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**RECALIBRATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: AN ANALYSIS OF U.S. POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATIONS**

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the strategic recalibration of United States foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) during the two terms of the Trump administration (2016-2024, 2025-present). Couched within the theoretical frameworks of realism, neoclassical realism, constructivism and dependency theory, each offering very different lenses for understanding power, state behavior, and global inequality, the study discusses the “America First” doctrine which is a political ideology and policy framework that prioritizes the domestic economy, national sovereignty and security of the United States above global treaties, foreign aid and international interventions. It argues that “America first” strongly represents a radical shift toward unilateralism, coercive diplomacy, and transactional engagement. This undoubtedly has been responsible for reshaping hemispheric relations through sanctions, migration restrictions, and security-driven partnerships. Using a content analysis approach, this qualitative research draws on policy documents, regional responses, and geopolitical trends. It explores how domestic political narratives - particularly populism and nationalism - intersect with traditional realist imperatives to reinforce U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere. It further assesses how these policies deepened structural asymmetries, constrained regional autonomy, and influenced the strategic behavior of Caribbean and Latin American states. The article contributes to existing debates on U.S. hemispheric strategy and hegemonic designs by demonstrating how identity politics, economic leverage, and security concerns have been converging to redefine inter-American relations during this period. The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that the Trump administration’s foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean is shaped by a hybrid configuration of strategic imperatives, domestic political narratives, structural asymmetries, and ideational framing.

**Keywords:** U.S. foreign policy, America, Caribbean, Trump administration, Realism, Neoclassical realism, Dependency theory, Constructivism, Sanctions, Migration securitization, Hemispheric relations, Geopolitical competition

**Introduction**

The article is divided into six sections. After the introduction, the literature

review positions the study within existing scholarship on U.S. hemispheric policy and Trump's foreign policy orientation. The theoretical framework outlines the realist, neoclassical realist, dependency, and constructivist lenses that guide the analysis. The methodology section explains the qualitative approach and data sources. The analysis section examines the strategic priorities, domestic drivers, regional impacts, and structural consequences of the Trump administration's policies. The discussion section reflects on the broader implications for U.S. foreign policy and hemispheric relations. The conclusion summarizes the findings and offers recommendations for policymakers and scholars.

By integrating theoretical rigor with empirical depth, this article seeks to advance scholarly analysis of U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere and to illuminate the enduring structural dynamics that shape relations between the United States and its southern neighbors. The Trump administration's approach to Latin America and the Caribbean has not been merely a temporary deviation but a manifestation of deeper tensions within U.S. foreign policy – tensions between unilateralism and multilateralism, coercion and engagement, and domestic political imperatives and international strategic interests. Understanding these dynamics is essential for anticipating future trajectories in hemispheric relations.

Contemporary United States foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean reflects a complex combination of engagement, coercion, and periodic strategic neglect, shaped by shifting global power dynamics and evolving domestic political priorities. After decades in which the region occupied a secondary place in U.S. strategic calculations, Latin America and the Caribbean have regained prominence due to intensifying challenges related to migration, transnational organized crime, narcotics trafficking, and increasing strategic competition with China.

The Caribbean, often described by U.S. policymakers as America's "third border," occupies a critical strategic position due to its geographic proximity, economic interdependence, and deep social and political ties with the United States. The region remains closely linked to U.S. economic and security interests, with the United States serving as the Caribbean's principal trading partner and a central actor in regional development and security cooperation [1].

Historically, U.S. policy toward the hemisphere has been shaped by enduring geopolitical imperatives and ideological narratives. From the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, through Cold War containment strategies (1945–1990), and into the post-Cold War liberal internationalist period, Washington's hemispheric strategy has consistently reflected efforts to preserve regional influence and limit external penetration [2]. These strategic traditions have evolved but have retained a persistent concern with maintaining hemispheric primacy.

The election of Donald J. Trump in 2016 represented a significant inflection point in this historical trajectory. Trump's America First doctrine marked a decisive departure from the multilateralism and institutional engagement that characterized previous administrations. Instead, it emphasized unilateral action,

transactional diplomacy, coercive economic instruments, border securitization, and a renewed focus on sovereignty-centered nationalism. His “America First” agenda reshaped global relationships, challenged multilateralism, and placed a new emphasis on economic self-interest. While some of his decisions have been praised for achieving specific strategic goals, others led to tensions and uncertainty in international affairs [3].

This orientation became more pronounced following Trump’s return to office in January 2025. In the administration’s most recent national security discourse, i.e. the National Security Strategy of the United States; a reassertion of hemispheric exclusivity became evident - an approach widely interpreted by analysts as a contemporary adaptation of Monroe Doctrine logic. Unlike the nineteenth-century doctrine, however, the principal strategic target is no longer European colonial influence but China’s expanding economic and political presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. As China has become the leading trading partner of several Latin American states, U.S.–China competition has increasingly transformed the Western Hemisphere into a theater of strategic rivalry [4].

This shift has had significant implications for regional politics. The Trump administration’s hemispheric approach has been characterized by intensified sanctions regimes, diplomatic pressure, transactional bilateralism, and the securitization of migration and ideological threats. Such policies have reconfigured both bilateral and multilateral relationships while reshaping the strategic environment in which Caribbean and Latin American states operate [5]. For many governments in the region, the period from 2017 to 2021 - and its intensification since January 2025 - has represented a recalibration of U.S. influence, combining traditional realist imperatives with the domestic political logic of populism and nationalism.

Despite growing scholarship on Trump’s foreign policy, analyses of its hemispheric implications remain fragmented. Much of the recent literature has concentrated on U.S.–Mexico border policy, immigration enforcement, or the Venezuelan crisis, while comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the Latin America and Caribbean region and to the broader structural consequences of Washington’s regional strategy. Moreover, few studies integrate international relations theory with empirical analysis to explain how domestic political narratives, ideological framing, and structural asymmetries interact to shape U.S. policy choices [6].

