



April 2013 Public Forum “PRO” Analysis

Hey, PFers! The April topic, **Resolved: The continuation of current U.S. anti-drug policies in Latin America will do more harm than good**, is perhaps the most challenging yet. The issue of U.S. drug policy is a contentious one domestically, with many states considering a variety of ballot measures in support of decriminalizing limited use of certain substances. Drug policy is also controversial globally, with many producer nations subject to international measures to control output. This is compounded globally by the fact that Latin America, the location of many such producer nations, is a rising region of the world and will become increasingly relevant globally as our neighbors to the South continue to bolster or, in some cases, build democratic institutions.

At the intersection of these concerns, U.S. drug policy is a major determinant of the future direction of progress on both fronts. The U.S. “war on drugs,” begun officially during the Nixon administration in 1971, was a culmination of a long history of strict disapproval of mind-altering substances in U.S. culture. Throughout the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, the U.S. government progressively escalated anti-drug policies, “getting tough” on drugs. A centerpiece of these efforts was and continues to be the use of U.S. military institutions and monetary aid in an attempt to control drugs at one of their main sources, Latin America. The rationale behind these policies was that, given the weak institutions and corruption in Latin American countries that grow, refine, and traffic drugs, drug trafficking would remain an attractive option in locally. Leaders argued that stopping the drug trade would be impossible but for a strong effort to locate counter the drug trade on the **supply side**.

Recently, Latin American leaders and notable figures in the United Nations have called for the U.S. to step away from harsh, military-oriented policies and toward a health-oriented approach. The Obama administration has, notably, backed away from “war on drugs” rhetoric and embraced some public health approaches but stands firm on its policy to interdict and eradicate drugs where needed to stem supply and to keep all law enforcement options open. The U.S. continues to argue in favor of a harsher approach than host countries would like, cautioning that legalization and soft-line policy without harsh enforcement mechanisms do nothing to stem trafficking violence while paving the way for an explosion in drug use.

The core controversy of this topic is one of approach (as explained above) but also one of geopolitics. Given international outcry, when is it prudent to abandon a policy that the U.S. believes to be in its best interest? Today, we’re discussing the arguments in favor of substantially changing drug policy toward Latin America. We will begin with a core objection:

- 1. Supply-side drug policy fails because it doesn’t tackle high demand – causes surges in violence. Alternatives are better.**

At their core, international criticism of U.S. drug policy argues that we focus too heavily on the supply of drugs while ignoring the high demand. The Huffington Post explains the basic objection:



Huffington Post, 2011 ["Latin American Leaders Blast U.S. Drug Policies, Call For Decriminalization," December 21, Huffington Post Latino Voices.]

In recent years, Latin America countries and the U.S. have differed about who is most to blame for the uninterrupted drug trafficking, with Mexico leading the charge with the claim that it is the steady and insatiable demand for drugs in this country that drives the huge industry. According to this year's National Drug Threat Assessment report by the U.S. Department of Justice, the overall demand and abuse of heroin, marijuana and methamphetamine has only increased. For countries such as Mexico, which bear the economic burden of policing a drug trade whose overwhelming scope has been linked to the deaths of an estimated 45,000 persons in the last five years, it is clear that frustrations are running high. President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner of Argentina said, "It seems that Latin America ends up with all the deaths and guns, and others end up with the drugs and the money." The concerns raised this week are not new. Earlier this month, leaders from every Latin American nation converged to inaugurate CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. While the international financial crisis was the main issue tackled over the two-day summit in Caracas, Venezuela, the drug trade and the violence that accompanies it was another important topic of discussion. Some of the head of states present in Venezuela assigned historical value to the meeting. President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua said there that the gathering of the 33 nations was the beginning of the end for the Monroe Doctrine, the 1823 U.S. policy which gave Washington the rationale to intervene in the region. Referring to the almost \$700 million of aid that the U.S. has invested in Mexico to fight drug traffickers, Ortega said, "All the money, regardless how much it is multiplied, and all the blood, no matter how much is spilled" would not curtail the drug trade "as long as the north continues consuming." Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos suggested that he would not oppose legalization of marijuana and cocaine in order to reduce drug-related violence.

