

Political alternation versus sovereignty

If Iberian America fails to forge even a minimal consensus on its very existence, it will continue to be the theatre for other powers' power struggles or, at best, a storehouse of raw materials for the North.

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In Mexico, the debate has recently been dominated by the scandal surrounding alleged [CIA agents who were operating on Mexican territory](#) without the federal government's consent, but in collaboration with the Chihuahua state government, led by the National Action Party (PAN). It might appear to be a strictly bilateral matter between the United States and Mexico, or even an internal conflict between the federal government and one of the states. However, it reveals a trend that has been gaining momentum in Latin American politics in recent years.



Bukele meeting with Trump. [Creative Commons Zero, Public Domain Dedication https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visita_oficial_Presidente_Bukele_en_EE.UU.19.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visita_oficial_Presidente_Bukele_en_EE.UU.19.jpg)

National sovereignty and the interests of the nation-state have ceased to be a constant, a cross-party value, in most countries south of the Rio Grande, and have instead become an ideological variable. In the case of Mexican politics, which has always been characterised by a pragmatic nationalist consensus, as early as November 2025 we witnessed, during the so-called 'Generation Z' march organised by the right, calls for military intervention by Donald Trump's government. If we look further south on the map, we will find examples of similar attitudes and agendas, both amongst opposition parties and within established governments.

It would therefore appear that foreign policy, rather than disputes over economic policy, redistribution or the family, is emerging as the defining feature of the Iberian American right. And the constant element of that defining feature is unconditional alignment with Washington. This is particularly true of the current administration, which, for its part, exerts an enormous gravitational pull and regards certain regional political forces as its strategic allies.

The list of actions in this regard is long. On the one hand, the US uses its economic, media and even military power to defeat, or at least undermine, the opponents of these right-wing movements in each of their countries. In this regard, we have, for example, Donald Trump's clear interference in the recent Honduran elections, which resulted in victory for 'his' candidate, Nasry Asfura. We could also mention the imposition of tariffs against Lula da Silva's Brazil – with whom the US president has had several run-ins – as well as Trump's constant defence of former president Jair Bolsonaro, who was convicted of attempting a coup d'état. And perhaps the most extreme example of this behaviour – predating the current US administration – is that of Venezuela, where the Chavista government was subjected to the full range of economic, media, political and legal pressure, culminating in the bombing of Caracas in January 2026 and the subsequent abduction of President Nicolás Maduro, accused of leading the alleged – and never mentioned again after the abduction – 'Cartel de los Soles', all with the support – and with the consent and applause – of Venezuela's dominant right wing.

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As for countries where the right is in power, we have seen much the same. Noboa in Ecuador, for example, has ratified agreements allowing the presence of troops from the US and joint military operations on Ecuadorian territory under the pretext of combating drug trafficking. In Argentina's case, sovereignty has gone from being a constitutional mandate to a commodity on sale. Milei's government is not only aligning its rhetoric but is also handing over the rivers, airspace and subsoil to the strategic planning of a foreign power. The patriotism of the 'forces of the sky' is revealed as a sham that conceals the actual dismantling of the nation, turning it into an administrative dependency of the Southern Command in the so-called crusade against the 'enemies of the free world'.

The case of El Salvador, under President Nayib Bukele, is one of the most paradoxical, yet at the same time most telling. Whilst adopting a confrontational stance towards the outside world to shore up his domestic power, he is surrendering the country's strategic levers to Washington's agenda. His administration has turned El Salvador into a link in the chain of US migration control. In exchange for accepting this role as a migration enforcer, he gains impunity from international pressure on human rights issues.

Bukele has turned El Salvador into a link in the US immigration control chain.

Another factor reflecting this shift is policy towards Cuba. Since the 1970s, but particularly after the end of the Cold War and the military dictatorships of the 1990s, Cuba has re-established normal relations with most countries in the Iberian America, following the isolation imposed on it by the United States and the OAS in the 1960s. Indeed, regardless of the political leanings of the governments in those countries, cooperation developed in the fields of education, sport and health, and a unanimous regional consensus was reached against the US economic blockade of the island. However, in 2025, Javier Milei's government reversed Argentina's historic vote at the United Nations in favour of lifting the blockade on Cuba – a move that Jair Bolsonaro had already made on Brazil's behalf in 2019. Meanwhile, the governments of Costa Rica and Ecuador have severed relations with Cuba, and many others have halted health cooperation due to pressure from Washington.

