



## OAS PERFORMANCE: DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Source: [OAS](#)

Socioeconomic crises of historic proportions in Nicaragua and Venezuela have repeatedly raised calls for action from the Organization of American States (OAS). The organization, which dates to 1948, is the most prominent and likely candidate for a unified front.

However, that poses the question: What has been the OAS record thus far? Further, what tools does it have at its disposal to confront anti-democratic and inhumane regimes?

### **Who funds the OAS? What is its total budget?**

The General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) relies on a regular fund [by setting country quotas](#) based on each member's capacity to pay. This regular fund supports the General Secretariat along with OAS programs and initiatives. Countries can make voluntary contributions to the regular fund or specific projects. The United States, [for instance](#), voluntarily contributed an additional \$17 million to the 2017 regular fund.

The OAS's [2018](#) regular fund totaled \$81.6 million, and the United States contributed more than \$50 million, which is nearly 60 percent. The specific funds totaled \$64.9 million in 2018.

### Are some countries behind on payments?

Country	Delay time
Grenada	7 years
Venezuela	6 years
Argentina	1 year
Belize	1 year
Dominican Republic	1 year
Ecuador	1 year
Mexico	1 year
Peru	1 year
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	1 year
Suriname	1 year
Trinidad & Tobago	1 year
Uruguay	1 year

Source: [Report on Compliance with Quota Payments, OAS](#)

### How many people does it employ and where are they all?

The number of job positions financed by the 2018 Regular Fund is 394.

The 2018 budget [resolution](#) dictates personnel costs must not exceed 62.85 percent.

- Personnel costs in 2018, paid from the regular fund: \$53.3 million
- Personnel costs in 2018, paid from specific funds: \$8.7 million

The OAS headquarters, made up of five buildings, is located in Washington, DC.

The OAS also [has offices](#) in these member countries:



Bridgetown, Barbados

Belize City, Belize

La Paz, Bolivia

Bogotá, Colombia

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Quito, Ecuador

San Salvador, El Salvador

Guatemala City, Guatemala

Georgetown, Guyana

Port Prince, Haiti

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Kingston, Jamaica

Mexico City, Mexico

Panama City, Panama

Asunción, Paraguay

Montevideo, Uruguay

Caracas, Venezuela

The OAS has offices in all member states, except for Canada and Brazil. However, for the locations not listed above the OAS has not assigned representatives at this time.

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## What has the OAS done to halt the march of 21st-century socialism?

OAS actions towards 21st-century socialism [began late](#) in the [Bolivarian Alliance](#) era, and the OAS position remains ambiguous.

[According to](#) Cuban journalist Carlos Alberto Montaner, the United States lost interest in the OAS as the political motivation to halt the expansion of communism in Latin America decreased. The OAS, founded in April 1948, emerged as a Cold War tool.

When Hugo Chávez began implementing his socialist agenda in 1999, Venezuela enjoyed plentiful revenues from her oil-extraction industry. Chávez and his allies promoted Latin-American autonomy from the United States, so they teamed up to confront the “capitalist empire” in diplomatic forums.

For example, Chávez created [Petrocaribe](#) in 2005, an [oil alliance](#) between Caribbean nations to bankroll like-minded Latin-American governments. The recipients included Ecuador, Nicaragua, Argentina, and El Salvador, and this patronage meant [diplomatic allies](#) for Venezuela. With this strategy, Chávez ensured a friendly majority at the OAS General Assembly.

Initially, Chávez’s social-justice agenda [garnered praise](#) from Luis Almagro, the OAS secretary general. In 2015 Almagro began spearheading a regional campaign to hold the Venezuelan regime accountable for human-rights violations.

### **Actions with little or no impact:**

- In 2016, the OAS promoted a dialogue in Venezuela between the government and the opposition. The effort failed and the confrontations, economic crisis, and exodus worsened.
- After Venezuela's economic crisis and human-rights violations became too blatant to ignore, in 2016 Almagro also tried to suspend Venezuela from the OAS. The allies of Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's successor, repeatedly blocked this motion. Just after the last Venezuelan election in June 2018, 19 out of 34 countries [voted](#) for Venezuela’s suspension. However, members need a two-thirds majority (24 votes) to pass such a motion.
- Another way in which the OAS promotes democracy in the region is by supervising elections. However, the most recent elections in Ecuador and Honduras have cast doubt over the OAS role.

After the 2017 Ecuadorian presidential and legislative election, the OAS submitted a report [praising](#) the “transparent and correct electoral process” despite fraud complaints from civil-society groups and the opposition party CREO. The exiled Ecuadorian journalist Emilio Palacio and Montaner [detailed](#) how the ruling Alianza PAIS party resorted to political manipulation to win the election.

In Honduras, the OAS detected [irregularities](#) in the entire electoral process and [asked](#) the Supreme Electoral Court to recount 25 percent of the votes. Secretary Almagro [said](#) the results were unconvincing and recommended that Honduras repeat the presidential election, which never happened.