This criticism underscores a basic, but little known, truth: **Most drugs are not consumed where they are grown.** Rather, they are grown cheaply by poor farmers in Latin American countries such as Colombia, refined, and trafficked north, particularly to the United States, to be sold for many times the price.

Given the risk involved (not to mention the fact that drug users are often physically addicted and will pay very high prices for substances on which they are dependent), drug traffickers can sell illegal substances to (comparatively) wealthy U.S. users for a significant **mark-up**. Since the **mark-up** (that is, the amount of difference between what it costs to produce and traffic drugs versus what they are eventually sold for) is large, trafficking organizations are guaranteed a sizable profit. This creates a huge **incentive** to take the risk to traffic drugs, no matter how harsh the legal penalties and how dangerous the business. **Essentially, traffickers can expect to make so much money that even a substantial risk seems worth it.**

Moreover, some numbers indicate that the U.S. demand for drugs has not decreased, no matter how harsh the penalties in Latin America. U.S. users continue to consume increasing amounts of drugs, despite the harsh penalties imposed in producing and trafficking nations.

This angers Latin American leaders because they do not perceive that the U.S. is doing its part to deal with high demand for drugs. In addition, **interdiction** (military enforcement against drugs) efforts are often bloody and dangerous even to civilians with no hand in the drug trade. The Huffington Post continues,

Huffington Post, 2011 ["Latin American Leaders Blast U.S. Drug Policies, Call For Decriminalization," December 21, Huffington Post Latino Voices.]



Citizen Insecurity—Latin America is as violent as any region in the world, even war-ravaged Africa. Few countries have made much headway in containing the surge of criminal violence. In most places, as many polls show, improved security is the public’s major concern. The situation in the “northern triangle” countries of Central America—Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—is particularly alarming. There, homicide rates have skyrocketed and unchecked brutality is growing. Democratic institutions, the rule of law, and economic and social progress are all at risk. The Caribbean countries have also been severely affected and could face worsening conditions. Latin Americans of all political stripes point fingers at the United States for its failure to curtail its huge demand for drugs, which bankrolls criminal gangs. They also call on the United States to do more to control the southward flow of arms and illicit cash and to reform its policies on immigration and deportations, which aggravate problems of crime and violence.

Essentially, leaders are concerned because trafficking violence is growing and beginning to affect the overall security situation. Given the perception that the U.S. is content with the rising tide of violence in other countries but reluctant to stem the demand in their own, the supply-side argument is gaining credence. Many believe that interdiction fails to curb drugs but does introduce a military element that increases violence when traffickers fight drug enforcers. Youngers and Rosin continue,

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 [“Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy,” Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

The drug trade is more like a balloon than a battlefield—when one part of a balloon is squeezed, its contents are displaced to another. Similarly, when coca production is suppressed in one area, it quickly pops up somewhere else, disregarding national borders. Arrested drug lords are quickly replaced by others who move up the ranks; dismantled cartels are replaced by smaller, leaner operations that are harder to detect and deter. When drug-trafficking routes are disrupted by intensive interdiction campaigns, they are simply shifted elsewhere. Andean coca cultivation, as depicted by the State Department’s own annual estimates, is remarkable for its stability at around 200,000 hectares per year (see chart on page 3). While the share of crops raised in each coca-producing country has fluctuated, the total land area under cultivation each year has not varied dramatically.⁴ Moreover, according to U.S. government statistics, the average yield of coca leaves per hectare has risen over time, so that even apparent declines in cultivated land area may not translate into less coca available for processing into cocaine.⁵In announcing the U.S. government figures for 2003 coca production, U.S. officials all but declared victory. A sharp drop in Andean region coca cultivation, from 223,700 hectares in 2001 to 173,450 hectares in 2003, was attributed to a significant reduction of Colombia’s coca crop and a smaller reduction in Peru.⁶ While U.S. officials took the drop as a sign of success, the reduction represents only a 5 percent decrease, if measured from 1999 instead of the 2001 high point.⁷ Evidence is already mounting of a shift in coca production within Colombia to new areas, as farmers flee massive fumigation campaigns, and coca production in Bolivia is again on the rise. A similar phenomenon happens with arrests of traffickers. Removing one set of international drug dealers has often simply cleared the way for rivals and new entrants to the drug trade, rather than reducing the size of the drug market. Smashing the large Mexican and Colombian cartels led to the formation of groups that are smaller and harder to detect. Larger and more frequent drug seizures, often offered as evidence of policy success, are in fact inherently ambiguous indicators. They may instead reflect increased drug production and trafficking, as traffickers seek to compensate for their anticipated losses.

