

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

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Letter from the Chair

Dear CELAC delegates,

Greetings everyone, and welcome to WAMUNC XXVIII (28)! My name is Andrew Brickman, and I will be your chair for the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

First of all, you should know a bit about me: I am a first-year student at the George Washington University, so, yes, I've technically been a freshman twice now; I grew up in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, which is near the King of Prussia Mall and Philadelphia; and I went to high school as part of the Methacton School District.

Ever since my freshman year of high school, I have been an avid participant in Model UN. In fact, I was a regular officer for a year and a half, as well as the co-president of my high school's Model UN team for two more years. As such, I have a lot of experience with MUN and in helping high school students work through it. Recently, I attended NCSC, Georgetown's annual Model UN conference, and UPMUNC, the University of Pennsylvania's annual MUN conference, starting off my career in the collegiate circuit of Model UN.

Personally, MUN changed me as a person, significantly increasing my public speaking abilities, my knowledge of the world, and even my career aspirations. Hopefully, MUN will have a significant impact on your lives, as well.

For this conference, you will be given the choice to debate about neo-colonialism in the Caribbean and/or the rights of incarcerated individuals. Both are quite broad but interesting topics which you can easily dive deeply into. During my research on these topics, I often found myself falling into deep rabbit holes of information, needing to remind myself that I have to remain broad for your sake. Do note that, in order to have a larger amount of countries, some countries are in fact territories. For fairness and simplicity, these territories will be treated as independent states.

Both topics are serious, still-relevant issues today, so I don't expect you to perfectly solve what experts and diplomats have been trying for decades. Instead, I just want you to try your best and see what you can accomplish. I look forward to chairing this committee and to seeing what resolutions you establish!

Best of luck,
Your chair, Andrew Brickman

Contact me at a.brickman@gwu.edu - **just make sure to CC an advisor in the email!!!!**

Committee Overview

The Committee of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is a bloc of Latin American states that often coordinates with the UN. In other words, it is a forum for advocating Latin American interests and allowing dialogue between Latin American states. Do note that the acronym, CELAC, is derived from the Spanish name for the bloc, which is “Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños.”

To clarify, Latin America generally refers to all of the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries in North and South America, though the term is sometimes used to refer to all of the countries of North and South America excluding the US and Canada. For simplicity’s sake, the latter definition will be followed, though it is scholarly inaccurate.

CELAC acts as a counter to US and Canadian hegemony in the region, advocating for more Latin American autonomy. It serves to deepen dialogue between Latin American countries on a wide array of issues, including but not limited to education, incarceration, research, culture, finance, language, and the environment, and position Latin America as a united front. This way, Latin America can compete with other global powers on the international stage. Strikingly, the CELAC countries combined make up the third largest economy in the world (in terms of GDP) and it is also the world’s largest producer of food.

As member states of CELAC, it will be your job to advocate your state’s interests through the CELAC body. In this conference, there will be two topics of selection: neo-colonialism in the Caribbean and the rights of incarcerated individuals. Find out your country’s stance, their progress in that topic’s regard, and how you can help solve the issue.

History of CELAC

The organization that prompted the creation of the Rio Group, the predecessor of CELAC, was the Organization of American States (OAS). The OAS, created in 1948, still exists and functions today. The problem with it, though, is its notable domination by the US and Canada in policy-making. Unhappy with this dynamic, the Rio Group formed. The Rio Group no longer exists, having been succeeded by CELAC in 2011.

Officially created in 2011, the idea of CELAC was proposed by both Mexico under the Calderón administration and Brazil under the Lula administration (after a lapse of power, he has actually returned to the presidency of Brazil, once again). This movement coalesced into the official creation of CELAC in December of 2011.

