Here to Stay:
The Domestic and International Priorities of Latino Leaders

A Report from:
Public Agenda & The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute
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Introduction

Hispanics* are projected to become the nation's largest minority group in the year 2010 and to make up 25% of the nation's population by the year 2050.1 In a recent Foreign Affairs article, Samuel Huntington cautions about the effect of rising ethnic interests in the U.S., and warns they will lead to fragmentation of national interest in our nation's foreign policy.2 But America, the old truism holds, is a nation of immigrants, and immigrant groups – from the Irish, to European Jews, to Germans to Cubans – have historically sought to weigh-in when America's foreign policy touched the nations they were close to. What might the nation expect from its Latino leaders?

This is a study of the views of 454 Hispanics who hold leadership positions in key institutions – including government, academia, business, media, the arts and the nonprofit sector. What issues absorb their attention and what do they think lies in store for their community? Just how concerned and active are they regarding U.S.-Latin American relations? Are the interests of Latino leaders so tied to their countries of origin that they are blinded to U.S. interests or do they have a perspective that is more subtle? Is there a single “Hispanic” perspective toward Latin America or are the views of Latinos as disparate as the nations they come from?

Two organizations – Public Agenda and the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute – joined to answer these and other questions. Public Agenda is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization specializing in the analysis of public and leadership opinion on public policy issues. Its partner in this research, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, is an independent, nonprofit, nonadvocacy organization, conducting social, political, and economic policy action research on major issues relevant to all groups in the Latino community.

In addition to the survey, in-depth follow-up interviews were also conducted with about a dozen survey respondents; quotes from these conversations are used throughout the report to shed light on their thinking.

* The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably throughout this report.
Finding One: Hispanic leaders expect the political and economic influence of their community to grow. But they are wary of a potential backlash in the U.S. and divisions within the Hispanic community itself.

Growing Clout
Latino leaders are optimistic about the prospects for the U.S. Hispanic community, anticipating gains on the economic and social fronts. “We’re living the impact now,” said one leader, “in terms of culture, food, music, and the economy.” Nearly 8 in 10 (77%) also believe economic opportunities for Latinos will increase in the near future. One leader said, “We’ll gain more board of directors, where we are now a paltry few, and that will influence the direction of business.”

Nor are the gains Hispanic leaders expect to see restricted to the economic realm: An overwhelming majority (87%) believes the influence of U.S. Hispanics on the political process will increase in the near future. “We’re going to be the largest minority,” predicted one leader, “we’re going to become politicians, be more involved.” Seven in 10 (71%) think the U.S. will show greater concern and attentiveness toward Hispanic affairs in general.

Perhaps because they think these trends will lead to concrete consequences, nearly two-thirds (66%) of Latino leaders also believe the nation is headed toward a greater acceptance of Spanish as the second most important language in the U.S.

Mixed Blessings?
But along with these positive trends, Hispanic leaders see some serious problems and speak about impediments to progress for the U.S. Latino community. Perhaps most troubling to them is their expectation that anti-Latino sentiment in the U.S. is likely to grow – an expectation shared by 80% of the leaders responding to this survey. Indeed, some explicitly connect the growing influence of Hispanics to expectations of a backlash. “Clearly, we’ve already become a much more visible factor in politics and the economy,” said one leader. “But with that comes another dimension of the problem: many Americans of good will – not just white supremacists – will become very spooked. There will be more bigotry, rather than less.”

Even the increased acceptance of the Spanish language has a downside, according to another leader: “I think Spanish will become the second language, but reluctantly... what happened in Miami – where people were upset about all the Spanish language signs – will be happening a lot more.” Perhaps this is why the state of race and ethnic relations in the U.S. is a pressing concern for Hispanic leaders: 8 in 10 (80%) Hispanic leaders believe improving race and ethnic relations ought to be a very important policy goal for the U.S.
Internal Differences

Latino leaders point to the diversity among U.S. Hispanics as something that has in the past hindered the progress of their community. The many differences in identity and countries of origin, according to this view, have diluted Hispanic strength. "The diversity is incredible," said one leader interviewed, "the Tex-Mex, the New Mexican, the Louisiana, the Florida Hispanic, etc. – they’re all very different groups." About 6 in 10 (58%) leaders feel that the diversity of backgrounds and identities among U.S. Latinos has weakened their influence. Leaders of Mexican heritage are less likely than other leaders to think diversity has weakened the influence of the U.S. Hispanic community (49% versus 65%).

The very question of what to name Hispanics/Latinos can be controversial in and of itself: "I have problems with the phrase 'Latin Americans','" said one leader, "and I've never been that keen on the phrase 'Hispanic' as an overall term. It's a term to fill a U.S. need to categorize and label a group of people the U.S. doesn’t know what to do with or call. It assumes a homogeneity that is not there."

Latino leaders responding to this survey predict these differences within the Hispanic community in the U.S. will recede. Nearly two-thirds (64%) expect to see the "emergence of a more unified Hispanic/Latino identity among Latinos in the U.S. regardless of their country of origin."

