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Organization of American States: In Brief

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Organization of American States: In Brief

The Organization of American States (OAS) is a regional multilateral organization that comprises 34 of the 35 independent countries of the Western Hemisphere, including the United States; Nicaragua withdrew from the organization in 2023. The OAS was established in 1948 as a forum for Western Hemisphere countries to engage one another and address issues of mutual concern. Today, the organization concentrates on four broad objectives: democracy promotion, human rights protection, economic and social development, and regional security cooperation. With budget expenditures totaling \$167.0 million in 2024, the OAS carries out various activities to advance these goals, often providing policy guidance and technical assistance to member states.

The OAS has occasionally struggled to fulfill its mandate due to political and financial challenges. Over the past two decades, increased ideological polarization among member states has made it more difficult to establish a common hemispheric agenda. In addition, member states have repeatedly assigned new responsibilities to the OAS without providing commensurate increases in funding. Consequently, the organization is sometimes unable to establish consensus on regional challenges or dedicate sufficient resources to address them effectively. Albert Ramdin, who is scheduled to take office as the next OAS Secretary General on May 30, 2025, has emphasized the importance of finding common ground among member states.

The United States hosts the OAS headquarters in Washington, DC, and is the largest financial contributor to the organization, providing an estimated \$60.4 million in FY2024. Historically, the U.S. government has sought to use the OAS to advance economic, political, and security objectives in the Western Hemisphere. OAS actions frequently reflected U.S. policy during the 20th century, particularly during the early Cold War period and the 1990s. This trend has changed to a certain extent over the past 25 years, as the policy preferences of the United States and other member states have diverged on certain issues.

Congress has helped shape U.S. policy toward the OAS through its legislative and oversight activities. For example, the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-47, Division F) appropriated funding for U.S. assessed contributions to international organizations, including the OAS, and designated at least \$15.0 million in voluntary contributions to support OAS efforts to protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and combat human trafficking. The legislation also directed the State Department to use the voice and vote of the United States to implement various budgetary and management reforms at the OAS and to prioritize OAS activities related to democracy and human rights. The Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4), signed into law on March 15, 2025, funds U.S. contributions to the OAS at the same rate, and under the same conditions and authority, as FY2024.

The 119th Congress may examine the Trump Administration's approach to the OAS and may influence U.S. engagement with the organization through the FY2026 appropriations process or other legislation. As of May 8, 2025, the OAS reported that the Trump Administration had terminated U.S. funding for at least 22 OAS programs. Pursuant to Executive Order 14199, issued on February 4, 2025, the Secretary of State is to conduct a review of the OAS and all other international organizations of which the United States is a member to determine if they are "contrary to the interests of the United States" and whether they can "be reformed." Within 180 days (i.e., by August 2025), the Secretary is to provide recommendations regarding whether to withdraw from such organizations. The Trump Administration's preliminary FY2026 budget proposal does not specifically mention the OAS but recommends pausing most assessed contributions and all voluntary contributions to international organizations. In addition to assessing legislative options, the Senate could consider President Trump's nomination of Leandro Rizzuto to be the U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS (PN26-41).

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Introduction

The United States helped create the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1948 as a multilateral forum in which the countries of the Western Hemisphere could engage one another and address issues of mutual concern. The U.S. Senate gave its advice and consent to ratification of the OAS charter, allowing for U.S. membership in the organization.¹ Congress authorizes and appropriates funding for the OAS, and the executive branch represents and shapes U.S. policy through the State Department and the U.S. Mission to the OAS in Washington, DC.

Historically, OAS decisions often have reflected U.S. policy, as other member states have sought to maintain close relations with the dominant economic and political power in the hemisphere. This was especially true during the early Cold War period, when the United States was able to secure OAS support for many of its anti-communist policies.² OAS decisions again aligned closely with U.S. policy in the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, due to a broad political consensus among member states in support of initiatives intended to strengthen democratic governance and liberalize markets.³ Over the past two decades, the United States' ability to shape outcomes in the Western Hemisphere has declined as countries throughout the region have elected ideologically diverse leaders whose domestic and foreign policies have sometimes diverged from U.S. policy preferences.⁴

Congressional debate regarding the OAS has focused on how to ensure the organization fulfills its mandate to promote democracy, protect human rights, advance economic and social development, and foster security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. Congress has designated funding to support such OAS activities in annual appropriations measures and has enacted two legislative measures over the past 12 years intended to strengthen the organization. The OAS Revitalization and Reform Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-41) sought to foster various financial and administrative reforms at the OAS to enable the organization to concentrate on its core competencies and carry out its mission more effectively. The OAS Legislative Engagement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-343) called for a formal mechanism to allow Members of Congress and national legislators from other OAS member states to participate in OAS activities. It also directed the Secretary of State to develop a strategy for supporting OAS anti-corruption and human rights promotion efforts.