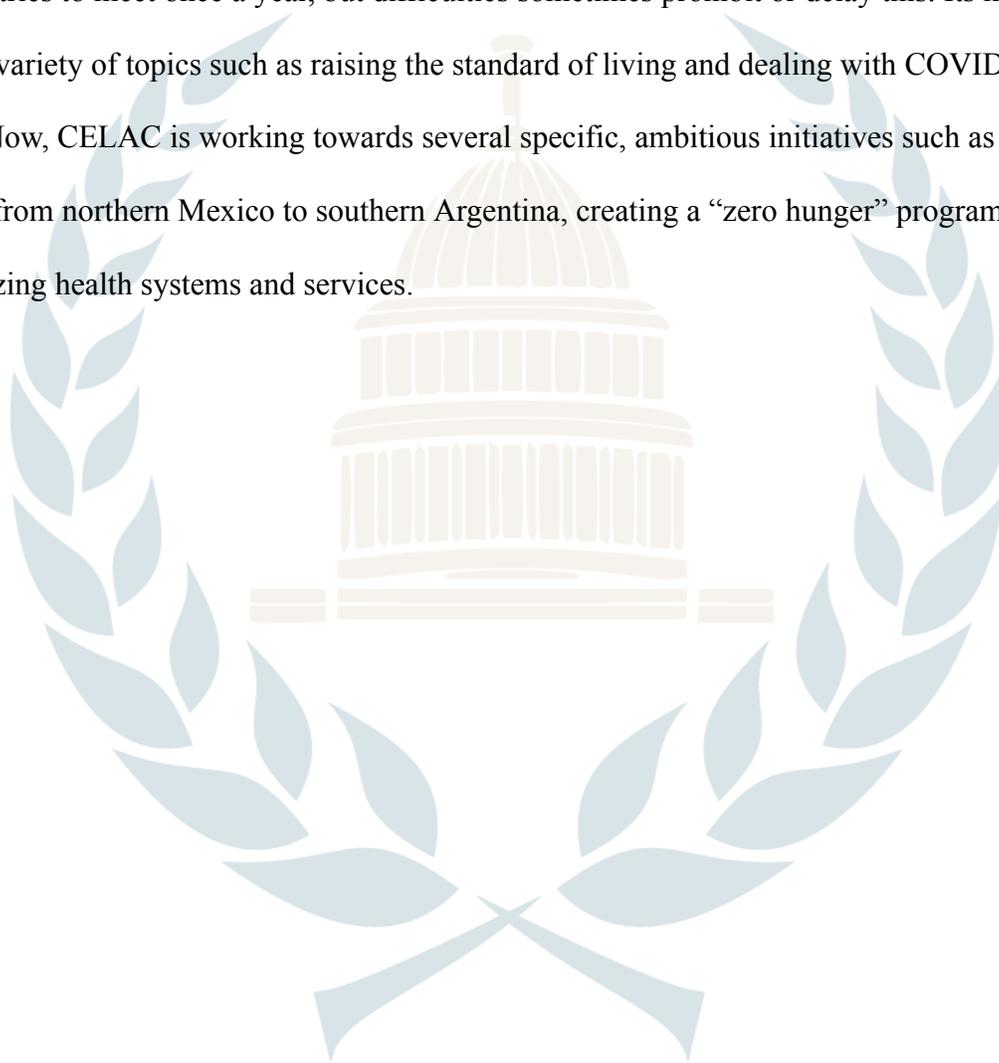
Notably, CELAC was signed into being in Venezuela, and the presidents of Venezuela and Chile were selected as co-chairs to the meeting to establish the official constitution of CELAC. This denotes the international and multilateral nature of CELAC, a fundamental feature of the organization.

The exact role of CELAC—such as whether or not it should totally replace the OAS, as well as whether it should focus on economic issues or other issues like human rights or the environment—is still debated. Still, it has established fifteen primary objectives: “1) post-COVID economic recovery; 2) regional health co-operation; 3) space cooperation; 4) science, technology and innovation for social inclusion; 5) integral disaster management; 6) education; 7) institutional reinforcement and the CELAC anti-corruption agenda; 8) food security; 9) dialogue with partners beyond the region; 10) the integration of Latin American and Caribbean infrastructure; 11) environmental co-operation; 12) the development and perfection of

CELAC operations; 13) improving the situation of women in member countries; 14) digital transformation and co-operation and 15) culture” ([CELAC International](#)).

Organizationally, CELAC is led by the pro-tempore of CELAC, a role which switches between member countries periodically and is currently held by Colombia. As for its meetings, CELAC tries to meet once a year, but difficulties sometimes prohibit or delay this. Its meetings are on a variety of topics such as raising the standard of living and dealing with COVID-19.