Finding Two: Latino leaders are far more concerned about the well-being of the Hispanic community within the U.S. than they are about the state of U.S.-Latin American relations. Domestic issues – education, race relations and economic growth – are their top priorities.

Focus on the Home Front

It is the progress and well-being of the Hispanic community in the U.S. that most absorbs the attention of Latino leaders – not the state of U.S.-Latin American relations or foreign policy issues in general. Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) say U.S. Latinos should be most concerned with the well-being of the Latino community in the U.S. Another 3 in 4 (75%) also say that "what happens to the Hispanic/Latino community in the U.S. is more important to me than the state of U.S. relations with Latin America." "Basically, we should cultivate our own garden," said one survey respondent in a follow-up interview. "We should be focused on the amelioration of conditions here in the U.S." Leaders born in the U.S. are more likely to focus on the U.S. Hispanic community rather than Latin America (81%); but even 64% of Hispanics born in Latin America concur. Interestingly, only a narrow majority (51%) of Hispanic leaders of Cuban origin agree that U.S. Latinos are more important to them than relations with Latinos outside the country.

Latino influentials clearly focus on the issues that are close to home, and domestic priorities such as education and the economy top their list of concerns. Rating the importance of a wide-ranging list of 18 domestic and international policy objectives, including maintaining economic growth, improving education, combating international terrorism and reducing our foreign trade deficit, Hispanic leaders choose domestic goals as their top 5 policy priorities for the U.S.

Education Is the Top Priority

Improving education is clearly highest on their agenda, with nearly all leaders – fully 95% – saying it is a very important goal. One Hispanic leader said, "Education is the key to the growth of the person and the community. Without education,
we will be on the same treadmill of low income, poor jobs, and so on."

Other issues that occupy their top tier of concerns would no doubt also emerge in any survey conducted with the general American public. Maintaining economic growth is cited by 3 in 4 (76%) as a very important goal. Reducing crime and improving the U.S. environment are cited by 6 in 10 as very important issues (61% and 60%, respectively). Historically, these same issues have been at the forefront of the American public's mind.

In the end, it is interesting that the only foreign policy objective to attract a high level of concern is a dramatic, high-stakes one—preventing the spread of nuclear weapons (62% say it is very important). Even a fairly innocuous and benevolent issue—improving the global environment—fails to rally overwhelming interest, with less than half of the leaders (46%) judging it to be very important. Other matters abroad are much less compelling: maintaining superior military power worldwide (20%), and defending our allies' security (8%), for example.

Finding Three: Hispanic leaders maintain strong bonds with Latin America. Most believe Hispanics should be more active and influential regarding U.S. policy toward Latin America, but also believe their agenda should not contradict official U.S. policy.

But since these leaders are clearly more concerned about domestic priorities and the well-being of the Hispanic community within the U.S., the question naturally arises: How much do Hispanic leaders really care about foreign policy toward the region? And if they do care, what role do they see for themselves?

Staying in Touch

Hispanic leaders have hardly turned their backs to Latin America—in fact, as individuals they have a wide web of relations and points of contact with the region and routinely track what goes on there. Almost 9 in 10 (87%) Hispanic leaders closely follow current events in Latin America. Almost all (92%) have been to Latin America—and more than half of these (59%) have traveled there within the last 12 months.

What's more, their social contacts, friends, family, and peers at work reinforce and remind them of their connection to Latin America. More than half (52%) have participated in activities regarding U.S.-Latin American affairs ranging from writing letters to offering expert advice to participating in associations. More than 7 in 10 (74%) say at least some of their Latino colleagues at work or friends keep close track of events in Latin America, and 40% work for organizations that have extensive dealings in Latin America. Two-thirds (66%) have relatives in Latin America, and of these, 66% maintain regular contact with them. In the end—whether through personal ties or professional action or both—the relationship between Hispanic leaders and Latin America is a close one.

It is perhaps not surprising to note that leaders born in Latin America are more likely to follow events in the region very closely than those born in the U.S. (54% compared to 30%); to have relatives in Latin America (84% to 56%); and to stay in close touch with those relatives (82% to 51%, among those with relatives).

A Bridge to Latin America

Perhaps because of their extensive contacts and relations in the region, Hispanic leaders believe they can make a unique contribution to U.S.
foreign policy toward the region, and that it is proper and appropriate for them to get involved in the shaping of policy. Fully 7 in 10 (70%) reject the view that "there is little reason for the Hispanic/Latino community in the U.S. to develop and pursue its own agenda on U.S. policy toward Latin America." Another 8 in 10 (79%) would like to see U.S. Hispanics increase their efforts to influence U.S. policy toward Latin America. "Latinos should get involved," remarked one leader, "because we know the region better than others, because we’re from there. Our relatives live there, we speak the language." Another leader was equally upbeat about the possibility: "We could be a terrific bridge to Latin America for the U.S. and increasingly we will be. It’s in the U.S. interest. Hispanics shouldn’t be sheepish about getting involved."