At times, some Members of Congress have expressed concerns that the OAS is falling short, particularly in its efforts to promote democracy and human rights. These Members have called on the organization to respond more forcefully to authoritarian actions in countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua and occasionally have sought to compel stronger action by threatening to suspend funding for the organization.⁵ Some Members also have criticized certain OAS actions that they argue are outside the organization's mandate. In 2018, for example, a group of Senators asserted that two OAS-affiliated bodies' statements in favor of legalized abortion contravened a

¹ The Senate gave its advice and consent to ratification of the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) in August 1950. The text of the charter is available at <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/charter.html>.

² George Meek, "U.S. Influence in the Organization of American States," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 3 (August 1975), pp. 311-325.

³ Carolyn M. Shaw, "Limits to Hegemonic Influence in the Organization of American States," *Latin American Politics and Society*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2003), pp. 59-92.

⁴ Russell Crandall, "The Post-American Hemisphere: Power and Politics in an Autonomous Latin America," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 3 (May/June 2011), pp. 83-95; and Inter-American Dialogue, *The Case for Renewed Cooperation in a Troubled Hemisphere*, April 2022, pp. 26-27.

⁵ See, for example, U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, *Advancing U.S. Interests Through the Organization of American States*, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., February 14, 2018; and Josh Rogin, "House Panel Votes to Defund the OAS," *Foreign Policy*, July 20, 2011.

long-standing legislative provision that prohibits U.S. funds from being used to “lobby for or against abortion,” and called for the State Department to withhold some funding.⁶ The first Trump Administration subsequently reduced the FY2019 U.S. contribution to the OAS by \$210,000, which it determined to be the U.S. “proportional share of possible OAS costs in question.”⁷

The second Trump Administration has called for a review of U.S. participation in the OAS and all other international organizations and has terminated some funding for the organization. The 119th Congress may assess the current state of the OAS, the Trump Administration’s policy approach, and whether and how to shape U.S. engagement with the organization.

This report briefly discusses the history and governance of the OAS, examines the organization’s funding and activities, and raises potential legislative and oversight activities related to the OAS that Congress could consider.

History and Purpose⁸

Multilateral relations among the countries of the Western Hemisphere date back to the International Conference of American States, held in Washington, DC, from October 1889 to April 1890. This conference was the first in a series of periodic meetings to establish norms and institutions to govern hemispheric relations and promote cooperation. The participating countries agreed to establish the International Union of American Republics, headquartered in Washington, DC, which was renamed the Pan American Union in 1910. In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt announced a “Good Neighbor” policy, which sought to emphasize hemispheric cooperation and trade and to distance the United States from its repeated military interventions in the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹ The policy shift paved the way for the adoption of the Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, which recognized the equality of states and the principle of nonintervention in one another’s affairs.¹⁰ Close cooperation during World War II further strengthened hemispheric ties, which were reinforced with the adoption of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty)—a collective security pact—in 1947.¹¹

In 1948, the United States and 20 other countries signed the OAS charter, which reconstituted the Pan American Union as the OAS and placed many of the hemisphere’s institutions and agreements (collectively known as the *inter-American system*) under the organization’s umbrella. According to the OAS charter, as amended, the purposes of the organization are

To strengthen the peace and security of the continent;

⁶ Letter from James Lankford, U.S. Senator, et al. to Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State, December 21, 2018. For more on the legislative provision, the Siljander amendment to the FY1982 Foreign Assistance and Related Programs Appropriations Act (P.L. 97-121; 95 Stat. 1657), see CRS Report R41360, *Abortion and Family Planning-Related Provisions in U.S. Foreign Assistance Law and Policy*, by Luisa Blanchfield.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, “Department Press Briefing,” March 26, 2019.

⁸ Information in this section is drawn from U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Inter-American Relations: A Collection of Documents, Legislation, Descriptions of Inter-American Organizations, and Other Material Pertaining to Inter-American Affairs*, Joint Committee Print, Prepared by the Congressional Research Service, 100th Cong., 2nd sess., December 1988, S.Prt. 100-168 (Washington: GPO, 1989); and OAS, “Our History,” http://www.oas.org/en/about/our_history.asp.

⁹ See CRS Report R42738, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2023*, by Barbara Salazar Torreon and Sofia Plagakis.

¹⁰ The Senate gave its advice and consent to ratification of the Convention on the Rights and Duties of States in June 1934. The text of the treaty is available at <https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-40.html>.

¹¹ The Senate gave its advice and consent to ratification of the Rio Treaty in December 1947. The text of the treaty is available at <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/b-29.html>.

To promote and consolidate representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of nonintervention;

To prevent possible causes of difficulties and ensure the pacific settlement of disputes that may arise among member states;

To provide for common action on the part of those states in the event of aggression;

To seek the solution of political, juridical, and economic problems that may arise among them;

To promote, by cooperative action, their economic, social, and cultural development;

To eradicate extreme poverty, which constitutes an obstacle to the full democratic development of the peoples of the hemisphere; and

To achieve an effective limitation of conventional weapons that will make it possible to devote the largest amount of resources to the economic and social development of member states.¹²

Over the decades, OAS membership gradually expanded to incorporate newly independent Caribbean countries and Canada. It now includes 34 of the 35 independent countries of the Western Hemisphere. Nicaragua, which was a founding member of the OAS, denounced the OAS Charter in November 2021, initiating a two-year withdrawal process that resulted in Nicaragua's departure from the organization in November 2023.¹³ Government participation and representation in the OAS have also varied over time. For example, Cuba has not participated in the OAS since 1962 (see text box, "**Cuba and the Organization of American States**"). Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro began the process to withdraw from the OAS in April 2017, but the then-opposition-controlled National Assembly, which OAS member states recognized as the legitimate government of Venezuela, halted the withdrawal in February 2019 and appointed a representative to the OAS in April 2019. That representative departed the OAS in January 2023, after Venezuela's opposition dissolved the interim government. Venezuela has not participated in the OAS since then.