Now, CELAC is working towards several specific, ambitious initiatives such as making a rail line from northern Mexico to southern Argentina, creating a “zero hunger” program, and modernizing health systems and services.



Topic 1

The first of the two options for topics for this committee is **neo-colonialism in the Caribbean**. While this topic is technically confined to a particular region, it still encompasses a large number of the countries within CELAC. Thus, the incentive for addressing this issue is at the center of CELAC itself: will indirectly-affected states address issues and unite as part of a larger Latin American bloc, or will they free ride CELAC problems, only dealing with them when they directly affect their state. Moreover, this topic is not truly confined to the Caribbean, for it is all of both North and South America that were affected by colonialism, still bearing that legacy today.

Colonialism may seem an advent of the past, but it is not so. There are still people alive today who lived through and even remember colonial times, colonial institutions still persist in now-independent states, and former colonies continue to be reliant on previous colonial powers.

A lot of institutions from colonial times still exist today in post-colonies. For instance, government structures often reflect colonial foundations, such as Chile's Civil Code of 1885, which heavily reflects Spanish civil code. Additionally, post-colonies feature other similar structures such as export-oriented economic structures, social hierarchies that favor whites and Europeans, and similar landholding systems from colonial times.

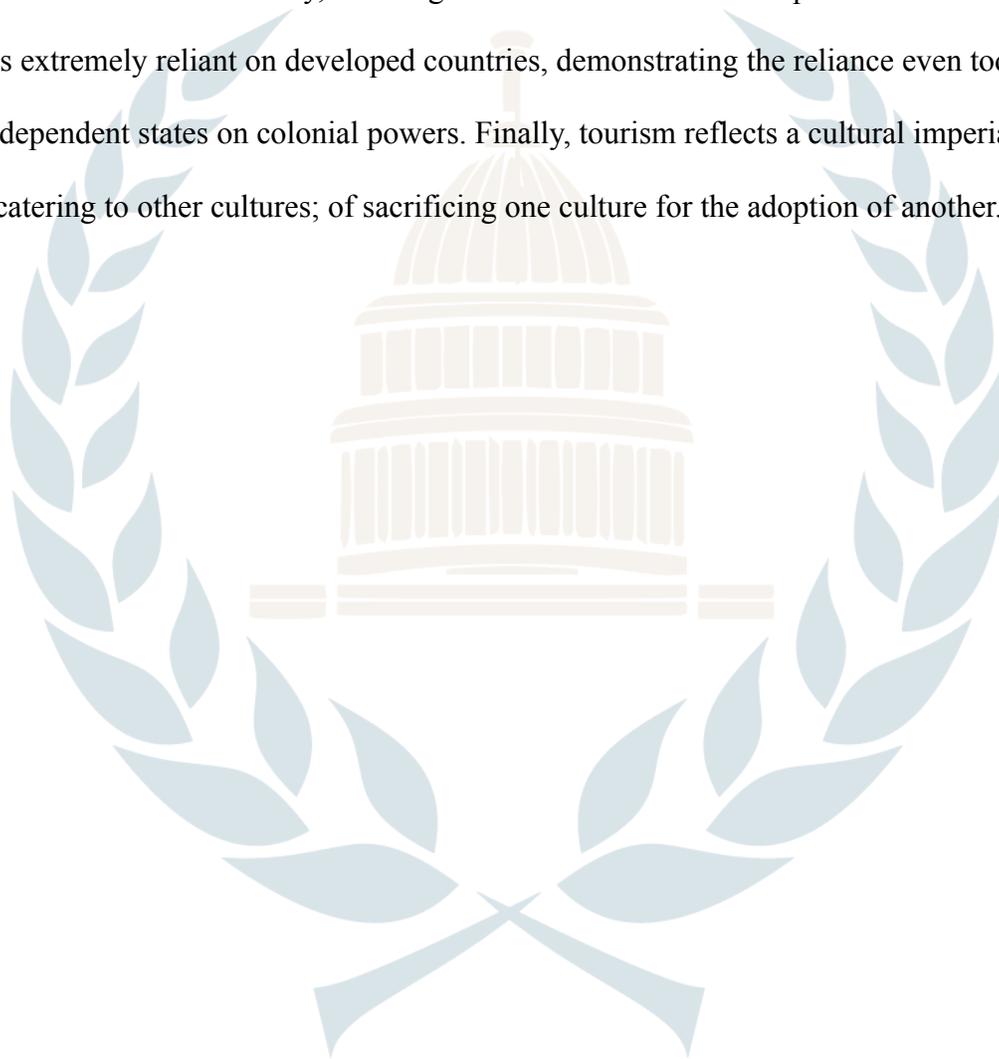
Even architectural structures reflect imperialism by using architecture derived from colonial powers. This has actually been a cause of severe issues as of late due to the unsustainable nature of these architectural designs in Latin America. For instance, many Caribbean countries build their houses on shorelines and lack house stilts, making them much more vulnerable to hurricanes and floods. This was not the case a few hundred years ago, before