Many who criticize supply-side drug policy make the balloon analogy, and you can use this to answer a number of “con” arguments. The argument is, essentially, that since there’s so much money to be made, even if drug traffickers are defeated in one area, they’ll simply spring up in another. This is because



people still want to buy the product and will pay a lot of money -- if there is a market for a product, someone will supply it.

This argument is strategic because, when the con argues that examples, such as the drastic decrease in cocaine trafficking in Colombia, prove drug policy is successful, you can argue that these successes are ultimately meaningless. Examples like Colombia simply represent the industry moving, not disappearing. Charles Kenny continues,

Kenny, 2012 ["The Narco State," Charles, Schwartz Fellow at the *New America Foundation*, April 18.] America's longest running war -- the one against drugs -- came in for abuse this weekend at the Summit of the Americas. The abuse is deserved. Forty years of increasingly violent efforts to stamp out the drug trade haven't worked. And the blood and treasure lost is on a scale with America's more conventional wars. On the upside, we know that an approach based around treating drugs as a public health issue reaps benefits to both users and the rest of us. President Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala opened the rhetorical offensive against the drug war last week when he wrote that "decades of big arrests and the seizure of tons of drugs" have not stopped "booming" production and consumption. Molina argued that "global drug policy today is based on a false premise: that the global drug markets can be eradicated."

Drug abuse, like alcoholism, should be treated as a public health problem, he suggested. We should consider a move towards drug regulation -- including taxation and prohibition of sales to minors. As this weekend's discussion made clear, Molina's statement represents region-wide concern with the business-as-usual strategy towards drugs. Indeed, most of Latin America has already moved towards decriminalization of drug possession in small amounts, and some are considering legalization. But it isn't just in Latin America that the winds of change are blowing when it comes to drugs policy. Last June, the Global Commission on Drug Policy, which included Kofi Annan, three former presidents from Latin America, a prime minister and former president from Europe, former Fed Chair Paul Volker and former Secretary of State George Shultz, concluded much the same thing as Molina. "The global war on drugs has failed," they reported. It is high time to move towards experimentation with "models of legal regulation." As a domestic policy, a harsh enforcement approach has done little to control drug use, but has done a lot to lock up a growing portion of the U.S. population. Cocaine and opiate prices are about half their 1990 levels in America today. And 16 percent of American adults have tried cocaine -- that's about four times higher than any other surveyed country in a list that includes Mexico, Colombia, Nigeria, France, and Germany. And while criminalization has a limited impact on price and use, it has a significant impact on crime rates. Forty percent of drug arrests in the United States are for the simple possession of marijuana. Nearly half a million people are behind bars in the United States for a drug offense -- that's more than ten times the figure in 1980. As a result, the United States is spending about \$40 billion per year on the war on drugs -- with three quarters of that expenditure on apprehending and punishing dealers and users. All of those police out there slapping cuffs on folks found with a baggie of Purple Kush aren't watching for drunk drivers or burglars. And drug enforcement is more closely linked with violent crime than drug use. Meanwhile, the cost of lost productivity from jailed citizens is around \$39 billion per year. Such sums are considerably higher than the costs of ill-health associated with drug use, suggesting in strict economic terms at least that it isn't drugs -- but drug control policy -- that is the problem. Add in the social effects of mass incarceration (from rape to split families to unemployment to poverty) and the uncertain benefits of the war on drugs become dwarfed by the known costs. Harsh enforcement hasn't failed as a policy only in the United States, of course. Across countries, analysis by World Bank economists Philip Keefer, Norman Loayaza, and Rodrigo Soares suggests that drug prosecution rates or the number of police in a country has no effect on drug prices. Conversely, the Global Commission on Drug Policy report compiled evidence suggesting that approaches based on treatment rather than punishment were far more effective in reducing consumption, HIV prevalence, and crime rates among users. For example, Britain and Germany, both of which long ago adopted harm reduction strategies for people injecting drugs -- programs that include needle exchange programs and medication -- see HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs below 5 percent. The United States and Portugal, by contrast, where such strategies were introduced later or only partially, see HIV prevalence among a similar community at above 15 percent. Again, the global evidence that legalization would increase use is sparse. Use is far more connected with social, environmental, and economic contexts than legal status. Portugal decriminalized drug possession and use ten years ago, and has seen drug use fluctuate at similar rates to countries where possession remains illegal according to the Commission report. Similarly, U.S. states that have decriminalized cannabis possession have not seen greater increases in use than those states where it remained illegal. But if the war on drugs is a failed domestic policy in the United States, it is also -- particularly as the U.S. population is the world's largest consumer of illicit drugs -- a failed global strategy. And a larger price for that failure is paid abroad. Drug crop eradication programs simply don't work to dry up global supply. They can drive up the local price of a crop -- but that alone is likely only to force a move in production rather than overall reduction. Aggregate coca