No Loose Cannons

But Hispanic leaders do not believe that the involvement of ethnic groups has always worked to the benefit of the U.S. and perhaps for that reason prefer a moderate approach to their own involvement. Asked to assess the impact of such ethnic groups as Irish, Jewish or Cuban upon U.S. foreign policy, 20% believe they have tended to harm the U.S. national interest; 13% say they have benefited the national interest. The majority (54%) say such groups have had mixed effects. One leader interviewed expressed misgivings about the Cuban lobby and cited it as an example of what not to do: "It’s a group that concentrates all their energies on one issue ... This one group has held U.S. policy towards Cuba hostage, and I don’t think that should be the goal."

Most Hispanic leaders believe they have an obligation to work within the framework and bounds of official U.S. foreign policy. Forced to choose among 3 roles Hispanic organizations should play – from working independently regardless of U.S. policy, to working on behalf of U.S. policy, to working independently but not in contradiction – most Hispanic leaders choose the moderate course. Only one-fourth (26%) say U.S. Latino organizations should pursue their own objectives regardless of U.S. policy, and only one-fourth (24%) believe the opposite – that they are obligated to coordinate action with the government in support of U.S. goals in Latin America. The plurality (43%) believe it appropriate to independently pursue their own objectives in Latin America so long as they do not contradict U.S. foreign policy priorities or interests.

Chart 2: Overall, do you think that the involvement of ethnic or religious groups such as Irish or Jewish or Cuban organizations in U.S. foreign policy toward the countries of their interest has tended to:

- Benefit U.S. national interest: 13%
- Harm U.S. national interest: 20%
- Have mixed effects: 54%
- Don’t know: 4%
- Depends on group: 9%

Chart 3: What is the proper role of Latino/Hispanic organizations when it comes to U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America?

- Coordinate and support U.S. policy in Latin America: 24%
- Don’t know: 8%
- Pursue their own objectives in Latin America, so long as they do not contradict U.S. policy: 43%
- Pursue their own objectives regardless of U.S. policy: 26%
Finding Four: Although domestic affairs are their foremost concern, Latino leaders want the U.S. to be actively involved in the world, and particularly in Latin America. They believe U.S. policy toward Latin America should focus upon trade and development, and promoting democracy and human rights.

Hispanic leaders have distinct views on U.S. policy toward Latin America and offer some “do’s and don’ts” to guide its actions.

Stay Active …

Although Hispanic leaders are fundamentally concerned with domestic matters and the well-being of the U.S.-Hispanic community, they are hardly isolationists, sharing with other U.S. leaders surveyed in the past a global perspective and a proclivity toward an activist U.S. foreign policy. About 9 in 10 (89%) think it is better for the future of the U.S. to take an active part in world affairs rather than to stay out. Only 14% of Latino leaders responding to this survey say “keeping involvement abroad to a minimum” should be a top priority for U.S. foreign policy. In Public Agenda’s 1995 study of the foreign policy views of a broad sample of U.S. leaders, 14% responded the same way.¹ In a separate survey Gallup conducted of the foreign policy views of a broad sample of American leaders, 98% wanted the U.S. to take an active part in world affairs, as did 65% of the general public.²

… Especially in Latin America

Hispanic leaders want the U.S. to adopt an activist foreign policy not only on the world scene but in Latin America as well. Eighty-five percent say the U.S. should be paying more attention to its
relations with Latin America. Hispanic leaders are convinced greater U.S. activity will have positive consequences for Latin America. Seven in 10 (71%) leaders say that more U.S. activity in the region will be better for Latin America. "I think on the whole the U.S.-Latin American relationship has been beneficial," said one respondent.

To say the U.S. should maintain - and even enhance - its engagement in Latin American affairs is one thing, but toward what goals?

Two Pillars: Trade and Democracy

Hispanic leaders want two policy themes to drive U.S. objectives in Latin America: improvement in trade and development and strengthening of democracy and human rights. More than half (56%) of Latino leaders give top priority to increasing trade, economic growth and development in its relations with Latin America. Asked to choose the one issue that deserves the highest priority from a list of 7 — including limiting political instability, controlling drug trafficking, and protecting the environment — the plurality (44%) opt for trade and growth.

The focus on economic relations plays out in concrete terms: The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is extremely popular among Hispanic leaders as a good pattern to replicate in U.S.-Latin American trade relations. Seven in 10 (69%) say the U.S. should extend free trade with other Latin American countries on the NAFTA model. What's more, although support for the extension of NAFTA is, not surprisingly, highest among the business leaders surveyed (81%), the sentiment is shared by respondents working in the nonprofit, academic, media, and political sectors as well. Finally, 77% of Hispanic leaders think the future holds greater interdependence between U.S. and Latin American economies.

