LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

FALL/WINTER 2026 ◊ VOLUME 24 ◊ ISSUE 2

THE ADVOCATE

ACTION AT HOME FOR JUST POLICIES ABROAD

Stronger Together:
Exploring a New Chapter for LAWG and Alianza Americas

By Vicki Gass and Dulce Guzmán

Democracy across the hemisphere is under renewed strain. Authoritarianism, the use of security frameworks to justify repression and exclusion, persistent structural inequities, and resurgent U.S. interventionism are reshaping the region. At the same time, the forces driving migration, democratic erosion, economic inequality, and climate displacement cross national borders. **The question before us is not simply how to defend democracy under these conditions, but how to shape what comes next.**



Dulce Guzmán (L) with Rep. Jim McGovern and members of the National TPS Alliance in Washington, D.C. / Credit: Alianza Americas

This moment demands a stronger transnational framework grounded in shared analysis and coordinated action. That work should be led by persecuted communities in Latin America and the Caribbean and by the immigrant diaspora in the United States, alongside the social justice, faith-based, and labor organizations that have been the bedrock of support for migrant communities since U.S. military

Continued on page 2 ⟶

IN THIS ISSUE

1 Exploring a New Chapter for LAWG and Alianza Americas

3 What the New Congress Means for Latin America and the Caribbean

4 Cuban Americans Challenge Washington's Maximum Pressure Campaign

5 U.S. Immigration Policy: The Politics of Cruelty in Action

7 Rights Watch: Updates from Across the Region

GET UPDATES

lawg.org/take-action/sign-up

FOLLOW US

@LAWGACTION

ABOUT US

The **Latin America Working Group Education Fund** (LAWGEF) mobilizes concerned citizens, organizations, and networks to call for just U.S. policies towards Latin America and the Caribbean. We educate policymakers and the public about the impact of U.S. foreign and immigration policy. We coordinate a coalition of over 50 U.S. organizations and work closely with civil society partners in Latin America to support their human rights campaigns and make sure their voices are heard in the policy debates that take place in Washington, D.C.

LAWGEF TEAM

Vicki Gass
Executive Director

Andrea Fernández Aponte
Senior Associate

Questions? Comments?
Email us at **lawg@lawg.org**

CONTRIBUTORS

Dulce Guzmán
Executive Director, Alianza Americas

Helena Olea
Deputy Director, Alianza Americas

interventions in the region in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is with this vision that **Alianza Americas and the Latin America Working Group (LAWG) have begun exploring a potential organizational integration.** As longtime allies in advancing human rights and social justice, we see an opportunity to bring together our complementary strengths to respond more effectively to the challenges facing our communities and the region.

This strategic alliance would unite LAWG's decades of policy expertise, advocacy experience, and relationships across Latin America and Washington, D.C., with Alianza Americas' immigrant-led, transnational network. More than an organizational integration, it would be an investment in building the collective leadership, capacity, and power of communities across the Americas to influence the decisions that shape their lives. Together, we can advance a new vision for U.S. domestic and foreign policy grounded in the lived experiences of communities—one that defends human rights, strengthens democracy, and builds more just and equitable societies for all, regardless of immigration status.

Over the past several months, we have spoken with LAWG partner organizations, longtime donors and supporters, Alianza Americas member organizations, and other stakeholders to explore this possibility, hear their perspectives, and consider how an integration could strengthen our collective work.

Robin Lewy-Moraga, former executive director of the Rural Women's Health Project in Florida, said this about the potential union: "The merger of Alianza Americas and LAWG [would be] a valuable opportunity to build power, strengthen cross-border leadership and to recalibrate solidarity." Similarly, Charissa Zehr, a longtime LAWG board member, said: "LAWG has a rich legacy and strong coalition through years of trust-building and perseverance. The opportunity to merge with Alianza Americas will enrich the work of both organizations, amplifying their reach and impact. After years participating as a member organization of LAWG and even longer as a board member, I am excited for this new chapter. LAWG brings a depth of policy and advocacy experience to enrich the transnational work of Alianza."