This article addresses these gaps through a combination of theoretical frameworks and a regionally comprehensive examination of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean under the Trump administrations. The central argument advanced here is that Trump’s hemispheric policy represents a hybrid foreign policy orientation combining elements of classical realism, offensive realism, neoclassical realism, and dependency-reinforcing practices. While strategic imperatives—such as preserving regional dominance, countering

rival powers, and securing U.S. borders - remain central, these objectives have been amplified by domestic political narratives rooted in populism, nationalism, and ideological polarization. These internal drivers intensified coercive tendencies through sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and unilateral decision-making. At the same time, these policies reinforced longstanding structural asymmetries within the hemisphere, deepening patterns of economic and political dependency that continue to constrain the autonomy of Latin American and Caribbean states.

This article further argues that Trump's hemispheric foreign policy cannot be fully understood without considering the role of identity construction and rhetorical framing. Constructivist insights illuminate how the administration portrayed Latin America and the Caribbean as sources of threat - whether through migration, criminality, or ideological subversion - and how these narratives shaped policy outcomes. The securitization of migration, for instance, provided political justification for restrictive domestic and foreign policies directed toward Mexico, Central America, and Caribbean transit states. Similarly, the framing of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua as a hemispheric "troika of tyranny" reinforced a confrontational posture that prioritized regime pressure over sustained diplomatic engagement. The significance of this study lies in its multidimensional analysis of U.S. hemispheric policy during a period of global transformation. Latin America and the Caribbean have become increasingly contested geopolitical spaces, with China, Russia, and other extra-hemispheric actors expanding influence through trade, investment, infrastructure financing, and security cooperation. Understanding the Trump administration's response to these developments is therefore essential for assessing the future trajectory of hemispheric relations [6].

This paper is guided by three central research objectives:

1. To discuss the ways in which the Trump administration's overarching strategic rationale shape its engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. To examine how U.S. domestic political discourse, ideological framing, and partisan priorities influence the administration's foreign policy decisions toward the region.
3. To analyze across Latin America and the Caribbean react to these policy shifts, and what broader structural or geopolitical effects resulted from their responses.

To address these objectives, the article employs a qualitative methodology integrating content analysis of policy documents, executive orders, presidential speeches, and official strategic statements with comparative examination of regional responses. Drawing on international relations theory, the study offers a multidimensional framework for interpreting the strategic, domestic, and structural drivers of U.S. hemispheric policy, moving beyond descriptive accounts toward deeper theoretical explanation [7].

#### *Literature Review*

Since the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean has generated a substantial

body of scholarship spanning historical, theoretical, and policy-oriented perspectives. This literature reflects the enduring complexity of hemispheric relations, shaped by asymmetrical power dynamics, ideological contestation, and shifting global contexts. The Trump administrations' foreign policy has attracted considerable scholarly attention, yet analyses remain uneven across sub-regions and theoretical traditions [8].

This literature review synthesizes four major strands of scholarship:

- (1) historical and structural analyses of U.S. hemispheric policy;
- (2) scholarship on Trump's foreign policy orientation;
- (3) regional perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean; and
- (4) theoretical contributions and gaps relevant to understanding the administration's approach.

#### *Historical and Structural Analyses of U.S. Hemispheric Policy*

A significant portion of the literature situates U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean within a long-standing tradition of hemispheric dominance and hegemonic design. Foundational works emphasize the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary, and Cold War containment as key pillars of U.S. strategic thinking. These frameworks established a pattern of interventionism, economic leverage, and ideological policing that shaped U.S. engagement throughout the twentieth century. Scholars argue that despite rhetorical shifts, the underlying logic of U.S. policy has remained consistent: preserving regional stability, preventing external influence, and maintaining economic access [9].

Post-Cold War scholarship highlights a shift toward neoliberal economic integration, democratic promotion, and multilateral cooperation. The Clinton and Bush administrations emphasized free trade agreements, security partnerships, and counter-narcotics operations, while the Obama administration pursued diplomatic engagement, particularly with Cuba, and supported regional multilateralism. However, scholars note that structural asymmetries persisted, with the United States retaining disproportionate influence over regional institutions, trade flows, and security arrangements [10].

This historical literature provides essential context for understanding the Trump administration's departure from previous approaches. While some scholars argue that Trump represented a radical break from U.S. foreign policy traditions, others contend that his administration intensified long-standing patterns of unilateralism and coercive diplomacy. The literature thus establishes a foundation for analyzing continuity and change in U.S. hemispheric strategy.

#### *Scholarship on Trump's Foreign Policy Orientation*

The second major body of literature examines the Trump administration's foreign policy doctrine, often characterized as a blend of nationalism, unilateralism, and transactionalism. Scholars describe "America First" as a rejection of liberal internationalism and multilateral cooperation, emphasizing sovereignty, border security, and economic protectionism [11]. Trump's foreign policy is frequently analyzed through the lens of populism, with researchers

highlighting how domestic political narratives shaped international behavior. Several studies focus on the administration's use of coercive tools, including sanctions, tariffs, and diplomatic pressure. Scholars argue that Trump relied heavily on economic statecraft to achieve foreign policy objectives, particularly in relation to adversarial states such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Others examine the administration's securitization of migration, framing it as both a domestic political issue and a foreign policy priority.

However, the literature on Trump's foreign policy is uneven. While U.S.–Mexico relations and the Venezuelan crisis have received substantial attention, the Caribbean remains under-studied. Few works analyze how small states navigated U.S. pressure or how the administration's policies affected regional institutions such as CARICOM or the OAS. This gap underscores the need for a more comprehensive hemispheric analysis [12].

*Regional Perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean*

The third major body of literature, that is, Latin American scholarship offers critical insights into how regional states perceived and responded to the Trump administration. Analysts highlight the polarization of regional politics, with right-leaning governments aligning more closely with U.S. positions on Venezuela and left-leaning governments resisting U.S. pressure [13]. Studies also examine how Trump's policies exacerbated regional fragmentation, weakening multilateral initiatives such as UNASUR and CELAC.