cultivation in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru was higher in 2007 than in the late 1990s, for example -- despite stepped up eradication programs in all three countries. In turn, this might help explain why multiple, expensive eradication efforts from Colombia to Afghanistan have done little to increase drug prices in Western markets, which reached historic lows in the mid 2000s. Connected to all this is the fact that farmers are not the ones making big money from the drug trade. The price of one kilo of cocaine at the point of production in Colombia in 2000 was about \$650. By the time it reached Miami, that price had risen to \$23,000, with a final retail price of closer to \$120,000 -- suggesting the point of production price is a little more than half a percentage point of the final price. Given the low wholesale price, it's not surprising that experience from around the world suggests that given other crop options -- flowers in Thailand, onions in Pakistan, potatoes in Laos -- and the ability to get those crops to a functioning market, farmers will often abandon coca and poppy production for these more profitable sources of revenue. The war on drugs, by creating instability and weakening the operation of those markets, may have the perverse effect of increasing the attractiveness of drug crop production for farmers. And while eradication doesn't work to reduce supply in rich countries, alongside interdiction efforts it can have catastrophic spillover effects in poor countries. Mexico is spending \$9 billion a year to fight drug trafficking, for example, and yet the drug war killed 34,000 people between 2006 and 2010, according to the government. Some 27,000 Colombians died each year during the 1990s as a result of violence fueled by drug cartels. Analysis by Jennifer Holmes and colleagues at the University of Texas suggests that coca cultivation was not related to violence in Colombia between 1999 and 2001 -- but eradication efforts were. Again, economists Oeindrila Dube and Suresh Naidu found that U.S. military aid to Colombia was associated with greater paramilitary violence: A 10 percent increase in U.S. military aid was associated with a 15 percent rise in paramilitary attacks in regions where there was a Colombian army base, compared to other regions. In fact, thanks to the profitable, violent, criminal oligopolies that are the spinoff of the global war on drugs, developing countries that produce drugs or are on drug trade routes face a risk of descending into narco-kleptocracy. In 2010, the commander of Venezuela's armed forces, the president of Nicaragua, the prime minister of Kosovo, the son of the president of Guinea, and a host of politicians allied with the Burmese junta were all deeply involved in the drug trade according to Moises Naim of the Carnegie Endowment.

Many, like Kenny, argue that we should shift to a “public health” focus. This is essentially an umbrella term for a number of drug policy strategies ranging from full legalization of drugs to controlled legalization to decriminalization to decreased enforcement. The common thread of all these strategies is that they want to decrease emphasis on law enforcement solutions to drugs and instead treat addiction as a health issue instead of a public safety issue. These approaches include needle exchange programs for addicts to prevent the spread of diseases, public education on the dangers of drug addiction, and treatment programs for those with serious dependency. Advocates argue that there would be many benefits, including:

1. Addicts would get the help they need to successfully quit or moderate their consumption. Currently, the risk of prison time or other penalties means that there is a serious social stigma associated with seeking treatment as well as, in some cases, a fear of legal consequences. Many argue that this drives addiction underground where addicts, with nowhere to turn, fall deeper into destructive behaviors and use more drugs. If help were available, the argument goes, people would learn to control their consumption or quit altogether. This would dampen **demand** for drugs. With less demand, supply may shrink on its own.