But Hispanic leaders do not want U.S.-Latin American relations to be only about business: a little more than half (52%) also want support for democracy and human rights to be a central pillar of policy toward the region. "This is a democratic hemisphere," stated one leader, "so we need fair elections and the rule of law."

Some believe that democracy and economic growth are intertwined — that one trend will reinforce the other — and that both must therefore be pursued simultaneously. "[The U.S.] should favor pluralistic democracies and the liberalization of markets with less governmental control," said a Hispanic leader. "I think there's a very firm link between economic liberalism and limited constitutional governments. You can't have one without the other." Another leader echoed this feeling: "Just as it happened in Europe with the collapse of authoritarian regimes, it's clear that a free economy and democracy go hand-in-hand."

There is also a sense that Hispanic leaders should themselves try to move the U.S. toward tying regional trade with support for human rights. Fully 75% of Hispanic leaders surveyed say U.S. Latinos should push for linking trade and aid to advances in democracy and human rights in Latin America. "But there are limits," counseled one
leader. "We shouldn't link trade completely to how pure the democracy is or how pure the economy is."

**Drugs Overshadow Relations**

Are the priorities of U.S. Latinos in line with current U.S. policy toward the region? Latino leaders do not think so. More than 4 in 10 (44%) leaders say that if they had to choose one issue that deserves highest priority in U.S.-Latin American relations, they would choose increasing trade, economic growth, and development. But only 22% believe this is what now gets highest priority from the U.S. And while another 28% of leaders would choose support for democracy and for human rights as their number one priority, only 4% believe this is currently what the U.S. focuses upon most.

Instead, the perception among the plurality of Hispanic leaders (41%) is that the predominate U.S. objective in Latin America is combating drug trafficking. And while this objective is important in the eyes of Hispanics, many also believe it overwhelms and obscures other important aspects of relations with Latin America. One leader said, "To a certain extent, the drug problem does overshadow our relations with some countries." Another said, "We shouldn't stop trying to deal with the drug crisis, but there's more to life than drugs. There's a need for U.S. involvement in the region that has nothing to do with drugs."

Latin leaders would also place less emphasis on illegal immigration. While only 12% believe this issue should be a top priority, 25% say it currently gets the most attention from the U.S.

**To Solve Illegal Immigration—Make Deals**

These differences may point to more than disagreements over emphasis: Hispanic leaders underscore trade and support for democracy because they see these as key to improving the conditions of the people living in Latin America and as key to stabilizing the area. In the words of one leader: "What better way to deal with illegal immigration than to trade, to make deals? Because what causes illegal immigration is economic need." Improve the situation of Latin Americans, Hispanic leaders suggest, and you will improve the illegal immigration and drug trafficking problems.

But several leaders questioned in the follow-up interviews thought U.S. strategy was incomplete and prone to dealing with symptoms - often in a heavy-handed manner. "Treat Latin America with the same degree of respect as Europe," said one leader. "How many Noriegas have we extricated from Germany, England? Whenever there was a communist in government, did we walk in with the military and just hunt them down? We did it in Chile, Panama, Grenada...That is not an example for the development of democratic institutions."

**A Gap Between Hispanic Leaders and the Public**

Some interesting differences come to light when the priorities of Hispanic leaders are compared with those of the general American public. The general public seems to place a good deal more importance on stopping both illegal immigration and drugs than do Hispanic leaders. In a 1995 Gallup poll, 72% of the public said controlling and reducing illegal immigration should be a top priority; in a 1997 Pew study 42% said reducing illegal immigration should be a top priority. But only 14% of the Latino leaders said it was very important to reduce illegal immigration.

And while the illegal drug issue troubles Latino leaders, the general public seems more concerned. In the Gallup poll, 85% of the public said that controlling the flow of illegal drugs should be a top priority for the U.S.; in the Pew poll, 67% of the public responded in this way. But 54% of Latino leaders responding to this survey said stopping the flow of illegal drugs should be a very important policy goal. In follow-up interviews, several suggested that immigration and illegal drugs are top public concerns because of media coverage. "That's what the public hears, because that's what the press tells them," one leader said. "But that doesn't mean that's all the public wants - they just don't know."
Finding Five: Latino leaders are ambivalent about U.S. involvement in the internal affairs of Latin American countries and counsel against military intervention in the area. They consistently prefer that the U.S. respond to regional crises with economic and political measures in cooperation with other countries in the area.

Be Careful

Although most Hispanic leaders want more U.S. involvement in Latin America, they have reservations and caveats about just how that engagement occurs. As one leader cautioned, “[It] depends on the involvement. Memories are long in Latin America.” The vast majority of Hispanic leaders (84%) believe the U.S. already has a lot of influence over what happens within Latin American countries. Yet a little more than half (52%) nevertheless believe the U.S. should stay completely out of their domestic affairs.