colonialism. Because of a forgotten lesson taken away because of colonialism, these states are forced to relearn that these architectural practices simply aren't feasible.

Most pressing—and most talked about—with neo-colonialism, though, is the continued reliance on colonial powers, Western states, and Western institutions in general. Notably, these already-disadvantaged states (due to a colonial legacy that stripped resources from them) can only take loans from the IMF if they follow a set of conditions. While these conditions are meant to help developing countries, they tend to have mixed results and are often criticized for promoting policies that favor developed (in particular, Western) states. Such policies often include export-oriented economic models. While these can work, they do tend to benefit developed countries by providing cheaper goods, and they also increase dependence on other countries, especially developed ones.

Another pressing issue is one that is more hidden, one that has only recently been given studies about: cultural imperialism. Essentially, this is the process of one state imposing its culture on another, eliminating the unique cultural elements of the recipient country. The US is often the most accused source of this due to its dominance in common cultural-spreading means like television, movies, and research, as well as through powerful economic models like fast-food chains and technology companies. The diffusion of such goods and services has resulted in an adoption of American values by the populations of recipient countries. This is not unique to the US, though, as other countries contribute as well; the US is simply the most cited and powerful example, at least in the last hundred years. In reference to post-colony states, cultural imperialism exists as a threat to developed and emerging independent cultures. Historically, too, cultural imperialism saw to the loss of old cultures such as that of the Aztec culture in favor of colonial cultures like that of the Spanish.

More noticeably, tourism can be used as a good illustration of colonialism's legacy. Tourism in Latin America is more often than not dominated by elites and foreign companies who treat workers much the same as colonial powers did: by exploiting them with long hours, subservient positions, low wages, and minimal benefits. This is not just capitalism; this is oligarchical control of an industry, resulting in unfair labor and market practices. Moreover, tourism is extremely reliant on developed countries, demonstrating the reliance even today by newly-independent states on colonial powers. Finally, tourism reflects a cultural imperialistic trend of catering to other cultures; of sacrificing one culture for the adoption of another.



Topic 2

The second of the two topic options for this committee is the issue of **the rights of incarcerated individuals in Latin America**. This issue is deep, complex, and has numerous variations of it that can take hold.

Overall, incarceration is a serious issue in Latin America right now. Strikingly, they have some of the largest incarcerated populations of any region in the globe. El Salvador, for example, is notorious for having amazingly high rates of incarceration. With 2% of its adult population in prison, as well as having every 1,659 people per 100,000 people in prison (about 900 people higher than the second-highest country, Cuba), it has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. With worsening and increasing rates of crime, these incarceration rates are only expected to rise in all of Latin America, despite substantial problems with the system itself.

Latin America's prisons are notorious for being dysfunctional and prone to human rights abuses, qualifications that can be attributed to a number of factors including but not limited to overpopulation, lack of resources, corrupt prison staff, and lack of essential services. These factors have contributed to issues such as a lack of hygiene, space to sleep, and disability accommodations, as well as the existence of torture conducted by prison staff, gang violence within prisons, riots, sexual assault, spread of life-threatening and non-life-threatening disease, and the proliferation of illegal objects and substances within prisons such as firearms and illegal drugs. All of these are serious issues that impact real lives, even potentially innocent prisoners awaiting trial, mild offenders, and youth.