2. Using force creates instability in producer countries when law enforcement inevitably collides with illicit activities. Weak institutions and poorly operating markets make it difficult for poor farmers and others involved in the drug trade to seek legitimate livelihoods. If they can't get crops to market or fear



violence without drug gang protection, they are unlikely to stop growing illegal product. On the flip side, stronger democratic institutions and increased stability increases the chances that a working social system can deal productively with drug crime and drugs addiction.

2. Military focus causes corruption.

Corruption refers to the overall credibility, or trustworthiness, of government officials and institutions within a country. Corrupt governments and officials often engage in illegal activities, using government resources for personal profit to the detriment of individuals in society. Countries with high levels of corruption have difficulty sustaining a free, open, and democratic society for a number of reasons:

- a. The self-interested dealings of local officials mean that they are not really serving the population.
- b. People in society, perceiving corruption, do not trust their government and, as a result, they are less likely to respect its laws. In these instances, law and order may break down quickly, causing conflict.

Youngers and Rosin explain:

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 ["Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

In every country studied that receives significant U.S. counterdrug assistance, U.S. support was instrumental in bringing the military into a domestic law enforcement role and has created a confusion of roles and conflicts between military and police forces. A related problem is U.S. military training of foreign police forces. Such training goes directly against efforts across the region during the 1980s and 1990s to bring police forces under civilian control. Moreover, funding for this training is largely provided by the U.S. Defense Department budget and hence circumvents both oversight and human rights safeguards. Training of local police forces by U.S. Special Forces is of particular concern. The "confidential" nature of counterdrug programs can further exacerbate problems of lack of civilian oversight and impunity within military forces, thereby contributing to the proliferation of corruption when military personnel are brought into more direct contact with the drug trade.

Youngers and Rosin contrast the civilian police force with the military. Just like in the U.S., countries have a military for national defense and a police force for local defense. U.S. drug policy bolsters the influence of the military in target countries, which causes corruption in two ways:

- a. Lack of **transparency**. This essentially means that the money and training sent from our military to militaries in Latin America is confidential and secret to all but a select few. This is because the military, unlike the police, does not have to disclose as much about their activities and practices. Thus, U.S. joint drug control operations are not subject to all of the normal oversight and are not checked by human rights watch groups. This not only gives the opportunity for corruption (it's easiest to get away with when fewer groups are watching what you're doing) but also gives the appearance of corruption even where none may exist (people assume the worst when they aren't allowed to know what you're doing).



- b. Increased military contact with traffickers. Militaries in Latin America working on drug cases have extensive contact with individuals involved in the drug trade due to the nature of their jobs. This creates opportunities for the military to be bribed or otherwise compromised by drug traffickers. This not only decreases public confidence in the military but also makes the drug trade infinitely worse by allowing it to penetrate the highest levels of national defense.

As corruption is such a cornerstone of effective democracy, you can use this as an internal link to any number of "Latin American Democracy" is good arguments.

3. Unilateral decisions on focus, timing, and mandates harm US-Latin America relations.

We've already mentioned the growing tide of international resentment of U.S. drug policy, but in Latin America it's reached a boiling point. IAD explains,

Inter-American Dialogue, 2012 ["Remaking the Relationship: The United States and Latin America," Policy Report, April.]

Some enduring problems stand squarely in the way of partnership and effective cooperation. The inability of Washington to reform its broken immigration system is a constant source of friction between the United States and nearly every other country in the Americas. Yet US officials rarely refer to immigration as a foreign policy issue. Domestic policy debates on this issue disregard the United States' hemispheric agenda as well as the interests of other nations. Another chronic irritant is US drug policy, which most Latin Americans now believe makes their drug and crime problems worse. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, while visiting Mexico, acknowledged that US anti-drug programs have not worked. Yet, despite growing calls and pressure from the region, the United States has shown little interest in exploring alternative approaches. Similarly, Washington's more than half-century embargo on Cuba, as well as other elements of United States' Cuba policy, is strongly opposed by all other countries in the hemisphere. Indeed, the US position on these troublesome issues—immigration, drug policy, and Cuba—has set Washington against the consensus view of the hemisphere's other 34 governments. These issues stand as obstacles to further cooperation in the Americas. The United States and the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean need to resolve them in order to build more productive partnerships.