Hispanic leaders also caution the U.S. to be wary of trying to cure internal political instability and unrest within Latin American nations. Only 12% feel the U.S. should give top priority to limiting civil unrest and political instability in Latin American countries. This reluctance may stem from lingering doubts about whether the U.S. can be an honest broker – in the words of one respondent: “given the history of the U.S. in a country like Mexico and its attempts to limit [Mexican] autonomy.” It may also be a function of the widely shared reluctance among the U.S. public and leaders about getting involved in civil conflicts. Only 43% of the public, for example, would approve the use of U.S. forces “if the Mexican government was about to fall because of revolution or civil war.”

Don’t Go It Alone, Avoid Force

Hispanic leaders counsel the U.S. to act carefully in Latin America: to avoid military intervention in the region, and to pursue objectives multilaterally, in cooperation with other countries in the area.

The survey asked respondents how the U.S. should respond to 6 hypothetical crises in Latin America – for example, a democracy asks for U.S. help to resist a coup, or chaos in Mexico triggers a dramatic increase in illegal immigrants – given a range of options from staying out entirely, to responding with military means. In no scenario did a significant number of Latino leaders favor unilateral military action; and in no situation did Latino leaders favor the “stay out” option. In fact, in none of the 6 scenarios did a majority favor any military response, even one conducted in concert with other nations. Instead, majorities wanted the U.S. to respond with diplomatic and economic measures in all 6 hypothetical crises, either unilaterally or in cooperation with other Latin American countries. For example, one scenario depicts a situ-
ation where “Fidel Castro dies, chaos and fighting break out in Cuba, and a flood of refugees begins to pour into Florida.” Most Hispanic leaders (62%) would have the U.S. rely on diplomatic and economic actions (36%) would do so only in cooperation with other Latin American countries, 26% would do so even if alone). In contrast, only 29% would respond with military means (12% would do so only with regional cooperation; 16% even if alone).

Support for U.S. military intervention is highest when the scenario depicts a Latin American democracy requesting U.S. help as it tries to fight off a military coup – perhaps not surprising since support for democracy and human rights is a top priority for Hispanic leaders. But even here support for a military response – either alone or multilaterally – only reaches 34%. Military intervention is justified, in the words of one respondent, “only if there’s a direct threat – like Mexico invading the U.S.”

**Going It Alone**

Finally, the only two scenarios where majorities, including leaders of Mexican origin, support unilateral action – either military or diplomatic – involve Mexico. To deal with a “drug kingpin under indictment in U.S. court [who] is living openly in Mexico, where he is protected by corrupt officials and runs a massive operation smuggling drugs across the border,” 42% believe the U.S. should respond with diplomatic and economic means, even if alone, and another 16% would respond with military means, even if alone. To deal with a dramatic increase in illegal immigrants crossing the Mexican border into the U.S., 42% would respond with diplomatic and economic means, even if alone, and 14% would do so with military means, even if alone. Majorities of leaders of Mexican origin respond in similar fashion.

The reluctance of Hispanic leaders to support military action is interesting given that the U.S. has already relied upon the military to deal with the drug problem or illegal immigration. The exception is also interesting to note: in all 6 scenarios Cuban respondents are more likely to support the use of U.S. military force, either alone or multilaterally. It may not be surprising to find 57% of Cuban leaders – but only 24% of others – supporting a military response to the scenario where “Fidel Castro dies, chaos and fighting break out in Cuba, and a flood of refugees begins to pour into Florida.” But support for military intervention continues, for example, when 48% of Cubans – versus only 15% of other leaders – think the U.S. should respond militarily if major disturbances in Haiti “prompt massive immigration to the U.S.”; and when 43% of Cubans – compared to only 23% of other leaders – support a military response against a U.S.-indicted drug kingpin living in Mexico under the protection of corrupt officials.

**Finding Six: Most Latino leaders are focused on Latin America, and tend to believe Mexico is more important to U.S. interests than other areas of the world, such as Western Europe or Asia. This view may be driven by their continuing ties to Latin America and their sense that American foreign policy and media have given short shrift to the area.**

**Mexico Is the Centerpiece**

When they look abroad, Hispanic leaders are far more likely to focus on Latin America than on other areas. By a 58% to 7% margin, they acknowledge they are personally more interested in events and developments in Latin America than in some other region of the world, though a third (34%) say they are equally interested in both. And within Latin America, Mexico is the focal point: 6 in 10 (59%) say they follow developments and current events there very closely. Cuba is a distant second
with 38% of Hispanic leaders saying they follow current events there very closely.

The strong connection that Latino leaders have to Latin America – and to Mexico especially – parallels their desire to put that area front and center of U.S. policy. When asked to rank 11 countries and regions in order of importance to the U.S., more than half (57%) of Hispanic leaders placed Mexico either first or second. By contrast, only half as many (28%) gave Western Europe the same ranking. Other regions that have traditionally garnered substantial attention in U.S. policy are seen as top-ranking by even smaller percentages: Only about one-fifth of Hispanic leaders give top rankings to Asia (23%), the Middle East (22%), and Canada (21%).

Balancing the Scales?