An important part of this vision is preserving and strengthening LAWG's longstanding advocacy work and relationships. Under the proposed structure, we envision maintaining LAWG's working groups on Colombia, Cuba, Central America, and migration. We also envision building on LAWG's timely advocacy on emerging regional issues, including congressional staff briefings, sponsored by Representative Delia Ramirez (D-IL), on the U.S. National Security Strategy and its implications for Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as its work addressing U.S. military strikes on vessels in the Caribbean and Pacific and the growing threat of military intervention on land. Our partner organizations, which are resoundingly supporting this union, would become affiliates of Alianza Americas, and we would continue working with them on promoting rights-based policies toward the region and just immigration policies here at home.

This process is still underway, and no final decision has been made. Any integration remains subject to the necessary legal and organizational

approvals, including a vote by Alianza Americas' member organizations. Their participation and decision-making are essential to determining the future of our network. We are committed to continuing this process with transparency, dialogue, and respect for the governance of both organizations.

We believe this opportunity is worth exploring because the challenges facing our communities require stronger connections between grassroots leadership, policy expertise, and transnational advocacy. Our shared vision is to advance policies that protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and build more just and equitable societies across the Americas.

As we move ahead, we invite our members, partners, and supporters to be part of the conversation. Share your perspectives, help us identify opportunities for collaboration, and connect us with others who can contribute to this vision. Your participation will help shape what comes next. To learn more, you can reach out to us via email at vgass@lawg.org and dguzman@alianzaamericas.org.

Together, we can imagine and build a stronger future for our communities across the Americas.

Midterm Shellacking of Trump and MAGA:
What the New Congress Means for Latin America and the Caribbean

By Vicki Gass

The results from the midterm elections are so much more than simply voters' rejection of President Trump and his policies of war, tariffs, attacks on immigrants, and corruption. They were the response of Latinos, African Americans, LGBTQ+ folks, and women who would not be denied the right to vote and demanded a seat at the table—and many won. This "Blue Wave" was also an urgent call by decent folks demanding accountability and a government that works for all of us, not the billionaire class. After nearly two years of overtly white-supremacist politics from the Trump administration, voters from coast to coast elected the most diverse set of leaders we have ever seen. This shellacking of Trump's policies and the MAGA movement is to be celebrated.

Still, President Trump has two more years in office and can wield the power of executive orders. The administration will continue to pursue its National Security Strategy, with its focus on the Western Hemisphere and on monopolizing rare earth minerals deemed vital to U.S. national security. We can expect a continuation of the boat strikes, the expansion of joint military operations, and an increase in human rights violations.

But beginning in January, the Democrats' control of the Senate and the House of Representatives will allow them to reclaim Congress's constitutional oversight role and hold the executive branch accountable. They can launch investigations into the administration's shady Venezuelan oil deals, including its decision to deposit the first $500 million from the sale of Venezuelan oil in a U.S.-controlled bank account in Qatar. They can demand documents such as the Justice Department's classified Office of Legal Counsel opinion justifying the extrajudicial killings in boat strikes on the high seas. They can also compel testimony from senior officials and subject them to sustained congressional scrutiny.

For Latin America and the Caribbean, a Congress willing to use its powers could change the course of U.S. policy. Congress holds the purse strings. It can condition security assistance on respect for human rights, refuse to fund military operations it never authorized, and invest in addressing the root causes of migration rather than militarizing borders. It can scrutinize deportation flights and the treatment of people returned to Central America and the Caribbean. And it can stand with communities across the region who are working for peace, democracy, and dignity.