National Security Network continues, emphasizing the importance of the relationship:

National Security Network, 2012 ["Renewing Ties to Latin America," <http://nsnetwork.org/renewing-ties-to-latin-america/>.]

Over the weekend, President Obama met with leaders from across the Americas in Colombia for the Summit of the Americas. That the event was overshadowed by a scandal involving Secret Service agents and uniformed military is a shame. Latin America is among the world's fastest-growing economic regions, a central U.S. partner for trade and energy security. We share important security challenges, in particular those posed by the drug trade, which we must confront together while resisting fear-mongering over other concerns, such as the extent of Iranian influence in the region. Even as the region continues to face human and social challenges, its progress in promoting the rule of law and combating poverty and inequality offers hope and inspiration for other regions of the world emerging from or still mired in conflict. Even as the U.S. and the region continue to stumble over differing views towards Cuba, that country itself is changing. Although not fast enough for other regional governments, the Obama administration has pursued a policy of pragmatic thaw with the island nation as it moves in the direction of a market economy. The U.S. has much to gain in trade, energy security from strengthened relations with Latin America. As Shannon O'Neil, fellow for Latin American studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, writes, "Latin America today represents a good economic news story for the United States. Trade with Latin America has grown faster than virtually any other region in the world, reaching



nearly a trillion dollars. U.S. shipments to its southern neighbors now total some \$350 billion annually, roughly a quarter of all exports. With somewhat complementary industries and economies, expanding these sales further can benefit all sides.” O’Neil continues, “Energy too provides a promising opening, not just for the economies in the region but also for shifting the fraught geopolitical balance for the better. Brazil’s huge oil finds, Colombia’s rising output, and the possibility of renewed exploration and production in Mexico (if the next president reforms the oil sector to allow foreign direct investment in the same manner as Brazil’s Petrobras), would all benefit the United States. The hemisphere is also a renewable energy leader, with wind, solar, hydroelectric, and ethanol. If integrated, these alternative sources could further the quest for a cleaner and more competitive energy matrix worldwide.” [Shannon O’Neil, [4/13/12](#)]

The drug policy, then, is a very significant and growing irritant in US-Latin America relations. These relations are becoming more important because Latin American markets are growing, making them potentially important to the future of U.S. exporters. Providing exporters a large market to sell their goods brings money into the U.S., which is excellent for the economy. Losing out on said markets makes it difficult for U.S. companies to compete globally, which is bad for the economy.

Moreover, Latin America has many energy resources, including oil and also is becoming a hotbed of innovation in renewable energy resources. These resources are important to the U.S. as we continue to seek new sources of energy to power the energy-intensive lifestyle to which Americans are accustomed.

In addition,

Inter-American Dialogue, 2012 [“Remaking the Relationship: The United States and Latin America,” Policy Report, April.]

There are compelling reasons for the United States and Latin America to pursue more robust ties. Every country in the Americas would benefit from strengthened and expanded economic relations, with improved access to each other’s markets, investment capital, and energy resources. Even with its current economic problems, the United States’ \$16-trillion economy is a vital market and source of capital (including remittances) and technology for Latin America, and it could contribute more to the region’s economic performance. For its part, Latin America’s rising economies will inevitably become more and more crucial to the United States’ economic future. The United States and many nations of Latin America and the Caribbean would also gain a great deal by more cooperation on such global matters as climate change, nuclear non-proliferation, and democracy and human rights. With a rapidly expanding US Hispanic population of more than 50 million, the cultural and demographic integration of the United States and Latin America is proceeding at an accelerating pace, setting a firmer basis for hemispheric partnership.

Aside from echoing the reasons stated by the previous author (the economy, energy), IAD argues that, given the increasing **soft power** (global influence) of Latin America, they will be an important partner to the U.S. in addressing global issues such as climate change, etc. Further, as the Latin American immigrant population in the U.S. grows, the cultural differences between the U.S. and Latin America will continue to shrink. This makes Latin America a natural choice as an ally to the U.S. in the future.