Caribbean scholarship, though more limited, emphasizes the vulnerability of small states to shifts in U.S. policy. Researchers note that the Trump administration's focus on security and ideological alignment placed pressure on CARICOM governments to adopt U.S. positions on Venezuela and Cuba [14]. At the same time, Caribbean states sought to diversify their external partnerships, deepening ties with China and other non-traditional actors.

Regional perspectives also highlight the economic consequences of U.S. policy. Sanctions on Venezuela disrupted energy supplies to several Caribbean states, while changes in U.S. immigration policy affected remittance flows and diaspora communities. These analyses underscore the interconnectedness of domestic and foreign policy in the hemisphere [15].

Despite these contributions, regional scholarship often remains siloed, with limited integration of theoretical frameworks that explain the relationship between U.S. power, domestic politics, and structural constraints. This article seeks to bridge that gap by applying multiple IR theories to a regionally comprehensive analysis.

The literature on U.S. hemispheric policy engages a range of international relations theories, though often in fragmented ways. Realist analyses emphasize power asymmetries, security imperatives, and geopolitical competition. Scholars argue that the United States has historically viewed Latin America and the Caribbean as a strategic sphere of influence, responding to perceived threats with coercive measures [3].

### *Theoretical Contributions and Gaps*

The fourth major body of Literature argues that neoclassical realist scholarship adds nuance by incorporating domestic political factors. Researchers highlight how leadership perceptions, ideological narratives, and electoral incentives shape foreign policy decisions [16]. This approach is particularly relevant to the Trump administration, given the centrality of populism, nationalism, and identity politics in its foreign policy rhetoric.

Dependency theory offers a structural critique, emphasizing how economic asymmetries and historical patterns of exploitation shape hemispheric relations. Scholars argue that U.S. policies often reinforce dependency by limiting regional autonomy and constraining development options [17]. This perspective is valuable for analyzing how sanctions, aid conditionalities, and trade policies affected Latin American and Caribbean states under Trump.

Constructivist scholarship, though less prominent in hemispheric studies, provides important insights into the role of identity, discourse, and ideological framing. Researchers examine how narratives about migration, socialism, and national security shaped U.S. policy and regional perceptions [18]. This lens helps explain the administration's portrayal of certain states as ideological adversaries and its use of rhetoric to justify coercive measures.

Notwithstanding the significant contributions of these theories significant gaps remain. Few studies integrate multiple theoretical perspectives to provide a holistic analysis of U.S. policy. Realist analyses often overlook domestic political drivers, while constructivist studies may underemphasize structural power dynamics. Dependency theory offers valuable critiques but is sometimes disconnected from contemporary geopolitical analysis [19]. This article addresses these gaps by employing a multi-theoretical framework that captures the strategic, domestic, and structural dimensions of U.S. foreign policy under Trump.

### *Summary of Gaps and Contribution of This Study*

The literature reveals several significant gaps that this article seeks to address including insufficient integration of International Relations theory in analyses of Trump's hemispheric policy; limited attention to the Caribbean, despite its strategic importance and vulnerability; fragmented regional analyses, with few studies examining Latin America and the Caribbean together; under-explored domestic political drivers, particularly the role of populism and ideological framing and limited analysis of structural consequences, including dependency and geopolitical competition. By synthesizing realist, neoclassical realist, dependency, and constructivist perspectives, this article offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the Trump administration's approach to the hemisphere. It also provides a regionally inclusive analysis that incorporates both Latin American and Caribbean perspectives, addressing a significant gap in the existing literature.

### *Theoretical Framework*

To accurately assess the foreign policy of the Trump administration

toward Latin America and the Caribbean, it is imperative to employ a theoretical framework that can effectively analyze the intricate dynamics of structural power, domestic political factors, and ideational influences. No single theory within the field of International Relations wholly encapsulates the complexities of U.S. actions in the hemisphere during this historical moment. Consequently, this study adopts a multi-theoretical approach, integrating four interrelated perspectives: classical and offensive realism, neoclassical realism, dependency theory, and constructivism. Collectively, these theoretical frameworks provide a nuanced lens that illuminates the strategic, domestic, structural, and ideational dimensions of U.S. policy [20].

*Realism and Offensive Realism: Power, Security, and Hemispheric Influence*

Realism has established itself as one of the foundational theoretical traditions for analyzing the foreign policy of the United States, particularly in regions characterized by significant power disparities. Classical realism underscores the importance of national interest and the preeminence of power in international relations [21]. Offensive realism, a variant that emphasizes structural determinants, argues that great powers are driven to maximize their relative power and assert dominance over their strategic environments to secure their interests. This framework is particularly pertinent to understanding U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere, traditionally viewed as a sphere of influence [22].

From a realist perspective, the Trump administration's foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean can be understood as a strategic effort to reaffirm U.S. dominance in the wake of perceived challenges. Such challenges included the increasing influence of China, particularly manifested through strategic trade, investment, and infrastructure initiatives; Russia's calculated involvement in regional contexts, particularly in Venezuela and Cuba; cross-border security issues, encompassing drug trafficking, migration, and organized crime and finally the presence of ideological adversaries, particularly leftist governments espousing anti-U.S. sentiments.

Realism effectively explains the administration's reliance on coercive instruments - such as sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and security partnerships—as tools for maintaining regional control. The designation of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua as the “troika of tyranny” aligns with realist principles of identifying adversaries, isolating them, and thwarting the encroachment of competitive powers within the hemisphere [23].

Offensive realism further clarifies the administration's tendency for unilateralism. Trump's articulated skepticism of multilateral organizations, including the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN), reflects a belief that great powers should operate independently to secure their interests. The administration's withdrawal from various international accords and its inclination toward bilateral negotiations exemplify this approach [22].