Cuba and the Organization of American States

Cuba was one of the founding members of the Organization of American States (OAS), and—as a signatory to the OAS charter—it remains a member. It has not participated in the organization since 1962, however, due to a decision at the Eighth Meeting of Consultation of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs to suspend Cuba for its adherence to Marxism-Leninism and alignment with the communist bloc. The resolution to exclude Cuba was controversial when it was adopted, and the reintegration of Cuba into the inter-American system has remained a frequent source of contention among the countries of the hemisphere ever since.

Latin American and Caribbean governments repeatedly have pushed to include Cuba in hemispheric forums. At the 2009 OAS General Assembly, member states adopted a measure to repeal the 1962 resolution that suspended Cuba from participation in the OAS. The measure stated that Cuba's eventual participation in the OAS "will be the result of a process of dialogue initiated at the request of the Government of Cuba, and in accordance with the practices, purposes, and principles of the OAS," which include representative democracy and respect for human rights. Although the Cuban government declared the repeal a "major victory," it also stated that it had no interest in participating in the OAS.

Sources: OAS, Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ser. C/II.8, January 22-31, 1962; OAS, *Resolution on Cuba*, AG/RES. 2438 (XXXIX-O/09), June 3, 2009; and Voice of America, "Cuba Says No to OAS Membership," June 4, 2009.

¹² Charter of the OAS, Chapter 1, Article 2.

¹³ Nicaragua denounced the OAS Charter after the OAS General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring that Nicaragua's 2021 elections had no democratic legitimacy.

Institutional Governance

Three primary bodies are responsible for setting and carrying out the agenda of the OAS: the General Assembly, the Permanent Council, and the General Secretariat. The OAS also includes other councils, committees, and institutional organs that implement portions of its mandate with varying levels of autonomy. For example, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), composed of seven independent commissioners, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, composed of seven independent judges, are the OAS bodies charged with promoting and protecting human rights (see “Human Rights Protection”).

General Assembly

The General Assembly is the principal policymaking organ of the OAS. It meets annually to debate issues, approve the organization’s budget, and set policies to govern the other OAS bodies.¹⁴ The General Assembly comprises the delegations of each participating member state (often led by foreign ministers), and each state has a single vote. The body is empowered to adopt most decisions with the affirmative votes of an absolute majority of member states; however, some decisions—including adoption of the agenda and approval of budgetary matters—require the affirmative votes of two-thirds of member states. The 55th regular session of the OAS General Assembly is to be held in St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda, from June 25 to June 27, 2025.¹⁵

Permanent Council

The Permanent Council meets regularly at OAS headquarters in Washington, DC, and conducts the organization’s day-to-day business.¹⁶ Among other activities, the Permanent Council works to maintain friendly relations among member states, assists in the peaceful settlement of disputes, carries out decisions assigned to it by the General Assembly, regulates the General Secretariat when the General Assembly is not in session, receives reports from the various bodies of the inter-American system, and submits recommendations to the General Assembly. Additionally, the Permanent Council is empowered to undertake diplomatic initiatives in the event of an unconstitutional alteration of government in a member state. Each member state appoints one representative to the Permanent Council (including the U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS), and each member state has a single vote. Most decisions require the affirmative votes of two-thirds of member states.

General Secretariat

The General Secretariat, directed by the Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary General and consisting of approximately 1,100 staff, is charged with implementing policies set by the General Assembly and the Permanent Council.¹⁷ The General Assembly elects the Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary General to serve five-year terms with the possibility of one reelection. According to the OAS charter, the Secretary General serves as the organization’s legal representative and is allowed to participate in all OAS meetings but does not have a vote. The

¹⁴ A special session of the General Assembly can be convoked by a two-thirds vote of the Permanent Council.

¹⁵ OAS, *Place, Date and Theme of the Fifty-Fifth Regular Session of the General Assembly*, CP/RES. 1279 (2539/25), March 19, 2025.

¹⁶ The Headquarters Agreement Between the Organization of American States and the Government of the United States of America is available at <http://www.oas.org/legal/english/docs/bilateralagree/us/sedeusa.htm>.

¹⁷ OAS, “Organizational Structure,” April 30, 2025, <https://www.oas.org/opdbweb/default.aspx?Lang=En>.