Without a good relationship, however, all of these benefits will be diminished, if not eliminated. Given the inevitable rise of Latin America globally, authors argue, it is important to remove irritants to the



U.S.-Latin America relationship such as drug policy. Failure to do so may harm the ability of the U.S. to maintain a strong economy and energy security as well as to participate in solving a variety of global problems. When constructing your case, feel free to concentrate on any of these diverse impact areas.

4. U.S. policy disproportionately targets the poor, damaging democratic institutions.

We've already discussed the impact of U.S. drug policy on corruption in Latin America. There is also, according to Youngers and Rosin, a problem of **focus**:

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 ["Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

In Latin America, the source of most of the cocaine and heroin on U.S. streets, the drug war has not only failed to curb production and trafficking, but has weakened democratic institutions. It also disproportionately targets the rural poor, who have few economic alternatives aside from growing illicit crops and who benefit the least from the drug trade. Concerned by the collateral damage of the drug war, WOLA commissioned an in-depth investigation into the impact of drug control policies on human rights and democracy in Latin America, giving particular attention to how counterdrug policies have affected the region's militaries, police forces, and judicial and legal systems. The book includes detailed studies on U.S. military and police drug control assistance programs, and case studies from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and the Caribbean, all major cultivation, production, or transit zones. We found that in one nation after another, U.S. drug control policies are undermining human rights and democracy and causing enormous damage to some of the most vulnerable populations in the hemisphere. The United States' insistence on zero tolerance for drug crops has led to massive forced eradication of coca and opium poppy crops, often the principal source of income for impoverished farmers. With few alternatives available, these families are ratcheted down into deeper poverty when their most important cash crop is destroyed. The region's militaries, which have not been held accountable for widespread human rights abuses and authoritarian dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, have been brought back into domestic law enforcement because the local police forces are either incapable or too corrupt to deal with the threat from drug trafficking and its associated violence.

Drug eradication and interdiction policies currently focus on disrupting drugs at their source: growers. These growers, however, are often not the same people who make huge profits from the illegal drug trade. By focusing on punishing poor farmers, U.S. drug policy ensures that these individuals remain impoverished. This creates high levels of class stratification in Latin America (meaning there's a huge divide between the rich and the poor). A large rich-poor gap makes a thriving society difficult and complicates a transition to democracy. Moreover, focus on low-level drug violators paves the way for human rights abuses:

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 ["Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

In order to further its drug control policy, the U.S. government has forged alliances with military and police forces with questionable and even deplorable human rights records. Though sometimes the human rights problem is recognized, training and assistance is usually provided to recipient governments and security forces even before they have shown clear signs of political will to alter past patterns of abuse. Moreover, successive U.S. administrations have, at different times, downplayed or



misrepresented human rights situations in order to obtain congressional support for counterdrug assistance. In some cases, the U.S. government is still supporting forces with a history of human rights violations and impunity. In others, U.S. policy directly results in human rights abuses. In the final analysis, it is morally wrong and ultimately counterproductive to provide U.S. assistance to any military or police force that operates outside the boundaries of the rule of law.

That is, the U.S. supports methods of drug enforcement that do not comply with basic human rights standards. Not only is this morally objectionable; it also necessarily erodes the integrity of these basic principles in Latin American countries. It's impossible for the U.S. to promote transparent, equitable, rights-based institutions if they assist in the commission of rights abuses. Further,

Finally, Youngers and Rosin summarize and conclude that the increasing militarization of U.S. drug policy is bad for regional democracy. This is because it short-circuits emerging and transitioning democracies by imposing constraints against a representative government:

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 ["Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