In follow-up interviews, leaders talked about the proximity of Mexico, its trade with the U.S., and the crossover in population from there to explain why they thought Mexico was so important. “Mexico is the great Hispanic neighbor, the one that has the most clout,” said one leader. “We have more investment in it than any other Hispanic country in the area – even before NAFTA.” But there seemed to be another reason as well, a sense that there is currently an imbalance in U.S. foreign policy – an inattentiveness toward Latin America in general and Mexico especially – that needs to be redressed. “Mexico is very important, it needs to be higher on America’s priority list,” one said. Another leader said: “I don’t know what our policy is ... I’m not even sure we have a concerted policy effort towards Latin America.”

Most leaders interviewed after the survey did not think the issue was a zero-sum game – they were not calling for a lessening of U.S. relations with Europe or Asia, but simply saw a need to pay increased attention to Latin America. “Japan and China are the future, and Europe too, not just because of the past but for economic and other reasons,” said one leader, “so it doesn’t make sense to change our focus, but it makes tremendous sense to enlarge our focus to include Latin America.” Another said, “Some reorientation toward South America is necessary, but I don’t view it as a zero-sum game regarding attention to Europe.”

One leader saw the issue in more blunt, realpolitik terms: “Is there a huge army in Latin America? Are there atom bombs? China has a huge population and the atom bomb. No country in Latin America competes with that. So our focus is a matter of practicality.” But even he thought inadequate attention was being paid to Latin America.

Central America Is Not Iowa

There is a sense among Latino leaders that the U.S. has been too quick to generalize about Latin America, and that a more nuanced perspective is necessary. “Latin America is not just one country, each country is different,” pointed out one leader, “the only thing that ties us is the language.” About 6 in 10 (62%) leaders say it is impossible to generalize about Latin America as a region because of differences in their economies, politics and problems, while only 36% instead say that there are enough common areas to make generalization possible.

But leaders often sense that such distinctions are lost on both the public and the nation’s leaders: “Most Americans think Central America is Iowa,” one said. “There is an ignorance, people don’t pay attention, and this allows faulty policies. The lack of information results in missing some critical opportunities. And meanwhile, we’ve gone without an ambassador to Mexico for nearly 2 years!”

Media Coverage

There are similar disappointments with media coverage of Latin America, a sense that there is not enough of it and that what little there is misleads or focuses on a narrow range of issues such as drugs or illegal immigration. Nearly 7 in 10 (68%) strongly agree with the statement that “the mass media do a poor job reporting on Latin America”
Finding Seven: Hispanic leaders share with other U.S. leaders some top priorities such as preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, expanding trade, stopping the flow of illegal drugs, and improving the global environment. But Hispanic leaders demur when it comes to some traditional foreign policy priorities of other U.S. leaders, such as limiting conflict, defending our allies' security, and maintaining military superiority.

Compared to a broad sample of U.S. leaders surveyed by Public Agenda in 1995, Latino leaders share the foreign policy priorities of improving trade and business, promoting democracy and human rights, and protecting the environment. Latino leaders' top foreign policy goals also mirror those of U.S. leaders surveyed in 1995 by Gallup for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations: preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, stopping illegal drugs, improving the global environment, combating world hunger, and protecting the jobs of American workers.

Consistent with their concerns about U.S. involvement in Latin America, Latino leaders are much less likely to support the realpolitick approach of limiting conflict in important regions, particularly in Latin America. About half (49%) of U.S. leaders in the 1995 Public Agenda study said limiting conflict in important areas should be a top priority. But only 12% of Latino leaders say limiting conflict should be a top priority for the U.S. in Latin America, and only 34% say this should be a top foreign policy priority in general. Latino leaders are also far less likely to support conflict-oriented
foreign policy goals, such as defending our allies’ security (1995 Gallup leaders: 60% vs. Latinos leaders: 8%), and maintaining superior military power (54% vs. 20%).14 The orientation towards a non-military approach is illustrated in the 6 Latin American scenarios discussed earlier: in none was the use of force supported by a majority. Instead of the military solutions that have marked U.S. historical involvement in the region, Latino leaders prefer a focus on building mutual trade and democracy.
Methodology

This study reports the views of 454 Hispanic leaders who responded to a mail survey conducted in the fall and winter of 1997. The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute initially mailed letters from a database of approximately 4,000 Hispanic leaders, requesting their involvement in the survey. Of these, 509 agreed to participate. The questionnaire was mailed at the end of September 1997 to those who had agreed to participate and to an additional 871 names from other lists of Hispanic leaders. Reminder postcards were then sent, followed by a second mailing of the same questionnaire. The fielding of the survey ended December 31, 1997.

Recipients were asked to discard the survey if they were not of Latino/Hispanic descent. The questionnaire itself was in English, although recipients were offered the opportunity to complete it in Spanish.