- In the case of Nicaragua’s political crisis, the OAS condemned in June Daniel Ortega’s repression of protesters—which killed 400 people—and set up a commission to seek peaceful solutions. Nevertheless, the conflict has persisted, and Human Rights Watch [has even](#)

[denounced](#) that the Nicaraguan Health Ministry has arbitrarily fired physicians who treated injuries during the protests.

On August 9, the OAS [announced](#) that the commission, made up of representatives from 12 countries, is suggesting a national dialogue—even though the Catholic church has already attempted this to no avail. Analysts such as Roberto García Moritán, former Argentine deputy minister of foreign affairs, [believe](#) this effort will be unsuccessful, since Ortega disapproves of it and the OAS has only a limited diplomatic role.

### **What is the status of the region's worst violators of human rights: Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela?**

Cuba is the only country in the Americas that is not a full member of the OAS. The organization suspended her in 1962 after the Cuban regime officially espoused Marxism-Leninism, which contradicts OAS democratic principles. Although Raúl Castro attended the Summit of the Americas in 2015 at Barack Obama's invitation, the Cuban regime has shown no interest in rejoining the OAS.

Venezuela is close to being suspended from the OAS, but the General Assembly needs to ratify the June decision with a two-thirds supermajority.

Nicaragua remains a member of the OAS, and a commission is working on a peaceful solution to the conflict, such as a national dialogue or early presidential elections. OAS [members, analysts](#), and US [lawmakers](#) believe the only way forward with Nicaragua is to suspend her from the OAS.

### **In the past two decades, what successes can the OAS claim?**

Its most relevant role has been as a mediator in conflicts, but few instances have been successful [over the past two decades](#):

**Suriname:** An OAS mission from 1992 to 2000 supported the country's process of reconciliation, peace, and democratization after decades of political turmoil.

**Haiti:** The OAS provided support during the country's transition from a military regime to a democratic one from 1993 to 2000. However, Haiti's political and social conditions remain fragile compared to the rest of the region.

**Colombia:** The OAS joined the United Nations to collaborate with Colombia's government armistice deal with the FARC Marxist guerrilla. The agreement came into force despite citizens' disapproval in a referendum, and the deal [has so far](#) failed to achieve the promised peace.

**Belize and Guatemala:** The OAS has promoted dialogue between both countries to find a solution to their border conflict. In 2008, they agreed to address the dispute through independent arbitration, but they [have not reached](#) a final agreement yet.

### **What can the OAS impose on human-rights and democracy violators?**

In the worst case-scenario, the OAS can only suspend a member country and indirectly support democratic institutions, calling for the protection of human rights.

The organization's charter [allows](#) only peaceful mechanisms to intervene in conflicts, such as "direct negotiation, good offices, mediation, investigation and conciliation, judicial settlement, arbitration, and those which the parties to the dispute may especially agree upon at any time."

It shuns other measures such as economic sanctions and military intervention, since it claims these could harm democratic progress and undermine a nation's sovereignty.

The OAS has its own judicial system, made up of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. The commission, after examining complaints of human-rights violations, submits the most urgent or egregious cases to the court.

Member nations are supposed to voluntarily incorporate the court's rulings into their own jurisdictions, since membership makes them binding. However, countries [have delayed or modified](#) incorporation and favored their own judicial systems. The IACHR has mainly contributed to the harmonization of member states' human-rights legislation.

### **Why did South American nations start UNASUR? Why has UNASUR fallen apart?**

One common characteristic of Latin-American leftist governments in recent decades has been a populist rhetoric against "imperialism" or regional US influence. Therefore, the Community of the Latin American and Caribbean States ([CELAC](#)) and the Union of South American Nations ([UNASUR](#)) were born as alternatives to the OAS.

On December 8, 2004, countries from [Mercosur](#) and the [Andean Community](#) came together to form an association called the South American Community of Nations (CSN). Its goal was to achieve regional integration and common policies à la the European Union, in [contrast](#) to the OAS, whose role is limited to advocating for democracy and human rights.

In 2007, the alliance [changed](#) its name to UNASUR and submitted a charter for the organization in 2008. That year, the members elected the body's first pro-tempore president, Michelle Bachelet. Not until 2011, when Uruguay signed the UNASUR charter, did the organization enter into full force, because all member countries had to ratify the agreement.

CELAC, created in 2011, [was the brainchild](#) of Brazil's two-term President Lula da Silva. It is a [hub](#) for regional dialogue and policy making that [comprises](#) all countries south of the United States, including Cuba. The idea is for a space where member countries can organize without the intervention of external parties such as the United States, Canada, and the European Union.

Many observers [regard](#) UNASUR and CELAC as Brazilian diplomatic tools to secure influence in the region. Regardless, both organizations [have publicly](#) aligned with progressive and populist left movements.

### **Previous Econ Americas Coverage**

["Nicaragua, Venezuela Prove OAS Fecklessness,"](#) *Epoch Times*, by Fergus Hodgson

["The Life and Crimes of Daniel Ortega,"](#) *Epoch Times*, by Fergus Hodgson

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