A current trend within Latin America has been the expansion of qualifications for imprisonment. Despite the overcrowding of prisons and the problems associated with that, Latin American politics has been pushing for larger numbers of people to be imprisoned. For instance,

there has been a recent push to reduce the age of criminal prosecution, such as with a narrowly-failed bill in Argentina and a referendum in Uruguay to decrease the age from 18 to 16 years old. This is striking, especially since Latin America is the region of the world with the second largest number of youth in prison (the largest is North America; the US, to be more specific). Additionally, increasingly smaller crimes are becoming qualifiers for imprisonment. Most notably, small-level drug offenses are causing people to be imprisoned. This effect has been notably detrimental to women, who have seen a rapid increase in incarceration rates, especially in Latin America. Unfortunately, these effects have not been confined to the women, as these women often have dependents. In other words, they have children that are depending on them. Thus, with them in prison, their kids are left to either receive help from relatives, the state, or themselves. However, the state largely lacks distributing any sort of assistance, causing kids without relatives to rely on themselves. Additionally, there are children who are born to pregnant prisoners. These children get to live with their mothers in prison for a few years (usually from 4 to 6 years; it differs per country due to the UN lacking any standard age for this), but receive no care from the state at all when they are released.

This leaves the question as to why there has been a push to increase incarceration rates, though. Mostly, this is due to an increased presence of crime in Latin America and a desire by governments and people to be rid of this. Despite this, critics point out that such a policy may actually be having the opposite effect. Because of criminal recruitment within prisons, a need for income even within prisons (this is a point that will be elaborated on later), a tendency for youth whose parents are incarcerated to be incarcerated later in life, a tendency for once-incarcerated youth to be incarcerated again later in life, and the power vacuums that form among cartels, the

push for more incarceration may simply be contributing to a self-perpetuating cycle that causes more crime and more imprisonment overall.

These policies of increasing the criteria for incarceration and the severity of the punishment for crimes in general are often referred to as *mano dura* policies. Recently, such an approach has been increasingly popular domestically due to its decrease in the amount of crime, but the problem with it is that its effects are only short-term. Long-term, *mano dura* policies do not seem to have a negative effect on crime rates. Not just statistically, though, *mano dura* policies are particularly bad for the innocent. Due to the sweeping nature of such programs, people are often put in pre-trial detention centers. A slow judicial system (which categorizes most of the world), though, means that so many people determined to be given trials may wait months or even years before their trial. In the meantime, they are placed in pre-trial detention centers, which are usually overcrowded, underfunded, and lack the proper facilities of general prisons.

As discussed earlier, life in a Latin American prison is not great. Aside from abuses by both prison staff and from other prisoners, a prisoner must deal with a lack of basic resources such as a bed, food, and hygiene products. Due to a lack of funding and overcrowding, resources in prisons have become scarce, oftentimes causing the burden of incarceration to also be placed on the families of prisoners. This means that the families of prisoners must bring in essential resources like medication, food, and blankets to help their loved ones in prison. Without the prisoners (who are often men) to make an income, the families must provide for prisoners as well as themselves. Much more often than not, it is men who are in prison and women who visit them. Even when women are in prison, there is a noticeable lack of men who come to visit. This means that women are disproportionately dealing with this burden, and women in prison often lack the

form of support that their male counterparts receive. Nevertheless, many prisoners do take up jobs to try to pay for essential goods that they may need. However, most Latin American prisons lack job systems, causing illegal business—particularly the sale of illegal drugs—to become a predominant industry within prisons. Such a dynamic contributes to criminal recruitment in prisons.

In addition, prisoners face the threat of disease. Due to the overcrowding of prisons in Latin America, a singular person getting infected could mean that the entire prison gets it, including prison staff. Without adequate medical resources or even nutrition, such epidemics can be extremely dangerous for prisoners, in particular. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this, revealing the weaknesses that Latin American prisons face from disease. During the pandemic, for instance, there was a significant rise in the number of prisoner riots due to fears of disease and frustration over a lack of visitations. To elaborate on the latter point, it should be noted that, during the pandemic, visitations were stopped. Because so many prisoners relied on visitations for necessities, this sudden stop was detrimental to the life of prisoners.

