



## Marco Rubio: Building a Pro-America Future in our Hemisphere

### Description

**US :** Our region is currently experiencing at least six major crises. These range from unprecedented mass migration at the U.S. southern border to the complete breakdown of social order in Haiti to ramped-up state oppression in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. At the same time, the outlook for our region remains bright.

Is this a contradiction? Only if we ignore the bright spots in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even as we recognize the horrors occurring not far from our shores—and do our best to counter them—we must draw inspiration from the new generation of potentially pro-America leaders in the Western Hemisphere.

In February 2023, when the internet was full of stories about the new “Pink Tide” of socialism washing over Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Colombia, I visited Ecuador.

There, I found leaders who were unimpressed by the left-wing fads of their neighbors and downright eager to expand collaboration with the United States on security and trade issues. Despite significant internal challenges, this remains the stance of the new Ecuadorian president, Daniel Noboa.

In March 2023, I visited El Salvador. What I saw was remarkable. An entire nation previously ruled by the sadistic MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs—a nation in which adult men were afraid to go out at night, and the watchword was literally “see, hear, and shut up”—had been transformed into a bastion of public safety in a matter of months.

Moreover, the man chiefly responsible for this transformation, President Nayib Bukele, was interested in working with the United States to make his nation even safer.

Earlier this year, I visited Argentina and Paraguay. Both countries have elected conservative presidents—Javier Milei in the first case and Santiago Peña in the second—with a distaste for socialism.

When I spoke with them, these leaders expressed strong support for the American-led international order, as well as a strong desire for greater economic collaboration with the United States.

Noboa, Bukele, Milei, Peña—add to this list Luis Abinader in the Dominican Republic, Dina Boluarte in Peru, Irfaan Ali in Guyana, and Rodrigo Chaves in Costa Rica.

These names make few of our headlines, but they are at the helm of more than 120 million people and more than \$1 trillion in GDP. And they are all willing to strengthen their U.S. partnerships.

I think it is in our national interest to reciprocate this willingness. Should we endorse these leaders wholesale? No—their fittingness to lead is up to their electorates to decide.

Should we imagine they align with us on every issue? No—by and large, they are no more interested in being dependent on the United States than they are in being dependent on China, for instance. Even so, we must recognize that success for these leaders begets success for us.

Consider security. A safer hemisphere benefits the United States by reducing transnational crime and illegal mass migration.

This is why I have introduced the bipartisan Western Hemisphere Security Strategy Act, which would increase bilateral and multilateral security collaboration with friendly Latin American and Caribbean nations, as well as the bipartisan Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Authorization Act, which would help nearby governments address gang violence emanating from Haiti.

The United States would also benefit from expanded collaboration with friendly nations on managed, outcome-oriented trade because they are rich in critical natural resources.

Argentina, for example, contains a tenth of the world's lithium reserves. Peru contains a tenth of the world's copper reserves. And Guyana, as we have recently discovered, holds access to billions of barrels of oil.

Latin America and the Caribbean provide valuable opportunities for nearshoring, too. During the pandemic, we saw that depending on supply chains spread all across the globe places our economy and society in danger.

That danger has been brought back into focus by the Houthis' disruption of shipping in the Red Sea. It is high time we respond to these warnings by bringing critical manufacturing back to America—or, when that is impractical, to the Americas.

To get regional investment flowing, we must expand the role and capacity of the International Development Finance Corporation. The United States should be able to invest in countries that are important to the national interest regardless of their income.

We also need to pass bills that directly incentivize nearshoring. My Medical Manufacturing, Economic Development, and Sustainability (MMEDS) Act would provide tax breaks for pharmaceutical companies to relocate from Asia to Puerto Rico. Why not offer similar breaks for companies to relocate to non-U.S. territories?

Then, there is a whole host of loopholes to close to prevent China from competing unfairly with our neighbors. Chinese companies that use slave labor are currently exploiting our de minimis rule to avoid tariffs and human-rights scrutiny.

In addition, Chinese automakers are preparing to exploit the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement by moving their factories to this hemisphere.

We will never decrease trade with China or increase trade with countries in our region unless we tackle these issues head-on. This is why we must ensure the Inter-American Development Bank is barred from lending to Chinese-controlled firms.

Moreover, it is why Congress must pass my bipartisan Import Security and Fairness Act and Closing Auto Tariffs Loopholes Act. These bills would keep slave-made textiles and Chinese automobiles out of our nation—and keep American investment dollars closer to home.

This brings us to the final area of regional collaboration that would benefit the United States: political resistance to totalitarian regimes.

Simply put, the more influence China, Russia, and Iran have over our neighbors, the more influence they have over us. Building a coalition against such influence is, therefore, obviously desirable.

However, the benefit of keeping totalitarian regimes at bay is less obvious to our neighbors. China offers business partnerships with huge dollar signs attached to them—plus bribes—with no questions asked.

We, meanwhile, are quick to criticize and even condemn countries that seek to be on our side. While we appease Nicolás Maduro for making false promises, we lecture Guatemala on “reproductive rights” and badmouth El Salvador as illiberal.

Foreign officials tell me that it sometimes seems better to be America’s enemy than America’s friend.

We must chart a new diplomatic course immediately. This does not mean we should abandon our core commitments to representative government or the rule of law.

But it does mean we should stop exporting progressive social values that are controversial even inside the United States. And, it means we need to be more supportive of our neighbors when they signal a willingness to work with us, as opposed to China.

Take Paraguay’s continued recognition of Taiwan in the face of Beijing’s bullying. This is a stand for freedom that the United States should be the first to congratulate President Peña on.

And we should couple congratulations with logistical support. A significant reason why Latin American and Caribbean nations turn to China is that they need affordable, reliable telecom infrastructure. We should be willing to offer alternatives to countries that choose not to go down the Huawei route.

All in all, these are just a few of the actions the United States can and should take to strengthen ties with friendly leaders in our region.

However, our most important task is to take seriously the opportunities for collaboration presented by countries like Ecuador, El Salvador, Argentina, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Guyana, and Costa Rica.

For decades, out of all the regions in the world, our own region has received the least consistent attention from U.S. policymakers. This cannot continue if we want security, prosperity, and freedom to win out in the Western Hemisphere. It is time to start doing things differently to build a pro-America future in our region and at home.

**by Marco Rubio**

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