If we compare with nations in other parts of the world, it is usually the case that foreign policy is a constant across party lines; it may undergo major or minor adjustments depending on the ideology of the ruling group, but it crystallises into a minimum consensus on what constitutes the national interest. This is evident not only in the major powers but also in countries that have enjoyed relative success in recent development, such as Vietnam,

Indonesia, Nigeria, or South Korea. Meanwhile, in Iberian America, no genuine *raison d'état* prevails beyond the vagaries of politics, even in an emerging power such as Brazil.

A few weeks ago, it made the news that Gustavo Petro's government had cleared the country's debt to the IMF. It cannot be ruled out that, in the future – and as happened in Argentina – if the right wing wins the elections in Colombia, any excuse will be used to plunge the country back into debt, so that it serves as a tool to undermine its sovereignty and to hinder any subsequent transformation project. By burdening their states with debt, these political forces tie the nation's fate to the dictates of the IMF and the US Treasury.

We might ask ourselves: why do Iberian American elites prefer to be the United States' tail-end wagon, rather than competing for a place in the world on equal terms through their own nation-states? The answer to this question is not merely political, but structural and cultural.

Firstly, unlike the bourgeoisies in South Korea or Vietnam, who invested in technological development and industrial competition in the global market, the elites in our region have consolidated their wealth through land rents and the extraction of natural resources. To export lithium, soya or oil, one does not need a sovereign and powerful state: one needs an open market and an external guarantor of security. The United States offers this framework of legal and commercial 'stability'. For these elites, competing for a place in the world would entail investing in education, science and industry, which would jeopardise their immediate profit margins. They prefer to be the overseers of the enclave, not its architects.

Secondly, for the Iberian American elite, a strong and sovereign state is a double-edged sword. If that state has the capacity to resist external powers, it will also have the capacity to regulate internal oligarchies. Furthermore, a sovereign national project necessarily requires integrating the masses into consumption and political decision-making. It may therefore be accompanied by demands for social justice and the redistribution of wealth. And this fear that haunts their minds does not come out of nowhere: Cuba exists. It is but a short step from nationalism and sovereignty to the people getting out of control and ousting their oligarchies. Alignment with Washington acts as a form of political life insurance. They prefer to be – as René Zavaleta would put it – a sub-bourgeoisie, an intermediate and second-rate class, in return for which the United States guarantees that no popular force can challenge their power at home.

Finally, there is a very important subjective-colonial factor: the regional elites do not feel entirely part of the nation they govern. Their life horizons, their investments, and their children's futures lie in Miami, Madrid, or New York. They inherited the distinguishing 'whitening' of the colonial period. They are 'something else', distinct from the 'chairs' and the 'black bastards'. This is also why Iberian American elites are so anti-popular and have a relationship with their people that is very different and far more antagonistic than might be found in Europe, Canada or the United States, to mention other parts of the hemisphere.

All this poses a serious problem for regional prosperity. This inability to arrive at a compromise policy on national development – and on regional integration, which is a key factor in that – leads to a perpetual cycle of restarts, in which the national project is not built but rather drawn up and scrapped according to the ideological whims of the ballot box. Today, Party A wins and invests in extracting a valuable mineral, but tomorrow it is replaced by Party B,

which hands that resource to foreign (North American) capital. And all of this is normalised and sanctified under the guise of liberal democracy.

Thus, whilst South-East Asia, for example, is strengthening itself as a bloc (ASEAN) to negotiate with China, the US or any other power, Iberian America is falling apart. Every time a country changes political alignment, it leaves one bloc and forms another ideological mini-bloc that lasts four years. The effectiveness of regional mechanisms such as the OAS, CELAC or MERCOSUR ultimately depends on the dominant ideological alignment on the continent. The sacrosanct alternation of power turns out, in reality, to be a mechanism of regional fragmentation.

If Iberian America fails to secure a minimum consensus on its very existence, it will continue to be the stage for other powers' power games or, at best, a storehouse of raw materials for the North. In the current geopolitical realignment of the world and the hemisphere, electoralism may well become a smokescreen concealing a new form of colonial relationship. The dispute, then, is not strictly ideological—between the left and the right—but rather between those forces that have a national project for sovereign development, and those that view their respective countries, at best, as pawns to be exploited for personal gain.

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