On the bright side, there is hope. While there are numerous problems with prisons in Latin American, there are potential solutions to help incarcerated individuals. Some alternatives to pre-trial detentions, for example, are supervised releases, pre-trial releases for lesser crimes, treatment programs (for drug offenses), and probation. To combat criminal offenses from youth without incarcerating them, some alternatives are community service, probation, reparations, and apologizing to victims (mostly for lesser crimes). While these potential solutions certainly have flaws, they have been proposed as alternatives to the current system. Additionally, Latin America's prison systems can be compared to more successful systems like that of Denmark, which stresses rehabilitation over punishment. After all, the Latin American states have formed

the general consensus that the loss of liberty for prisoners *is* the punishment, so taking away their dignity, too, is excessive.

To conclude, the rights of incarcerated individuals in Latin America truly is a diverse and complex topic. Aside from the issues discussed above, there are dozens of other approaches, issues, conclusions, and solutions that can be portrayed in this topic. Do not be afraid to deviate from what was mentioned above simply because it was not mentioned, for there are so many avenues to be explored.



Countries

Antigua & Barbuda

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism and offshore finance dependency.
- **Incarceration:** Limited capacity and overcrowding.

Argentina

- **Neo-colonialism:** Economically constrained by IMF debt and financial dependency.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowded prisons, heavy pretrial detention.
- Held the Pro Tempore Presidency from 2022-23.
- Hosted CELAC VII in 2023.

The Bahamas

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism and financial-services dependency.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowded prisons, migrant detention concerns.

Barbados

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism- and finance-oriented post-colonial economy.
- **Incarceration:** Small system with capacity strains.

Belize

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism- and finance-dependent post-colonial economy.
- **Incarceration:** Small system but chronic overcrowding.

Bolivia

- **Neo-colonialism:** Resource nationalism tempered by global market reliance.
- **Incarceration:** Poor conditions and prolonged pretrial detention.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President in 2019 from January to November under Evo Morales and from November of 2019 to January of 2020 under Jeanine Áñez.

Brazil

- **Neo-colonialism:** Global commodity exporter shaped by foreign capital and debt.
- **Incarceration:** Mass incarceration with severe racial and class disparities.
- Withdrew from CELAC in 2020 under former President Jair Bolsonaro. Rejoined in 2023 under President Lula da Silva.

Chile

- **Neo-colonialism:** Neoliberal model rooted in export dependence.
- **Incarceration:** Harsh policing and repression of protestors and Indigenous people.
- Was the inaugural Pro Tempore President, with a timeframe from 2011-13.
- Hosted CELAC I in 2013.

Colombia

- **Neo-colonialism:** U.S.-aligned security state tied to extractive development.
- **Incarceration:** Conflict-driven incarceration and prison overcrowding.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2025 to present.
- Called an emergency, virtual CELAC meeting to address the US' operation in Venezuela at the start of 2026.

Costa Rica

- **Neo-colonialism:** Export- and investment-driven economy with high social spending.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowding despite rights-oriented legal framework.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President in 2014 from January to May under Laura Chinchilla and from May of 2014 to January of 2015 under Luis Guillermo Solís.
- Hosted CELAC III in 2015.

Cuba

- **Neo-colonialism:** Anti-imperialist state constrained by embargo and isolation.
- **Incarceration:** Political imprisonment and limits on due process.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2013-14.
- Hosted CELAC II in 2014.

Dominica

- **Neo-colonialism:** Aid- and tourism-reliant economy.
- **Incarceration:** Limited infrastructure and overcrowding.

Dominican Republic

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism- and export-dependent economy shaped by U.S. influence.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowding and rights violations, especially for migrants.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2016-17.
- Hosted CELAC V in 2017.

Ecuador

- **Neo-colonialism:** Extractive dependency and IMF-linked austerity.
- **Incarceration:** Prison crisis marked by extreme violence.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2015-16.
- Hosted CELAC IV in 2016.