The sample participants were selected from various directories of Hispanic organizations in the U.S., in roughly 6 categories:

- **Nonprofit organizations**, including community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and others – mostly obtained from the *Hispanic Yearbook*, an annual directory of Hispanic organizations (16% of the sample)

- **Journalists** drawn primarily from a list provided by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (25%)

- **Public officials** at the federal, state, and local levels drawn from lists provided by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (13%)

- **Business leaders**, including members of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (10%)

- **Academics** from various disciplines, including political science, history and American studies, selected from various academic directories (22%)

- **Other fields** – including members of the Hispanic Council on International Relations and the Council of Foreign Relations’ Project for Diversity in International Affairs, as well as artists, religious leaders, and labor union leaders (14%)

Following the survey, open-ended telephone interviews were conducted with a small number of respondents to give voice to the attitudes captured statistically through the survey. Public Agenda takes full responsibility for the research analysis in this study.
### TABLE 1

**U.S. POLICY GOALS**

Here is a list of possible policy goals that the U.S. might have. For each please mark whether you think that it should be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving education</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving race and ethnic relations</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining economic growth</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing crime</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the U.S. environment</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the global environment</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combating world hunger</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combating international terrorism</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving U.S. relations with other nations</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the jobs of American workers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting and defending human rights in other countries</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing our trade deficit with foreign countries</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining superior military power worldwide</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening the United Nations</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling &amp; reducing illegal/undocumented immigration</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending our allies’ security</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Results of less than 1% are signified by “*”, no response is signified by “–”.

### TABLE 2

**LONG-RANGE FOREIGN POLICY GOALS**

Here is a list of possible long-range foreign policy goals which the U.S. might have. For each, please indicate whether you think it should be a top priority, a middle priority, or a low priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Hispanic Leadership</th>
<th>U.S. Leadership*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing international trade and business opportunities</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the global environment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting democracy and human rights abroad</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limiting conflicts in areas important to the U.S.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping the economies of developing countries (U.S. Leadership wording: “underdeveloped nations”)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping U.S. involvement abroad to a minimum</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: From Mixed Messages, Public Agenda, 1995 (see endnotes).
**TABLE 3**

**REACTIONS TO HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIOS**

Below are some hypothetical scenarios where U.S. interests concerning Latin America might be at stake. What do you think the U.S. should do if each of the following scenarios develop?

Should the U.S.: Stay out, Respond with diplomatic and economic means but only in cooperation with other Latin American countries, Respond with diplomatic and economic means even if alone, Respond with military means, but only in cooperation with other Latin American countries, or Respond with military means even if alone?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Stay out</th>
<th>Diplomatic &amp; economic, in cooperation</th>
<th>Diplomatic &amp; economic, alone</th>
<th>Military means, in cooperation</th>
<th>Military means, alone</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suppose there are major economic and civil-political disturbances in Haiti that prompt massive emigration to the U.S. Should the U.S.:</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Latin American government engages in systematic torture and violations of the human rights of its population. Should the U.S.:</td>
<td>Stay out</td>
<td>Diplomatic &amp; economic, in cooperation</td>
<td>Diplomatic &amp; economic, alone</td>
<td>Military means, in cooperation</td>
<td>Military means, alone</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidel Castro dies, chaos and fighting break out in Cuba, and a flood of refugees begins to pour into Florida. Should the U.S.:</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Latin American democracy faces a military coup and the legally elected government requests U.S. help to resist the coup. Should the U.S.:</td>
<td>Stay out</td>
<td>Diplomatic &amp; economic, in cooperation</td>
<td>Diplomatic &amp; economic, alone</td>
<td>Military means, in cooperation</td>
<td>Military means, alone</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A drug kingpin under indictment in U.S. court is living openly in Mexico, where he is protected by corrupt officials and runs a massive operation smuggling drugs across the border. Should the U.S.:</td>
<td>Stay out</td>
<td>Diplomatic &amp; economic, in cooperation</td>
<td>Diplomatic &amp; economic, alone</td>
<td>Military means, in cooperation</td>
<td>Military means, alone</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political chaos and social upheaval break out in Mexico, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of illegal/undocumented immigrants crossing the border from Mexico into the U.S. Should the U.S.:
**DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS**

### OCCUPATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>(Multiple response)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public official</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist or musician</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something else</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF RESPONDENTS BORN ABROAD (37%)<sup>1</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>(Multiple response)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someplace else</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### COUNTRY OF HERITAGE/ORIGIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.-born</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### COUNTRIES OF HERITAGE OF U.S.-BORN RESPONDENTS (63%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>(Multiple response)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someplace else</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year degree</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters/Professional</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 or under</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-44</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LANGUAGE FLUENCY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English better than Spanish</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and Spanish same</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish better than English</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

1 In 1996, it was projected that "By 2010, the Hispanic-origin population may become the second-largest race/ethnic group." Similarly predicted, "By 2050, 75 percent of the population would be White; 15 percent Black; 1 percent American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut; and 9 percent Asian and Pacific Islander. The Hispanic-origin population would increase to 25 percent, and the non-Hispanic White population would decline to 53 percent." Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050: February 1996, pp. 1, 13.