It is in the interest of the United States to have stable, democratic governments in its hemisphere. Yet U.S. international drug control policies can have a profoundly destabilizing effect, economically as well as politically. Even when significant social conflict and political instability is generated by the implementation of drug policy, more often than not U.S. policymakers fail to adjust the policy to the realities—and consequences—on the ground. Particularly in the convulsive Andean region, U.S. drug policy may in fact be destabilizing democracies that are already quite fragile. All too often, the use of "narcoterrorist" rhetoric in coca-producing countries identifies small coca farmers as military threats and suggests that they are somehow related to global terrorist networks. It also paints them as criminals, rather than valid interlocutors, so that any efforts to seek dialogue and common ground are cast as illegitimate. This in turn marginalizes significant sectors of the population and creates a situation in which conflict and violence are almost inevitable. The political consequences of ignoring significant sectors of society could be explosive. In the wake of September 11, both the drug war and the Latin American region have lost political ground in Washington. The attention of policymakers has shifted to the terrorism threat and to other parts of the world, while Latin America and the Caribbean have moved to the bottom of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In response, officials in charge of U.S. policy toward the region have sought attention and resources by lumping a broad range of issues together in the counterterrorism—and narcoterrorist—basket. Many U.S. officials and policymakers now talk about all illicit transborder activities as potential terrorist threats, including drug production and trafficking, illegal migration, arms trafficking and money laundering. It is certainly possible that illicit transborder activities could be used to support terrorism, but Latin America is not the Middle East. Defining all of these problems as terrorist threats is unhelpful and potentially destabilizing. Taking the fervor over antiterrorism a step further is the U.S. Southern Command, which has now taken to calling drugs a "weapon of mass destruction."⁸ This rhetoric promotes continuation of a failed approach and the notion that the United States, through its drug policy toward Latin America, must protect itself at any cost against this evil product emanating from the region.



5. Benefits are trumped by disadvantages.

Finally, despite a growing consensus that current policy is potentially ineffective and even harmful, the con has a number of arguments that defend the status quo. I'll outline them in the "con" analysis, but I wanted to include some on-point "pro" answers in this post.

First, it's important when you're "pro" to make the debate less about what actually impacts drug trafficking and more about stability and international relationships. This is because, given the nature of mind-altering and addictive substances, it's almost impossible to make the problem disappear:

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 ["Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

We are not questioning the commitment or the integrity of those who work tirelessly, against daunting odds, to keep drugs off America's streets. We are not saying that fighting drugs is impossible and that we should just give up. On the contrary—we are saying that we can do better. More effective and humane approaches to the enormous problems of drug trafficking and illicit drug use do exist. But achieving success will require an honest assessment of whether or not we are moving closer to our goals—and if not, what we need to be doing differently. We must go beyond the mentality of fear shared by U.S. policymakers and the public at large that has made any challenges to current drug policy taboo. No perfect solutions exist. It is unlikely that illicit drug use can be eliminated in the foreseeable future, or that transnational crimes like drug trafficking can be completely stamped out. But if we can open up a debate, evaluate the problems and the range of possible strategies to confront them, and then implement the policies either proven or showing the most promise to be effective, we can meet our fundamental goal of reducing drug abuse in the United States. Along the way, we will ensure that in Latin America, U.S. drug control policies do not continue to violate human rights and civil liberties, spark social upheaval, and undermine democracy.

Youngers and Rosin make an important impact framing argument here: **drug use at some level is inevitable. Attempts to fully eradicate it will fail.** Thus, the most relevant question becomes how to manage it with the least harm to other concerns, such as government-to-government relationships and internal stability. When debating, you can use this evidence to weigh the con impacts against your own as a kind of tie-breaker.

Moreover, they argue that even a marginal increase in drug trafficking as a result of a "softer" policy would be preferable to some of the negative impacts of current military-based approaches:

Youngers and Rosin, 2004 ["Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy," Executive Summary, Coletta, Senior Fellow and Eileen, Manager, Drug Policy Project, at Washington Office on Latin America.]

Those advocating the supply-side approach to drug control argue that the problems related to illegal drug production and consumption would be even worse without the international counterdrug programs presently in place. If these programs were abandoned, they say, the situation would deteriorate and illicit drugs would be even more readily available—even a marginal impact resulting from these efforts is better than none. What is missing from this line of reasoning, however, is a frank



assessment of the collateral damage caused by this approach, and whether such damage outweighs any as yet unproven positive impact of current programs.

In sum, advocates of the resolution will most successfully argue that the limited successes of a supply-focused drug policy are more than offset by the international chaos and possible human rights abuses they arguably cause. **Simply put, the end gains are too limited and unpredictable to justify the means – particularly in regions where democratic success is not guaranteed and on which the U.S. may increasingly depend.**

That's all for today! We hope today's analysis was very helpful! As always, please send us your cases for a free critique whenever you finish them and, as always, direct any questions to the comments section or via e-mail at lauren.sabino@ncpa.org. Good luck this season!