Secretary General also is empowered to establish offices and hire personnel to implement OAS mandates. In March 2025, a special session of the General Assembly elected Albert Ramdin—the foreign minister of Suriname and a former OAS Assistant Secretary General (2005-2015)—by acclamation to be Secretary General for 2025-2030. He is scheduled to take office on May 30, 2025, replacing current Secretary General Luis Almagro (2015-2025).¹⁸

Funding

OAS expenditures totaled \$167.0 million in 2024 (see **Table 1**). The largest portion of the budget is the Regular Fund, which covers the organization’s day-to-day operating expenses. The Regular Fund is financed through the assessed contributions, or membership dues, of OAS member states. These contributions are calculated based on each member state’s gross national income, with adjustments for debt burden and low per capita income. The United States is responsible for the largest assessed contribution, equivalent to 49.99% of the Regular Fund in 2025.¹⁹ The OAS also collects Specific Funds—voluntary contributions from member states, permanent observers, and other international donors that are directed to specific projects or programs.²⁰

According to the Audit Committee of the OAS, for over a decade, annual OAS budgets have “fallen significantly short of covering both programmatic and administrative requirements.”²¹ The Audit Committee notes that member states “have made efforts to incrementally increase funding, streamline mandates, and address aging infrastructure.”²² Nevertheless, the Audit Committee argues that the OAS remains financially vulnerable due to the organization’s dependence on the prompt payments of member states’ assessed contributions and its heavy reliance on a few key member states and donors.

Table 1. Organization of American States Budget: Calendar Years 2023-2025

(millions of current U.S. dollars)

	2023 (executed)	2024 (executed)	2025 (approved)
Regular Fund	81.8	88.7	92.0
Specific Funds^a	68.8	71.4	NA
Indirect Cost Recovery^b	7.3	6.9	7.7
Total	157.9	167.0	NA

Sources: OAS, *Proposed Program-Budget 2026*, p. 19; OAS, *Report to the Permanent Council: Annual Audit of Accounts and Financial Statements for the Years Ended December 31 2024 and 2023*, p. 29; and OAS, *Report to the Permanent Council: Annual Audit of Accounts and Financial Statements for the Years Ended December 31, 2023 and 2022*, p. 29.

Notes: Dollar figures may not sum to total due to rounding. NA = not available.

- a. FY2025 Specific Funds data are not yet available since Specific Funds are financed through individual donor agreements and do not align with the OAS budget cycle.

¹⁸ Another special session of the General Assembly, held on May 5, 2025, elected Laura Gil of Colombia to be the next Assistant Secretary General, as of July 17, 2025.

¹⁹ OAS, *Program-Budget of the Organization for 2025*, AG/RES. 1 (LV-E/24), November 1, 2024, p. 31.

²⁰ For more information on permanent observers to the OAS, see OAS, “Permanent Observers,” https://www.oas.org/en/ser/dia/perm_observers/countries.asp.

²¹ OAS Audit Committee, *Report to the Permanent Council, Annual Audit of Accounts and Financial Statements for the Years Ended December 31, 2024 and 2023*, JAE/doc.55/25, p. 10.

²² OAS Audit Committee, *Report to the Permanent Council*, p. 10.

- b. A percentage (7%) of all contributions to Specific Funds is directed to the Indirect Cost Recovery account to defray indirect costs incurred by the General Secretariat in administering Specific Fund projects.

U.S. Contributions

The United States has been the top financial contributor to the OAS, providing an estimated \$60.4 million in assessed and voluntary funding in FY2024 (see **Table 2**).²³ U.S. assessed contributions generally have been provided through the Contributions to International Organizations (CIO) account in annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations legislation. Congress typically has appropriated a lump sum to the CIO account each fiscal year, and the executive branch has allocated funding to specific organizations, including the OAS, based on assessment levels and U.S. policy priorities. The estimated FY2025 U.S. assessment to the OAS is \$46.4 million.²⁴

Table 2. U.S. Funding for the OAS: FY2023-FY2025

(allocations in millions of current U.S. dollars)

	FY2023 (estimate)	FY2024 (estimate)	FY2025 (estimate)
Assessed Contribution	43.2	45.4	46.4
Voluntary Contributions	10.0	15.0	15.0
Total	53.2	60.4	61.4

Sources: U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Fiscal Year 2025*, April 2024, pp. 75, 207, and 229; U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, committee print on P.L. 118-47, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Comm. Print 55-008 (Washington: GPO, 2024), pp. 1174, 1177, and 1179; H.Rept. 118-146, p. 90; and P.L. 118-83.

Note: The U.S. fiscal year is from October 1 to September 30, whereas the OAS fiscal year is from January 1 to December 31; as a result, U.S. and OAS annual funding data may not align or be comparable.