However, realism alone does not encompass the complete spectrum of the administration's foreign policy. It falls short in explaining the influence of domestic political narratives, ideological constructs, and structural economic disparities, which call for additional theoretical lenses.

*Neoclassical Realism: Domestic Politics and Leadership Perceptions*

Neoclassical realism serves as a bridging framework that connects external structural pressures with internal political dynamics. Neoclassical realism argues that while the international system sets the broad constraints and opportunities for states, leaders' perceptions, domestic institutions, and state capacity shape how states actually behave. It posits that foreign policy outcomes arise from an interplay between systemic constraints and domestic variables, such as leader perceptions, political institutions, and societal influences. This framework is particularly relevant to the Trump administration, where domestic narratives significantly influenced foreign policy decisions.

Three domestic drivers are vital to this analysis:

- *Populism and Nationalism*: Trump's political identity was fundamentally rooted in populist appeals targeting national sovereignty, economic protectionism, and cultural identity. These elements shaped foreign policy priorities, notably in the securitization of migration and the framing of Latin America as a source of potential threats.

- *Electoral Incentives*: The administration's approach toward Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean was often influenced by electoral calculations. Hardline immigration policies catered to Trump's political base, while sanctions against Venezuela and Cuba resonated with influential diaspora communities in Florida.

- *Leadership Perceptions and Ideological Framing*: Neoclassical realism underscores the significance of leaders' beliefs in shaping foreign policy. Trump's worldview—characterized by skepticism towards multilateralism, an antagonistic stance on socialism, and a focus on transactional relationships - directly impacted U.S. engagement in the hemisphere [6].

This theoretical framework elucidates why the administration prioritized issues like migration and ideological confrontation, even when such priorities did not seamlessly align with broader strategic objectives. It also sheds light on the administration's fluctuating interactions with regional allies and institutions. Nevertheless, neoclassical realism inadequately addresses the underlying structural economic dependencies that characterize hemispheric relations - insights that dependency theory effectively provides.

*Dependency Theory: Structural Asymmetries and Economic Leverage*

Embedded in Latin American scholarship, dependency theory presents a structural critique of global capitalism and the inequitable relationships inherent between core and peripheral states. This framework argues that economic reliance perpetuates political subordination, thereby constraining the autonomy of developing nations [24].

### *Constructivism*

Constructivism provides a critical interpretive lens for understanding U.S. policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean under the Trump administration by emphasizing the role of ideas, identities, and socially constructed narratives in shaping foreign policy behavior [25].

Unlike materialist approaches that view state interests as fixed, constructivism argues that interests are produced through shared meanings and discursive practices, making the way policymakers *imagine* a region central to the policies they pursue. In the context of the Global South, the Trump administration's framing of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of ideological contestation, migration-driven insecurity, and a strategic battleground vis-à-vis China, Russia and other extra-hemispheric actors contributed to a recalibration of U.S. engagement. Official rhetoric depicting the Caribbean as the "Third Border", the labeling of certain governments such as from Venezuela and Cuba as "socialist dictatorships," and the construction of migration flows as existential threats all functioned as identity-laden narratives that shaped policy priorities, threat perceptions, and diplomatic postures.

Constructivism therefore illuminates how U.S. policy was not merely a response to structural pressures or economic asymmetries, but also a product of ideational frameworks that defined the region's meaning, hierarchy, and place within the U.S. worldview. This theoretical perspective complements realist and dependency-oriented explanations by revealing the normative and discursive foundations underpinning the Trump administration's approach to the Global South [26]. Even U.S Fox News played a *narrative-reinforcing role*, helping construct and disseminate frames of the region as a source of insecurity, ideological threat, and geopolitical competition. This media ecosystem strengthened the administration's identity-based narratives and contributed to the social construction of threat perceptions that informed U.S. policy.

### **Description of Materials and Methods**

The research adopts a qualitative design situated within interpretivist and analytical traditions in **international relations methodology**. This approach aligns with the study's objective of unpacking the multilayered dynamics shaping U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean during the Trump administrations. Because foreign policy behavior emanates from the interaction of **strategic interests, domestic political incentives, and structural constraints** embedded in the hemispheric order, a qualitative framework is best suited to capture the interpretive and contextual dimensions of policy formation. The methodology integrates **document analysis**, comparative regional assessment, and theory-guided interpretation to examine both U.S. policy outputs and the differentiated responses of regional actors. The research design is organized around three interlocking components: **data collection and source selection; analytical strategy and case selection and comparative logic** [27].

Together, these elements provide a systematic and rigorous framework for analyzing U.S. hemispheric policy between January 2017 and January 2021, and from January to the present, enabling a nuanced interpretation of how power, ideology, and regional asymmetries shaped foreign policy behavior.

#### *Data Collection and Source Selection*

Data was collected from an extensive range of primary and secondary sources to ensure analytical depth and triangulation. Primary sources form the backbone of the analysis, providing direct insight into the Trump administration's foreign policy priorities, rhetoric, and decision-making processes. These include Presidential speeches and statements and foreign; National Security Strategy documents; Executive orders related to migration, sanctions, policy; U.S. Department of State press briefings and policy statements; Treasury Department sanctions announcements and Congressional testimonies by administration officials. These documents offer a clear record of the administration's articulated goals, strategic framing, and policy instruments.

To assess regional responses, the study incorporates CARICOM communiqués and statements [28]; national foreign policy statements from Caribbean and Latin American governments; OAS resolutions and voting records [29-31], and regional security reports [32] (e.g., IMPACS, RSS). These sources illuminate how regional actors interpreted and responded to U.S. policies. The study engages extensively with scholarly analyses of U.S. foreign policy; the Trump administration's decision-making; Latin American and Caribbean regional politics and IR theoretical frameworks relevant to the study. This literature provides conceptual grounding and situates the study within broader academic debates. Reputable media sources and policy think-tank reports are used to contextualize events, track policy developments, and capture expert interpretations. These sources are treated cautiously and used primarily for triangulation rather than theoretical grounding.

