elected leaders firmly dedicated to left leaning policies such as nationalization of key industries, direct welfare relief to the impoverished, and increased taxation on the wealthy. This skewing of national governments to the left side of the political spectrum has affected Latin America's relations with the United States and the world as a whole.

A mistake many on the outside make when looking at these left leaning leaders in Latin America is to fail to recognize the dual nature of this group. Castaneda argues that there are actually two separate groups of leftist leaders exercising power today in Latin America (3). One group has grown out of the old Communist and Bolshevik movements in the 1920s and 1930s. They have experience and have seen what has worked and failed in the past. This group, represented by Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Tabare Vazquez of Uruguay and to a lesser extent Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva of Brazil has moved

to strengthen and uphold existing ties with the United States, the world at large and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund. Lula welcomed president Bush on his visit to Brazil and expressed his determination to keep his economic initiatives within the bounds suggested by the IMF. Bachelet has remained close to the United States, despite his open opposition to the war in Iraq. A free trade agreement was signed by Bush and ratified by congress between the two countries, establishing mutually beneficial economic partnerships. In Uruguay, Vasquez has shown himself to support globalization and stood in league with the United States by protesting the inauguration of Avo Morales in Bolivia by not attending. Though still opposed to many of the policies of the United States, this group of leaders seems to have the most pragmatic view of international relations and seem willing to engage the world.

The second group is more populist leaders. This group is represented by Avo Morales in Bolivia, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Nestor Kirchner and his successor and wife Cristina Fernandez and nearly Manuel Lopez Obrador, had he not lost the election in Mexico by . 56% of the popular vote. The real support for these leaders is good old-fashioned nationalism. Nationalism in Latin America has been a driving force for change for many years. It is a ubiquitous part of the political landscape (Skidmore 374). These leaders hold power utilizing a few tactics that often do not really help their countries in the long run. One is to consolidate power, even if it is through democratic means. The great divide between rich and poor in Latin America provides great democratic support for leaders that promise to take from the rich and give to the poor. Another way they keep power is to find a common enemy for the proletariat of the nation to rail against. Often this is the great

capitalist juggernaut to the north, the United States, or multinational organizations such as the IMF. Regardless of their target, this type of populist rhetoric, the condemnation of wealthy nations, the IMF, the threats of nationalizing foreign investments, has put these nations at odds with the international community and the United States in particular. While these leaders espouse the support of the poor, economic data make it clear that the first group are being much more successful in their efforts to lift poverty (Castanada 7).

#### Work Cited

Castaneda, Jorge. " Latin Americas Left Turn." Foreign Affairs: Council on Foreign Relations. 2006. 14 Apr. 2008 .

Skidmore, Thomas, and Peter Smith. Modern Latin America, 6th ed. London: Oxford University Press, 2005.