The United States also has provided voluntary contributions to the OAS through various accounts in annual SFOPS bills. For FY2024 (P.L. 118-47, Division F), Congress appropriated \$6.5 million through the Economic Support Fund account for OAS human rights activities, \$6.0 million through the International Organizations and Programs account for OAS democracy strengthening activities, and \$2.5 million through the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement account for OAS efforts intended to combat human trafficking.²⁵ P.L. 118-47 also directed the U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS to “use the voice and vote of the United States” to implement various budgetary and management reforms at the OAS and to prioritize OAS activities related to democracy and human rights.²⁶ The Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and

²³ After the United States, the largest member state contributors to the OAS in 2024 were Canada (\$22.5 million), Brazil (\$11.6 million), Mexico (\$8.6 million), and Argentina (\$7.3 million). The largest nonmember donors were Japan (\$8.2 million), Spain (\$4.6 million), and the European Union (\$3.8 million). OAS, “Contributions to OAS Funds by Donor, From January 01, 2024 to December 31, 2024,” https://www.oas.org/saf/DFAMS/2024/12/SF_TABLE_CONTOAS_20241231_EN.pdf.

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification, Appendix 1: Department of State Diplomatic Engagement, Fiscal Year 2025*, April 2024, p. 457.

²⁵ U.S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, committee print on P.L. 118-47, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Comm. Print 55-008 (Washington: GPO, 2024), pp. 1174, 1177, and 1179; H.Rept. 118-146, p. 90.

²⁶ P.L. 118-47, §7045(j).

Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4), funds U.S. contributions to the OAS at the same rate, and under the same conditions and authority, as FY2024.

U.S. agencies may obligate additional funding to the OAS for specific programs or activities over the course of each fiscal year. In FY2023, for example, U.S. agencies obligated about \$20 million to the OAS—in addition the funds listed in **Table 2**—to implement various foreign assistance projects, such as anti-migrant smuggling efforts in Colombia, a national identification card program in Haiti, and regional counterdrug programming.²⁷

Trump Administration Funding Decisions and Reviews

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14169, pausing U.S. foreign assistance for 90 days “pending reviews of such programs for programmatic efficiency and consistency with United States foreign policy.”²⁸ U.S. agencies directed the OAS to suspend implementation of 47 projects funded through U.S. voluntary contributions.²⁹ According to the OAS, as of May 8, 2025, U.S. agencies had lifted suspensions on 18 programs, terminated 22 programs, and had yet to make determinations on the remaining 7 programs.³⁰ The terminated programs include a mix of development and security assistance activities, including regional anti-drug programming and a counterterrorism information sharing initiative launched with U.S. support during the first Trump Administration.³¹

Executive Order 14199, issued on February 4, 2025, directs the Secretary of State to conduct a review of the OAS and all other international organizations of which the United States is a member and all conventions and treaties to which the United States is a party to determine if they are “contrary to the interests of the United States” and whether they can “be reformed.”³² Within 180 days (i.e., by August 2025), the Secretary is to provide recommendations regarding whether to withdraw from such organizations and agreements.

To date, the Trump Administration has not released a detailed FY2026 budget request. A preliminary discretionary budget request, published on May 2, 2025, recommends pausing “most assessed and all voluntary contributions” to international organizations.³³ The request appears to include \$264.4 million for such contributions (an 87% decrease compared with FY2025 enacted levels); it is unclear whether the OAS would be among the organizations funded.³⁴ The preliminary budget outline also requests funding for a new “America First Opportunity Fund”

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Report to Congress on U.S. Contributions to International Organizations, Fiscal Year 2023*, July 18, 2024.

²⁸ Executive Order 14169 of January 20, 2025, “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid,” 90 *Federal Register* 8619, January 30, 2025.

²⁹ OAS, *Special Measures to Sustain OAS Operations and Human Resources in Response to the Executive Order on the Foreign Aid Realignment of the United States*, CP/RES. 1277 (2535/25), March 5, 2025; and OAS, *Status of Programs Financed With Specific Funds*, CP/CAAP/INF. 528/25, May 13, 2025.

³⁰ OAS, *Status of Programs Financed With Specific Funds*, CP/CAAP/INF. 528/25, May 13, 2025.

³¹ OAS, “PPA Status Overview: Lifts, Terminations, and Ongoing Suspensions,” April 30, 2025; and OAS, “OAS to Develop Inter-American Network on Counterterrorism to Facilitate Immediate Exchange of Information on Terrorist Threats,” October 3, 2019.

³² Executive Order 14199 of February 4, 2025, “Withdrawing the United States From and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to All International Organizations,” 90 *Federal Register* 9275, February 10, 2025.

³³ Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *The President’s FY 2026 Discretionary Budget Request*, p. 2, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-resources/budget/the-presidents-fy-2026-discretionary-budget-request/> (hereinafter OMB, *FY2026 Discretionary Budget Request*).

³⁴ CRS analysis of OMB, *FY2026 Discretionary Budget Request*, pp. 1-2; Division F of P.L. 118-47, and P.L. 119-4.

that the Administration asserts could be used to provide an unspecified amount of funding for international organizations, among other national security priorities.

Activities

The Strategic Vision of the OAS, adopted by the General Assembly in 2014, states that the four core pillars of the organization’s mission are strengthening democracy, promoting and protecting human rights, advancing integral development, and fostering multidimensional security.³⁵ In his election speech, Secretary General-elect Ramdin asserted that these goals “exist in unison” and that “without one the other cannot be fully attained.”³⁶ He also emphasized the importance of sustainable development efforts and the need to find common ground among member states. This marked a potential shift in priorities and approach from outgoing Secretary General Almagro, who focused primarily on democracy and human rights concerns and frequently spoke out about contentious issues during his tenure.