We have our work cut out for us. We will press the new Congress to abolish ICE, forge a progressive immigration policy, and redirect funding away from militarization toward human needs such as health care, housing, fuel, and food. We will press it to pass war powers resolutions, deliver humanitarian relief to the Cuban people, push for the end of the embargo, defend Colombia's hard-won peace, protect human rights and environmental defenders, and so much more. **LAWG is ready.**

Speaking Truth to Power:

Cuban Americans Challenge Washington's Maximum Pressure Campaign

By Andrea Fernández Aponte

In October, members of the Cuban diaspora from Florida, New York, and even Colorado came to Capitol Hill with a message for lawmakers: **not all Cuban Americans support Washington's maximum pressure campaign against Cuba.** Their visit came as the humanitarian situation on the island continues to deteriorate and the Trump administration's rhetoric and actions escalate. More than nine months after the administration launched an aggressive campaign to cut off the island's fuel supply, Cubans are living with the consequences every day.

Reporting from across the island this summer, *The Atlantic* found all-day blackouts routine even in Havana, and fishermen in eastern Cuba drying and salting their catch for lack of refrigeration. Ration books meant to guarantee basic foodstuffs had been blank for weeks, and the average public-sector salary was about 6,500 pesos a month—less than $10 at the informal exchange rate—while a single carton of eggs cost up to 4,700 pesos. The UN resident coordinator in Cuba, Francisco Pichón, has warned that tightened U.S. measures have triggered an energy crisis and risk a humanitarian collapse. In May, senior UN officials reported that more than 100,000 surgeries had been postponed.

On January 29, President Trump signed Executive Order 14380, threatening tariffs on any country that supplies oil to Cuba. Since then, Washington has turned to military assets to enforce what amounts to a fuel blockade. On October 2, the U.S. Coast Guard announced it had intercepted the *Grace*, a cargo ship it said was carrying fuel to Cuba, and that it had detained another vessel, the *Jaira Provider*, earlier this summer.

The pressure doesn't stop at sea. In late September, CBS News reported that the Army Reserve was assessing whether it could supply U.S. Southern Command with military police, medical, and logistics units within 90 to 120 days—planning that U.S. officials told the network is aimed at Cuba. Then, on October 23, Secretary of State Marco Rubio publicly urged Cubans seeking change to pursue a "discrete [*sic*] partnership with the CIA," and the agency followed up with a Spanish-language video with instructions on how to make contact.

The administration also took its campaign to the United Nations. Ahead of the General Assembly's annual vote on the embargo, Washington pressured governments to oppose the resolution or abstain. On October 28, the resolution still passed overwhelmingly—130 to 17, with 25 abstentions—but support fell from 165 votes last year to its lowest level in decades.

Against this backdrop, there is a ray of hope. For decades, Washington has pointed to Cuban Americans to justify its hardline policies toward Cuba. Cuban Americans for Cuba (CA4C), a new organization, is pushing back against that narrative—and LAWG has been working closely with its members to help them speak out against policies that harm their families and their people.



Members of Cuban Americans for Cuba in front of the Capitol building after a day of meetings with Congress. / Credit: CA4C

This fall, LAWG and Global Exchange co-hosted a Congressional Advocacy 101 training with CA4C to teach members how to work directly with their representatives and hold them accountable. In October, LAWG helped CA4C organize its first lobby day on Capitol Hill, where members met with congressional offices. In meetings facilitated by LAWG, they directly challenged the notion that Cuban Americans are a monolithic group that uniformly supports policies designed to punish the island.

Their message was clear and urgent: end the fuel blockade, and replace the maximum pressure campaign that hurts the Cuban people with a policy of engagement.

"For too long, politicians have claimed to speak for Cuban Americans while pushing policies that hurt our families on the island," said Danny Valdes, CA4C's founder and executive director. "**Our first lobby day showed Congress that many of us want engagement, not punishment—and LAWG was a crucial partner in making that happen. We're grateful for their support of our growing movement.**"

As Washington doubles down on a strategy that punishes ordinary Cubans, these voices—rooted in family, community, and lived experience—are exactly what Congress needs to hear.

With a new Congress taking office in January, LAWG will work to make sure it hears them. Alongside CA4C and our coalition partners, we will press lawmakers to use their oversight power to end the fuel blockade, pass war powers resolutions to prevent unauthorized military action against Cuba, and expand humanitarian relief for the Cuban people. Above all, we will push for a policy of engagement that puts Cuban families—on both sides of the Florida Straits—at its center.