The analytical strategy is guided by a theory-informed qualitative content analysis. This approach allows for systematic interpretation of textual data through the lens of the study's theoretical framework.

The analysis proceeds in three stages:

#### *Coding and Thematic Categorization*

Policy documents and regional responses are coded according to themes derived from the theoretical framework, including power projection and strategic behavior (realism); domestic political narratives and leadership perceptions (neoclassical realism); economic asymmetries and structural constraints (dependency theory) and ideological framing and identity narratives (constructivism). This coding process enables the identification of patterns across different types of documents and sources.

#### *Theory-Guided Interpretation*

The coded data is then interpreted through the integrated theoretical framework. This involves assessing how realist imperatives shaped strategic

decisions; identifying domestic political drivers behind policy choices; evaluating how structural dependencies influenced regional responses and analyzing the role of discourse and identity in shaping policy narratives. This interpretive process ensures that the analysis remains theoretically grounded while responsive to empirical complexity.

#### *Comparative Regional Assessment*

The study employs a comparative approach to examine differences and similarities between U.S. engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean. This involves comparing policy instruments used in each sub-region; assessing variations in regional responses and identifying structural factors that shape divergent outcomes. This comparative logic highlights the differentiated impact of U.S. policy across the hemisphere.

#### *Case Selection and Comparative Logic*

The study adopts a most-different systems design to examine U.S. policy across two distinct sub-regions: Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite significant differences in size, political systems, and economic structures, both sub-regions were subject to the Trump administration's hemispheric strategy. This design allows for the identification of common patterns and structural dynamics that transcend regional variation.

#### *Latin America*

Latin America is seen as critical to this study due to its geopolitical significance, the presence of ideological adversaries (Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua), and its centrality to U.S. concerns about migration and security. Key cases include Mexico: migration, trade renegotiation, and security cooperation; Venezuela: sanctions, regime pressure, and geopolitical competition and Brazil and Colombia: alignment with U.S. positions under right-leaning governments. These cases illustrate the administration's use of coercive tools and its reliance on ideological alignment.

#### *The Caribbean*

The Caribbean was also seen as critical due to its strategic vulnerability, economic dependence, and underrepresentation in existing scholarship. Key cases include CARICOM as a collective actor; Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados with their diplomatic balancing and small island states affected by sanctions on Venezuela and Cuba. These cases highlight the structural constraints faced by small states and their strategies for navigating U.S. pressure.

#### *Rationale for Comparative Approach*

The comparative design allows the study to identify common strategic logics across sub-regions, highlight variations in policy impact; assess how structural asymmetries shape regional responses and examine the interplay between domestic politics and foreign policy across different contexts. This approach strengthens the study's explanatory power and enhances its contribution to hemispheric IR scholarship.

### *Limitations*

While the methodology is robust, several limitations must be acknowledged: These include access to internal decision-making meaning the study relies on publicly available documents, which may not fully capture internal deliberations within the Trump administration. Secondly there are also regional data gaps meaning that Caribbean foreign policy documentation is less extensive than that of larger Latin American states, potentially limiting the depth of analysis for some cases and thirdly there is the issue of temporal scope where this study focuses on the period from 2017 to 2021 and from January 2025 to the present. While this allows for a comprehensive analysis of the Trump administration, it does not examine long-term consequences beyond this timeframe.

### *Interpretive Nature of Qualitative Analysis*

As with all qualitative research, interpretation is influenced by theoretical framing. However, triangulation across multiple sources mitigates this limitation.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study adheres to ethical standards in qualitative research, including accurate representation of sources; avoidance of political bias; respect for regional perspectives and sovereignty and transparency in methodological choices. These considerations ensure the integrity and credibility of the analysis.

### *Summary*

The methodological approach - combining document analysis, comparative regional assessment, and theory-guided interpretation - provides a rigorous foundation for examining U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean under the Trump administration. By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and diverse data sources, the study offers a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of hemispheric relations during this period.

## **Results**

The Trump administration's foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean was shaped by a complex blend of strategic imperatives, domestic political narratives, structural asymmetries, and ideational framing. This section analyzes the administration's hemispheric approach through the integrated theoretical framework outlined earlier, focusing on five major dimensions:

- (1) strategic priorities under the "America First" doctrine;
- (2) domestic political drivers;
- (3) impacts on Latin America;
- (4) impacts on the Caribbean; and

(5) structural consequences for hemispheric relations. Together, these dimensions reveal a foreign policy orientation that blended realist power projection, neoclassical realist domestic influences, dependency-reinforcing practices, and constructivist ideological narratives [5].

The Trump administration's hemispheric strategy continues to be anchored in the broader "America First" doctrine, which emphasized national sovereignty,

economic protectionism, and unilateral action. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this translated into four primary strategic priorities: migration control; sanctions and coercive diplomacy; countering rival powers; and redefining economic relationships [33].

Migration was the central organizing principle of the administration's engagement with Mexico, Central America, and, to a lesser extent, the Caribbean. The administration framed migration as a national security threat, linking it to crime, terrorism, and economic decline [33]. This securitization justified a series of aggressive policies, including construction and expansion of the U.S.–Mexico border wall; “zero tolerance” policy and family separation; the Migrant Protection Protocols (“Remain in Mexico”); pressure on Mexico and Central American governments to curb migration flows and reduction of refugee admissions and asylum restrictions. From a realist perspective, these policies reflected an effort to control territorial borders and manage perceived threats. From a neoclassical realist standpoint, they were also shaped by domestic political narratives that mobilized Trump's electoral base.

The administration relied heavily on sanctions as a tool of foreign policy, particularly against Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua [34]. Sanctions were used to pressure the Maduro government by targeting the oil sector, financial institutions, and key officials; reverse Obama-era engagement with Cuba by restricting travel, remittances, and economic activity and punish Nicaraguan officials for alleged corruption and human rights abuses. Offensive realism helps explain the administration's preference for coercive tools, which allowed the United States to exert pressure without committing military resources. However, dependency theory highlights the broader regional consequences of sanctions, particularly for Caribbean states reliant on Venezuelan energy supplies.