In March 2025, the U.S. Mission to the OAS urged Secretary General-elect Ramdin to continue to prioritize the defense of democracy, including by pushing for stronger action against repressive regimes, advocating for transparent electoral processes, and defending freedom of expression. The U.S. Mission to the OAS also urged Ramdin to strengthen regional cooperation, particularly “to end illegal migration.”³⁷ In May 2025 congressional testimony, Secretary of State Rubio asserted that the OAS should take on a greater role in resolving the crisis in Haiti, potentially including through the deployment of a multinational security mission.³⁸ Ongoing OAS activities are described below.

Democracy Promotion

Democracy promotion has been a top priority of the OAS, especially since the 1980s, when many countries in the region began to transition from authoritarian rule to civilian governance. Member states approved a series of instruments designed to support democratic governance, culminating in the 2001 adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which asserts that the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.³⁹ The OAS has sought to uphold these commitments through support for, and observation of, elections; technical assistance and other programs to foster institutional development and good governance; and the coordination of collective action when democratic institutions are threatened.

Some scholars have found that OAS electoral observation missions play an important role in the legitimization of electoral processes and long-term institution building throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴⁰ In 2023 and early 2024, for example, the OAS arguably helped ensure a

³⁵ OAS, *Strategic Vision of the Organization of American States*, AG/RES. 2814 (XLIV-O/14), June 4, 2014.

³⁶ OAS, *Remarks by H. E. Albert Ramdin Upon His Election as Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Delivered at the Fifty-Sixth Special Session of the General Assembly*, AG/INF. 5 (LVI-E/25), March 18, 2025.

³⁷ U.S. Mission to the OAS, “Senior Bureau Michael Kozak’s Remarks at the OAS Secretary General Elections,” March 18, 2025.

³⁸ Secretary of State Marco Rubio, testimony before the U.S. Congress, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Review of the FY26 State Department Budget Request*, 119th Cong., 1st sess., May 20, 2025. For additional information on Haiti, see CRS Insight IN12331, *Haiti in Crisis: What Role for a Multinational Security Support Mission?*, by Karla I. Rios.

³⁹ OAS, *Inter-American Democratic Charter*, http://www.oas.org/OASpage/eng/Documents/Democratic_Charter.htm.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Lisa Vasciannie, “The Organization of American States: Evolution of Election Observation in the (continued...)”

democratic transfer of power in Guatemala through its observation and diplomatic efforts.⁴¹ Nevertheless, analysts have sometimes questioned the findings of particular OAS electoral observation missions, contributing to controversy around some disputed electoral processes.⁴² In 2024, nine member states—including the United States—invited the OAS to observe their elections.⁴³

There is a lack of consensus among member states regarding how to respond to democratic backsliding in some countries in the region. Many member states adhere to the principal of nonintervention, which is enshrined in the OAS charter, and are largely unwilling to interfere in the internal affairs of another member state unless there is an abrupt democratic breakdown.⁴⁴ Consequently, the OAS General Assembly and Permanent Council arguably have been slow to respond to situations where elected leaders establish authoritarian governments through the gradual elimination of checks and balances and consolidation of power, as occurred in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Even in cases when member states have been unable or unwilling to act, however, the IACHR and other OAS institutions have often played important roles documenting democratic erosion.⁴⁵

Human Rights Protection

During the initial decades following the IACHR's 1959 creation, the commission's documentation of human rights violations brought international attention to the abuses of repressive regimes. Although the human rights situation in the hemisphere improved considerably with the spread of democracy, the IACHR has received more than 2,000 allegations of human rights violations each year over the past decade.⁴⁶ The IACHR investigates alleged human rights abuses, issues requests to governments to adopt "precautionary measures" to protect individuals or groups at risk of suffering abuses, and observes and reports on the general human rights situations in OAS member states. Occasionally, the IACHR has established special independent teams of experts to conduct in-depth investigations into some high-profile and politically sensitive human rights issues.⁴⁷ The IACHR also has created 13 rapporteurships to draw attention

Inter-American System 1962-2017," *Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy*, vol. 5, no. 1 (March 2018), pp. 89-112; and Ferran Martínez i Coma, Alessandro Nai, and Pippa Norris, *Democratic Diffusion: How Regional Organizations Strengthen Electoral Integrity*, University of Sydney and Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Executive Report, 2016.

⁴¹ See, for example, Rubén M. Perina, "The OAS and a Veiled Coup Attempt in Guatemala," *Global Americans*, September 21, 2023; and Sir Ronald Sanders, "From Crisis to Democracy: OAS Shines in Guatemala's Political Transition," *Caribbean News Global*, January 18, 2024.

⁴² See, for example, Anatoly Kurmanaev and María Silvia Trigo, "A Closer Look at Bolivia's Election Muddies Tampering Claims," *New York Times*, June 7, 2020.

⁴³ OAS, Secretariat for Political Affairs, Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation, "Electoral Observation Missions and Recommendations Database," accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.oas.org/eomdatabase/default.aspx?lang=en>.