El Salvador

- **Neo-colonialism:** Formally sovereign but economically dependent on remittances and aid.
- **Incarceration:** Extreme mass incarceration under emergency powers.
- Was Pro Tempore President from 2017-19.

Grenada

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism and external aid dependency.
- **Incarceration:** Small prison system with rights concerns.

Guatemala

- **Neo-colonialism:** Oligarchic economy tied to land and foreign capital.
- **Incarceration:** Weak justice system, overcrowding, and abuse.

Guyana

- **Neo-colonialism:** Oil-driven economy shaped by multinational control.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowded prisons and slow judicial processes.

Haiti

- **Neo-colonialism:** Extreme external control via debt, aid, and intervention.
- **Incarceration:** Collapsed prison system with severe rights violations.

Honduras

- **Neo-colonialism:** Economy shaped by foreign investment and U.S. security policy.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowded, violent prisons with weak safeguards.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2024-25.
- Hosted CELAC IX in 2025.

Jamaica

- **Neo-colonialism:** Debt, tourism, and security dependence.
- **Incarceration:** Harsh policing and overcrowded prisons.

Mexico

- **Neo-colonialism:** Deeply integrated into U.S. economic and security systems.
- **Incarceration:** Militarized justice fuels abuses and mass pretrial detention.
- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2020-22.

- Hosted CELAC VI in 2021.

Nicaragua

- **Neo-colonialism:** Anti-imperialist in rhetoric, but dependent on alternative foreign powers.
- **Incarceration:** Prisons are used for political repression and rights abuses.

Panama

- **Neo-colonialism:** Economically constrained by global trade and U.S.-centered systems.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowded prisons disproportionately hold the poor and marginalized.

Paraguay

- **Neo-colonialism:** Export-led economy dominated by foreign land and capital.
- **Incarceration:** Carceral system entrenches class and racial inequality.

Peru

- **Neo-colonialism:** Extractive economy dominated by multinational firms.
- **Incarceration:** Overuse of pretrial detention and prison overcrowding.

Saint Kitts & Nevis

- **Neo-colonialism:** Citizenship-by-investment and tourism reliance.
- **Incarceration:** Very limited prison capacity.

Saint Lucia

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism-dependent post-colonial economy.
- **Incarceration:** Small but overcrowded prison system.

Saint Vincent & the Grenadines

- **Neo-colonialism:** Tourism- and agriculture-dependent economy.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowding and limited rehabilitation.

- Held the position of Pro Tempore President from 2023-24.
- Hosted CELAC VIII in 2024.

Suriname

- **Neo-colonialism:** Resource-export economy with foreign corporate influence.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowding and limited oversight.

Trinidad & Tobago

- **Neo-colonialism:** Energy-export economy tied to global markets.
- **Incarceration:** Overcrowding and pretrial detention issues.

Uruguay

- **Neo-colonialism:** Moderate global dependence with strong institutions.
- **Incarceration:** Rising incarceration despite comparatively strong rights protections.

Venezuela

- **Neo-colonialism:** Anti-imperialist rhetoric amid sanctions and oil dependency.
- **Incarceration:** Political detention and severe prison conditions.



Guiding Questions

Topic 1:

1. What measures can be taken to ensure that CELAC acts as a unified body, not prone to free rider problems?
2. How might the IMF's policies be altered to reduce the dependence of developing states on developed states?
3. Should the institutions created by colonial powers (such as government structures and international organizations) be kept, altered, or discarded? If the latter two, how so?
4. Is it within the best interests of CELAC member states to continue export-oriented industrialization (EOI) policies? If not, what kind of economic model should they shift to?
5. How should concerns about cultural imperialism be addressed in order to preserve the cultures of CELAC member states and promote further independent cultural development?

Topic 2:

1. How should Latin American states care for children who were born in their prisons but later released?
2. What can be done to ensure that drugs, weapons, and other illegal goods cannot be distributed into prisons?
3. What steps can be taken to address overcrowding in Latin American prisons, as well as the problems that overcrowding begets?

4. Should Latin American states prioritize decreasing the number of prisoners or should they try to get more people in prison? Why or why not?
5. How can the delay for trials be reduced?



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