The administration viewed Chinese and Russian engagement in the hemisphere as strategic threats. China's Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructure investments, and trade expansion were framed as challenges to U.S. influence (Ellis, 2020). Russia's support for Venezuela, including military cooperation and financial assistance, was portrayed as destabilizing. The administration responded by warning Caribbean states against accepting Chinese loans; increasing diplomatic pressure on countries with close ties to China; supporting opposition movements in Venezuela aligned against Russian influence and strengthening security cooperation with regional allies. This behavior aligns with offensive realist predictions: great powers seek to prevent rivals from gaining influence in their strategic environment.

The administration sought to renegotiate trade agreements and reshape economic ties. Key actions included renegotiating NAFTA into the USMCA; imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Brazil and Argentina and pressuring Caribbean states to align with U.S. positions in exchange for economic benefits. These actions reflected a transactional approach to economic diplomacy, consistent with Trump's broader foreign policy orientation.

Domestic political narratives played a central role in shaping the administration's hemispheric policy. Neoclassical realism provides a useful lens for understanding how internal factors influenced foreign policy decisions.

Trump's political identity has been rooted in populist appeals to national sovereignty, cultural identity, and economic protectionism. These narratives shaped foreign policy in several ways such as migration was framed as a threat to American identity and security; Latin America was portrayed as a source of crime and instability and left-wing governments were depicted as ideological adversaries. This ideological framing influenced policy choices, particularly the administration's confrontational approach toward Venezuela and Cuba [35].

Electoral considerations were especially evident in policies toward Venezuela and Cuba, where sanctions appealed to Cuban-American and Venezuelan-American voters in Florida; Mexico, where hardline immigration policies mobilized Trump's political base and Central America, where aid cuts and pressure campaigns aligned with domestic narratives about border security. These dynamics illustrate how domestic political incentives can shape foreign policy priorities.

Trump's personal worldview - skeptical of multilateralism, hostile toward socialism, and focused on transactional gains - directly influenced U.S. engagement with the hemisphere. Leadership perceptions shaped the administration's preference for bilateral negotiations; its skepticism toward regional institutions and its reliance on sanctions and coercive tools [36]. Neoclassical realism thus helps explain the administration's distinctive foreign policy style.

The administration's policies had significant and varied impacts across Latin America. Three cases - Mexico, Venezuela, and Brazil/Colombia - illustrate the diversity of these effects. Mexico was at the center of the administration's hemispheric strategy. Key developments included threats of tariffs to force Mexico to deploy its National Guard to curb migration; renegotiation of NAFTA into the USMCA and continued security cooperation despite political tensions. The administration's approach reflected a combination of coercive diplomacy and economic leverage, consistent with both offensive realism and dependency theory.

The administration's approach to Venezuela was the most aggressive in the hemisphere. Key elements included recognition of Juan Guaidó as interim president; comprehensive sanctions targeting the oil sector; diplomatic pressure on regional states to isolate the Maduro government and support for opposition movements. This strategy reflected ideological framing (constructivism), domestic political incentives (neoclassical realism), and power projection (realism).

Right-leaning governments in Brazil and Colombia aligned closely with U.S. positions on Venezuela and regional security. This alignment facilitated increased security cooperation; diplomatic coordination and shared ideological narratives about socialism and regional threats. These cases illustrate how ideological convergence can reinforce strategic partnerships.

The Caribbean experienced the Trump administration's policies in distinct ways, shaped by structural vulnerabilities and geopolitical positioning. For example, the administration pressured Caribbean states to support U.S. positions on Venezuela, often linking economic benefits to political alignment. Examples included high-profile meetings with selected Caribbean leaders; threats to reduce aid for states that opposed U.S. positions and diplomatic outreach to counter Chinese influence. This pressure highlighted the structural asymmetries that shape U.S.–Caribbean relations.

Sanctions on Venezuela disrupted the PetroCaribe program, affecting energy supplies in several Caribbean states. Additionally, changes in U.S. immigration policy affected remittances; restrictions on Cuba impacted tourism flows in the region and aid conditionalities reinforced dependency dynamics. Dependency theory provides a strong explanatory lens for these developments [37].

The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) remained a key component of U.S. engagement. However, funding levels fluctuated, cooperation was increasingly tied to political alignment and maritime security operations intensified. These dynamics reflect the intersection of realist security concerns and dependency-reinforcing practices. The Trump administration's policies had several long-term structural consequences for hemispheric relations. Economic and security dependencies deepened, particularly in the Caribbean. Sanctions, aid conditionalities, and trade asymmetries constrained regional autonomy.

The administration's skepticism toward multilateralism weakened the OAS, CARICOM's diplomatic cohesion as well as regional integration initiatives. This fragmentation undermined collective regional responses. At the same time, China and Russia expanded their influence as U.S. engagement became more coercive. This competition reshaped regional alignments and strategic calculations. The administration's ideological framing intensified regional polarization, particularly around Venezuela and Cuba.

The Trump administration's hemispheric policy was shaped by a hybrid foreign policy orientation that blended realist power projection, domestic political narratives, structural economic asymmetries and ideological framing and identity politics. This hybrid approach reshaped hemispheric relations, reinforcing dependency, weakening multilateralism, and intensifying geopolitical competition [3].

## **Discussion**

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that the Trump administration's foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean was shaped by a hybrid configuration of strategic imperatives, domestic political narratives, structural asymmetries, and ideational framing. This hybrid orientation produced a hemispheric strategy that was simultaneously coercive, unilateral, ideologically charged, and structurally reinforcing of long-standing dependencies. The discussion section synthesizes these findings, evaluates their

implications for international relations theory, and assesses their significance for the future of hemispheric relations.