⁴⁴ Article 19 of the OAS charter states, "No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic, and cultural elements."

⁴⁵ For example, the annual reports of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) each include a chapter (Chapter IV since 1998) on human rights situations deemed to merit special attention. See IACHR, "Annual Reports," <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/IA.asp>.

⁴⁶ IACHR, "Statistics," accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/multimedia/statistics/statistics.html>.

⁴⁷ In February 2025, for example, the IACHR launched such a group to investigate the 2016 assassination of Berta Cáceres, a prominent Indigenous leader and human rights defender in Honduras. IACHR, "IACHR Launches Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts for the Case of Berta Cáceres in Honduras," February 14, 2025.

to certain human rights issues, such as freedom of expression, and to groups that it deems particularly at risk of human rights violations.⁴⁸ In June 2025, the General Assembly is expected to elect three new IACHR commissioners for the 2026 to 2029 term. The Trump Administration has put forward the candidacy of Rosa María Payá, a Cuban human rights and democracy advocate.⁴⁹

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, installed in San José, Costa Rica, in 1979, is a judicial institution charged with interpreting and applying the hemisphere's human rights conventions.⁵⁰ It considers cases submitted by the IACHR to determine whether OAS member states are responsible for human rights violations and, if so, the measures to be adopted to redress the consequences of such violations. The court also provides advisory opinions to member states and other OAS bodies, and it orders member states to adopt “provisional measures” to protect the rights of individuals or groups at urgent risk of suffering irreparable harm. Currently, 19 OAS member states accept the court's jurisdiction; the United States does not.⁵¹

Human rights advocates generally have praised the work of the IACHR and the Inter-American Court and have sought to defend the independence of both institutions to ensure they are able to carry out their mandates without political interference. Some member states have sought to curtail that independence, however, in apparent efforts to avoid criticism and/or perceived intrusions on their sovereignty.⁵² Some analysts and member states also have criticized the IACHR and the court for weighing in on issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion, which they argue are outside the institutions' mandates.⁵³

Economic and Social Development

The OAS began to place greater emphasis on economic, social, cultural, scientific, and technological programs during the 1960s, coinciding with President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress to promote development in Latin America. Although the region has made considerable strides in terms of economic growth and social inclusion, poverty and inequality levels remain high in many countries and the OAS continues to support development efforts today. The Secretariat for Integral Development provides an array of training and capacity-building support to member states regarding economic, human, and sustainable development. It also fosters policy dialogue and serves as a clearinghouse for best practices. In addition to those activities, the OAS Development Cooperation Fund provides seed funding to support national and

⁴⁸ The 13 thematic rapporteurships focus on freedom of expression; economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights; memory, truth, and justice; and the rights of Indigenous peoples; women; migrants; children; human rights defenders; persons deprived of liberty; Afro-descendants; lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, and intersex persons; older persons; and persons with disabilities.

⁴⁹ IACHR commissioners serve in their personal capacities and do not represent governments. U.S. Department of State, “Announcement of Candidate to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,” March 26, 2025.

⁵⁰ For the text of the conventions, see IACHR, “Basic Documents in the Inter-American System,” https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/mandate/basic_documents.asp.

⁵¹ The United States has not ratified any of the inter-American human rights conventions. The United States is subject to the jurisdiction of the IACHR under the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (adopted in 1948 alongside the OAS charter), but the U.S. government argues that the declaration does not create legally binding obligations.

⁵² See, for example, José Miguel Vivanco and Tamara Taraciuk Broner, “Why a Human Rights Icon Needs Its Independence,” *Americas Quarterly*, September 2, 2020.

⁵³ See, for example, Alfonso Aguilar, testimony before the U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, *Advancing U.S. Interests Through the Organization of American States*, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., February 14, 2018; and Gobierno de Guatemala, “Presidente Giammattei Rechaza Presiones de Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos de la OEA,” June 28, 2022.

multinational development projects. During its 2021-2024 programming cycle, this fund allocated a total of \$1.8 million to activities in 15 countries focused on responding to, and long-term recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁴

Some analysts have asserted that the accumulation of development programs at the OAS has stretched the organization's mandate and resources while undermining its efficiency. They contend the OAS should transfer such programs to other institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, so it can focus more clearly on the remaining portions of its mission.⁵⁵ Conversely, some officials from member states—particularly Caribbean countries—argue the OAS has placed too much emphasis on democracy and human rights issues and should reprioritize development efforts.⁵⁶ As noted above, Secretary General-elect Ramdin, who is to be the first OAS Secretary General from the Caribbean, has highlighted the importance of the organization's development activities.