3 Regarding the economy:
Gallup Organization. National telephone survey of 1,020 adults, September 1995. "As I read a list of issues, please tell me how serious you believe the problems being faced in that area are to the country. For this, I'd like you to use a ten point scale—where 10 indicates you believe the problems are extremely serious, and a zero indicates they are not that serious. The higher the number the more serious the problem, the lower the number the less serious the problem. On a scale from zero to 10, how serious do you feel . . . violent crime . . . is as a problem for the country?" (0-5: 5%); (6-8: 28%); (9-10: 66%); (Don't know: <1%).

4 Regarding the environment:
Princeton Survey Research Associates poll for the Pew Research Center. National telephone survey of 1,200 adults, November 1997. "I'm going to read you a list of environmental problems. As I read each one, please tell me if you personally worry about this problem a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or not at all. First, how much do you personally worry about pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs?" a great deal, 61%; fair amount, 27%; only a little, 9%; not at all, 3%.

Cambridge Reports/Research International. National telephone survey of 1,250, September 1993. "Using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not serious at all and 7 means extremely serious, please tell me how serious a problem you think each problem is for your community. The more serious a problem is for your community, the higher the number you would give it . . . Providing more jobs and employment opportunities." (1-3: 13%); (4-5: 26%); (6-7: 59%); (Don't know: 1%).

4 Mixed Messages: A Survey of the Foreign Policy Views of American Leaders, Public Agenda, 1995, p. 17. When asked, "Now I'm going to read you a list of possible long-range foreign policy goals
which the United States might have. Please tell me if you think each should be a top priority, a middle priority, or a low priority ... keeping U.S. involvement to a minimum?” 14% of the leaders said a top priority.

5 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, (Gallup Organization conducted survey), 1995, p. 13. National telephone interviews of 1,492 adults, conducted in October 1994. They conducted 383 telephone interviews with leaders between October and December 1994. When asked to choose whether it is best for the future of the country to take an active part in world affairs or to stay out of world affairs, 98% of leaders favor an active role for the United States in world affairs compared to 65% of the general public. Please note: Comparison with the Gallup survey should be done with caution since the questions asked of Latino leadership in the Public Agenda survey included domestic priorities not included in the Gallup survey.

6 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, p. 15. When asked, “I am going to read a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please say whether you think it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all. How about ... controlling and reducing illegal immigration?” 72% of the general public said very important.

America's Place in the World II, Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, (Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted survey), October 1997, p. 97. National telephone interviews of 2,000 adults were conducted in September 1997, 993 of those adults were asked, “As I read a list of possible LONG RANGE foreign policy goals which the United States might have, tell me how much priority you think each should be given ... reducing illegal immigration, do you think this should have top priority, some priority, or no priority at all?” 42% said top priority.

7 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, p. 15. When asked, “I am going to read a list of possible foreign policy goals the United States might have. For each one please say whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all. How about ... stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.” 85% of the general public said very important.

8 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, p. 15. When asked, “I am going to read a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please say whether you think it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all. How about ... controlling and reducing illegal immigration,” 72% of the general public said very important; 28% of leaders responded similarly.

9 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, p. 15. When asked, “I am going to read a list of possible foreign policy goals the United States might have. For each one please say whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all, ... stopping the
flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.” 85% of the general public said very important; 57% of leaders responded similarly.

10 America’s Place in the World II, p. 100. 2,000 respondents were asked, “Would you approve or disapprove of the use of U.S. forces in the following situations: If the Mexican government was about to fall because of revolution or civil war.” 43% said approve.

11 Mixed Messages, p. 17. Leaders were asked, “Now I’m going to read you a list of possible long-range foreign policy goals which the United States might have. Please tell me if you think each should be a top priority, a middle priority, or a low priority.” 59% said “pursuing international trade and business opportunities” should be a top priority; 44% said “supporting democracy and human rights abroad” should be a top priority; and 46% said “protecting the global environment” should be a top priority.

12 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, p. 15. For example, 90% of leaders said that “preventing the spread of nuclear weapons” should be a very important goal of the United States; 57% responded that “stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.” should be a very important goal of the United States; 49% said “improving the global environment” should be a very important goal of the United States; 41% responded “combating world hunger” should be a very important goal of the United States; and 50% said “protecting the jobs of American workers” should be a very important goal of the United States.

13 Mixed Messages, p. 17. Leaders were asked, “Now I’m going to read you a list of possible long-range foreign policy goals which the United States might have. Please tell me if you think each should be a top priority, a middle priority, or a low priority.” 49% said “limiting conflicts in areas important to the U.S.” should be a top priority.

14 American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995, p. 15. 60% of leaders said “defending our allies’ security” should be a very important goal of the United States; 54% said “maintaining superior military power worldwide” should be a very important goal of the United States.
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