The Trump administration's approach cannot be reduced to a single theoretical explanation. Instead, it reflects a multi-layered foreign policy orientation in which the following four issues were clear: realist and offensive realist logics drove efforts to maintain U.S. dominance and counter rival powers; neoclassical realist dynamics shaped the administration's prioritization of migration and ideological confrontation, driven by domestic political incentives; dependency-reinforcing practices constrained regional autonomy and deepened structural asymmetries and constructivist narratives framed Latin America and the Caribbean as sources of threats, shaping public perceptions and policy choices. This hybrid configuration produced a foreign policy that was both strategically assertive and domestically driven, reflecting the unique political context of the Trump presidency [3].

#### *Implications for International Relations Theory*

The findings of this study have several implications for IR theory.

The administration's emphasis on sanctions, border security, and countering rival powers underscores the enduring relevance of realist explanations for U.S. behavior in the hemisphere. Despite rhetorical departures, the underlying logic of U.S. policy remained consistent with long-standing patterns of hemispheric dominance.

The centrality of domestic political narratives - particularly populism, nationalism, and ideological polarization - highlights the importance of neoclassical realism in explaining foreign policy variation. The Trump administration's foreign policy was deeply intertwined with domestic political incentives, illustrating how internal dynamics can shape external behavior. The study reinforces the relevance of dependency theory for understanding hemispheric relations. The administration's use of economic leverage, aid conditionalities, and sanctions deepened structural asymmetries, limiting the autonomy of Caribbean and Latin American states.

The administration's rhetorical framing of migration, socialism, and national identity demonstrates the importance of constructivist insights. Ideational factors shaped not only policy choices but also regional perceptions of U.S. intentions. Together, these theoretical implications underscore the value of a multi-theoretical approach for analyzing complex foreign policy behavior.

#### *Implications for Latin America and the Caribbean*

The Trump administration's policies have created significant and lasting impacts on regional politics, economics, and security. In Latin America, the administration's confrontational approach toward Venezuela, including the removal of Maduro, and its embargo on Cuba intensified regional polarization. Right-leaning governments aligned with U.S. positions, while left-leaning governments resisted U.S. pressure. This polarization weakened regional institutions and undermined collective responses to shared challenges. The

administration's focus on migration reshaped relations with Mexico and Central America, producing new forms of security cooperation but also generating tensions and humanitarian concerns.

The Caribbean experienced the administration's policies through the lens of structural vulnerability. Sanctions on Venezuela disrupted energy supplies, while changes in U.S. immigration policy affected remittances and diaspora communities. Caribbean states were pressured to align with U.S. positions on Venezuela, often at the expense of regional cohesion. At the same time, Caribbean governments sought to diversify their external partnerships, deepening ties with China and other non-traditional actors. This diversification reflected a strategic effort to navigate U.S. pressure while preserving autonomy. The Trump administration's policies produced several long-term structural consequences that will shape hemispheric relations for years to come. Economic and security dependencies deepened, particularly in the Caribbean. Sanctions, aid conditionalities, and trade asymmetries reinforced U.S. leverage, limiting regional autonomy. On the other hand, the administration's skepticism toward multilateralism weakened regional institutions such as the OAS and CARICOM. This fragmentation undermined collective regional responses to crises, including the Venezuelan humanitarian emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic [38].

Notwithstanding this, China and Russia expanded their influence as U.S. engagement became more coercive. This competition reshaped regional alignments and strategic calculations, particularly in the Caribbean and South America. The administration's ideological framing intensified regional polarization, particularly around issues of socialism, democracy, and human rights. This polarization weakened regional cohesion and complicated diplomatic efforts.

The structural dynamics identified in this study will shape future U.S. engagement with Latin America and the Caribbean. Several trends are likely to persist including continued geopolitical competition. China's economic presence and Russia's strategic engagement will continue to challenge U.S. influence. Future administrations will need to navigate this multipolar environment. Migration will remain a central issue in U.S.–Latin American relations, driven by economic inequality, political instability, and climate change. As in the past, economic and security dependencies will continue to shape regional responses to U.S. policy, particularly in the Caribbean and rebuilding regional institutions will be essential for addressing shared challenges, including climate change, public health, and transnational crime.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the Trump administration's foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean through a multi-theoretical lens, integrating insights from realism, neoclassical realism, dependency theory, and constructivism. The analysis demonstrates that the administration's hemispheric strategy was shaped by a hybrid configuration of strategic imperatives, domestic political narratives, structural asymmetries, and ideational framing.

The administration's policies reinforced U.S. dominance while deepening regional dependencies, weakening multilateral institutions, and intensifying geopolitical competition. At the same time, domestic political incentives and ideological narratives played a central role in shaping policy priorities, particularly in relation to migration and ideological confrontation.

The study contributes to international relations scholarship by offering a comprehensive, theory-driven analysis of U.S. hemispheric policy during a period of global and regional transformation. It highlights the importance of integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to capture the complexity of foreign policy behavior and underscores the need for regionally inclusive analyses that incorporate both Latin American and Caribbean perspectives.

As Latin America and the Caribbean confront new challenges - from climate change to economic inequality and geopolitical competition - understanding the structural dynamics of U.S. engagement will be critical for policymakers and scholars alike. The Trump administration's approach represents not only a distinct moment in U.S. foreign policy but also a reflection of deeper tensions within hemispheric relations. Addressing these tensions will require renewed commitment to multilateralism, regional cooperation, and equitable development.