Regional Security Cooperation

The OAS has dedicated greater attention to hemispheric security issues over the past two decades as member states have become more concerned about transnational threats. In 2005, the OAS created the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security in an attempt to address security issues in a more comprehensive manner and better coordinate member states' efforts. The Secretariat supports a wide variety of activities, including efforts to reduce gang violence, prevent human trafficking, and remove land mines. The OAS also supports regional coordination on cybersecurity and counterterrorism efforts through the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE). In 2024, CICTE reportedly provided technical assistance to a variety of member states to help them develop national cybersecurity strategies, update biosecurity legal frameworks, and establish strategic trade controls, among other activities.⁵⁷

OAS member states coordinate anti-drug efforts through the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD). CICAD assists OAS member states in strengthening their anti-drug policies by developing and recommending legislation, providing technical assistance and specialized training, and conducting assessments. CICAD is currently developing its *2026-2030 Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs*. The previous plan of action, adopted in 2020, called for member states to strengthen national measures to address the threat of fentanyl-related substances and non-medical synthetic opioids.⁵⁸

Issues for Congress

Countries throughout the Western Hemisphere are contending with challenges, including the erosion of democratic institutions and the expansion of transnational crime. As the preeminent multilateral forum in the hemisphere, the OAS is well placed to facilitate regional cooperation on

⁵⁴ OAS Audit Committee, *Report to the Permanent Council*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Ben Raderstorf and Michael Shifter, *Rebuilding Hemispheric Consensus: A Reform Agenda for the Organization of American States*, Inter-American Dialogue, February 2018, pp. 15-16. For more on the Inter-American Development Bank, see CRS Report R41170, *Multilateral Development Banks: Overview and Issues for Congress*, by Rebecca M. Nelson.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Anton Edmunds, Ambassador of St. Lucia to the United States, remarks during a virtual Center for Strategic and International Studies event on "A New Agenda for the Hemisphere: Perspectives from Ambassadors," August 16, 2021.

⁵⁷ OAS, *2024 Draft Annual Report of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE) to the Fifth-Fifth Regular Session of the General Assembly*, CP/doc.6083/25, March 27, 2025, pp. 3-13.

⁵⁸ CICAD, *Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs 2021-2025*, CICAD/doc.2533/20, December 10, 2020, p. 8.

such issues, though political differences among member states and internal financial constraints may pose challenges. Members of Congress may seek to influence OAS actions and U.S. policy toward the organization through a variety of oversight and legislative activities.

Oversight. Over the past 12 years, Congress has enacted the OAS Revitalization and Reform Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-41) and the OAS Legislative Engagement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-343), which were intended to strengthen the OAS and increase congressional involvement in the organization. Congress also has directed the State Department to support certain OAS reforms in annual SFOPS appropriations legislation (e.g., §7045(j) of P.L. 118-47). Congress may monitor how the Trump Administration is complying with the directives included in those measures and the extent to which the OAS is adopting Congress’s recommended reforms. Congress also may conduct oversight of the Trump Administration’s approach to the OAS, and to what extent, if any, its actions—including funding terminations—have affected the OAS and/or U.S. influence within the organization.

Appropriations. Congress may assess U.S. funding for the OAS during the FY2026 appropriations process. As noted previously, the Trump Administration’s preliminary budget proposal recommends pausing most assessed contributions and all voluntary contributions to international organizations while requesting some flexible funding that could potentially support such organizations. During the appropriations process, Congress may consider whether to specifically designate funding for the U.S. assessed contribution to the OAS and/or voluntary contributions to support particular OAS activities or objectives. Alternatively, Congress could consider appropriating a lump sum for international organizations, through existing or new funding accounts, and leave allocation decisions to the Administration.

Other Legislation. Congress also may consider other legislative measures to help shape U.S. policy toward the OAS. For example, as part of a potential foreign relations authorization measure, Congress could direct the State Department to pursue particular objectives at the OAS. Congress also could establish reporting requirements or other mechanisms to support congressional oversight of the Administration’s policy approach.

Advice and Consent. The Senate could shape U.S. policy toward the OAS using its right to provide advice and consent on nominations and ratification of treaties. The Senate could consider President Trump’s nomination of Leandro Rizzuto to be the U.S. Permanent Representative to the OAS (PN26-41). The U.S. Permanent Representative leads the U.S. Mission to the OAS, which serves as the central coordination point between the U.S. government and the OAS, interacting with other offices in the State Department, interagency partners, OAS member states, and other inter-American organizations.⁵⁹ The Senate also could consider various inter-American treaties that the United States has negotiated at the organization but has not ratified.⁶⁰ Additionally, the Senate may monitor the State Department’s review of international organizations and agreements pursuant to Executive Order 14199, and assess any potential Trump Administration decisions to withdraw from Senate-approved inter-American organizations or treaties.⁶¹

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, Foreign Affairs Manual, 1 FAM 154 U.S. Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States (WHA/USOAS), <https://fam.state.gov/FAM/01FAM/01FAM0150.html>.

⁶⁰ For example, the American Convention on Human Rights (Treaty Doc. 95-21), the hemisphere’s primary human rights treaty, has been awaiting the advice and consent of the Senate since 1978, and the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking of Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (Treaty Doc. 105-49) has been awaiting the advice and consent of the Senate since 1998.

⁶¹ For analysis of executive and legislative powers related to international treaties, see CRS Report RL32528, *International Law and Agreements: Their Effect upon U.S. Law*, by Steve P. Mulligan.

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