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## **ЖАҢАНДЫҚ ОҢТҮСТІКТЕГІ ҚАЙТА БАҒДАРЛАУ: ТРАМП ӘКІМШІЛІГІ КЕЗІНДЕГІ АҚШ-ТЫҢ ЛАТЫН АМЕРИКАСЫ МЕН КАРИБ АЛАБЫНА ҚАТЫСТЫ САЯСАТЫН ТАЛДАУ**

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**Андатпа.** Бұл мақалада Трамп әкімшілігінің екі кезеңі (2016–2024 жж., 2025 ж. – қазіргі уақытқа дейін) барысында Америка Құрама Штаттарының Латын Америкасы мен Кариб алабына (ЛАК) қатысты сыртқы саясатының стратегиялық қайта бағдарлануы қарастырылады. Реализм, неоклассикалық реализм, конструктивизм және тәуелділік теориясының тұжырымдамалық негіздеріне сүйене отырып, олардың әрқайсысы билік, мемлекеттің мінез-құлқы және жаһандық теңсіздікті түсіндіруге әртүрлі көзқарастар ұсынатындықтан, зерттеуде АҚШ-тың ішкі экономикасын, ұлттық егемендігі мен қауіпсіздігін басымдыққа қоятын саяси идеология мен саясат шеңбері болып табылатын «Америка бәрінен бұрын» доктринасы талданады. Бұл ұстаным бойынша Америка Құрама

Штаттарының мүдделері жаһандық келісімдерден, шетелдік көмектен және халықаралық араласулардан жоғары қойылады.

Мақалада «Америка бәрінен бұрын» қағидаты біржақтылыққа, мәжбүрлеу дипломатиясына және мәмілеге негізделген өзара іс-қимылға бағытталған түбегейлі бетбұрыс ретінде сипатталады. Бұл саясат санкциялар, көші-қон шектеулері және қауіпсіздікке негізделген серіктестіктер арқылы Батыс жартышардағы қатынастардың өзгеруіне елеулі ықпал етті. Контент-талдау әдісіне негізделген бұл сапалық зерттеу саяси құжаттарға, өңірлік реакцияларға және геосаяси үрдістерге сүйенеді. Зерттеу популизм мен ұлтшылдық сияқты ішкі саяси нарративтердің АҚШ-тың Батыс жартышардағы ықпалы мен үстемдігін нығайту мақсатындағы дәстүрлі реалистік императивтермен қалай тоғысқанын қарастырады.

Сонымен қатар, аталған саясаттың құрылымдық асимметрияларды қалай күшейткені, өңірлік автономияны қалай шектегені және Кариб алабы мен Латын Америкасы мемлекеттерінің стратегиялық мінез-құлқына қалай әсер еткені бағаланады. Мақала Батыс жартышардағы АҚШ стратегиясы мен гегемония орнату жоспарлары туралы ғылыми пікірталастарға үлес қосады. Онда сәйкестік саясаты, экономикалық ықпал ету тетіктері және қауіпсіздік мәселелерінің осы кезеңде Америкааралық қатынастарды қайта айқындауда өзара тоғысқаны көрсетіледі.

Зерттеу нәтижелері Трамп әкімшілігінің Латын Америкасы мен Кариб алабына қатысты сыртқы саясаты стратегиялық императивтердің, ішкі саяси нарративтердің, құрылымдық асимметриялардың және идеологиялық ұстанымдардың гибридіті конфигурациясымен айқындалатынын көрсетеді.

**Тірек сөздер:** АҚШ сыртқы саясаты, Америка, Кариб алабы, Трамп әкімшілігі, реализм, неоклассикалық реализм, тәуелділік теориясы, конструктивизм, санкциялар, көші-қонды секьюритизациялау, геосаяси бәсекелестік

## **ПЕРЕКАЛИБРОВКА НА ГЛОБАЛЬНОМ ЮГЕ: АНАЛИЗ ПОЛИТИКИ США В ОТНОШЕНИИ ЛАТИНСКОЙ АМЕРИКИ И КАРИБСКОГО БАССЕЙНА ПРИ АДМИНИСТРАЦИИ ТРАМПА**

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**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается стратегическая перекалибровка внешней политики Соединенных Штатов в отношении Латинской Америки и Карибского бассейна (ЛАК) в течение двух сроков правления администрации Трампа (2016-2024, 2025 - настоящее время). Сформулированная в рамках теоретических основ реализма, неоклассического реализма, конструктивизма и теории зависимости, каждая из которых предлагает совершенно разные подходы к пониманию

власти, поведения государства и глобального неравенства, в исследовании обсуждается доктрина “Америка прежде всего”, которая представляет собой политическую идеологию и рамки политики, ставящие во главу угла внутреннюю экономику, национальный суверенитет и безопасность США. Соединенные Штаты стоят выше глобальных договоров, иностранной помощи и международных интервенций.

В статье утверждается, что “Америка прежде всего” представляет собой радикальный сдвиг в сторону односторонности, дипломатии принуждения и взаимодействия на основе сделок. Это, несомненно, повлияло на изменение отношений в Западном полушарии посредством санкций, миграционных ограничений и партнерских отношений, основанных на безопасности. Используя подход контент-анализа, это качественное исследование опирается на политические документы, региональные реакции и геополитические тенденции. В нем исследуется, как внутривнутриполитические нарративы, в частности, популизм и национализм, пересекаются с традиционными реалистическими императивами для укрепления позиций США и доминирования в Западном полушарии.

Далее дается оценка того, как эта политика усугубила структурную асимметрию, ограничила региональную автономию и повлияла на стратегическое поведение государств Карибского бассейна и Латинской Америки. Статья вносит свой вклад в существующие дебаты о стратегии США в Западном полушарии и планах по установлению гегемонии, демонстрируя, как политика идентичности, экономические рычаги влияния и проблемы безопасности сближались, чтобы по-новому определить межамериканские отношения в этот период. Анализ, представленный в этом исследовании, демонстрирует, что внешняя политика администрации Трампа в отношении Латинской Америки и Карибского бассейна определяется гибридной конфигурацией стратегических императивов, внутривнутриполитических нарративов, структурных асимметрий и идеологических установок.

**Ключевые слова:** внешняя политика США, Америка, Карибский бассейн, администрация Трампа, реализм, неоклассический реализм, теория зависимости, конструктивизм, санкции, миграционная секьюритизация, геополитическая конкуренция.

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