U.S. Immigration Policy:
The Politics of Cruelty in Action

By Helena Olea

In the United States today, the politics of cruelty, the deliberate use of state power to inflict public suffering on a particular group, is at the core of the Trump administration's immigration policy. Suffering is not a side effect but the main goal.

The administration has pushed the boundaries of its immigration enforcement powers, with concentration camps, deportations, and family separation, and tested the limits of judicial protections. As journalists have acutely described, "cruelty is the point." Cruelty is reserved for those deemed unworthy of humane treatment, and it has three features: it is performative, staging harm to be seen; it targets those with the least power to respond; and it recasts suffering as success.

Raids as Public Spectacle

Immigration arrests changed from silent, targeted actions to massive urban operations aimed at apprehending any person believed to be undocumented. Egregious immigration enforcement actions in Los Angeles were followed by "Operation Midway Blitz" in Chicago and "Operation Metro Surge" in Minnesota. Masked, unidentified agents in unmarked cars apprehended people based on their appearance, accent, employment, or location, smashing car windows and breaking down doors without judicial warrants, using excessive force, and firing tear gas at community members who came out to defend each other. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol agents killed migrants and U.S. citizens, including Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, during these actions, with no accountability. Enforcement has since shifted: arrests now take place in closed spaces, such as courthouses, often with the cooperation of local and state agencies. Arrests have increased, and fear remains.

The spectacle has left an enduring impact nationwide. If masked agents can sweep a neighborhood, every immigrant family and every person who is not white has reason to fear, regardless of nationality or immigration status. No place is safe: not schools, places of worship, hospitals, or workplaces. Families live with the constant fear of deportation, which limits their movement and harms their mental health.

Continued on page 6 ⟶

Detention as Punishment

Mandatory detention has produced the largest number of people in immigration detention on record: about 73,000 in mid-January 2026. The claim that enforcement would target people with criminal convictions proved false: nearly three in four detainees had no criminal conviction or criminal record.

The politics of cruelty is also profitable. CoreCivic and the GEO Group have become key providers of detention beds, raking in millions while failing to provide adequate health care and edible food. People have died in their custody, and no one has been held accountable for the lives lost.

Lack of legal representation, inadequate health care, and the prospect of lengthy detention are part of the design. Frequent transfers to facilities far from families, communities, and lawyers deepen the isolation that pressures detainees to accept voluntary departure.

Deportation as Banishment

Although most deportees have violated only immigration law, they are portrayed as dangerous. An estimated 660,000 deportations were carried out in fiscal year 2026, after roughly 620,000 in the Trump administration's first year. Over its first 18 months, only 31 percent of formal removals involved a criminal conviction. Employers, communities, and families are reeling from the impact.

The starkest form of the politics of cruelty is third-country deportation: sending people to countries where they have never lived, may not speak the language, and have no networks or even consular representation. The Departments of State and Homeland Security pressured countries into more than 30 agreements. Conditions vary widely. At one extreme was the inhumane spectacle of the 252 Venezuelans held at CECOT, El Salvador's mega-prison. At the other, roughly 20,000 non-Mexican nationals have been quietly deported to Mexico and abandoned with no support. Deportations to African countries are fewer, but deportees' accounts of isolation and lack of protection are very effective in instilling fear. The greatest punishment now is the threat of deportation to an unknown destination—a threat that extends even to people granted protection under the Convention Against Torture or withholding of removal. It is a cruel tactic that is pushing many to leave the United States.

A Path Forward

Naming, describing, and denouncing the politics of cruelty is an important first step. Community action to document arrests, educate, and protect neighbors has also proven critical. With a new Congress taking office in January, congressional oversight of detention centers must include requests for information, hearings, and political pressure to ensure adequate conditions. Taxpayers need to understand when and how this machinery of suffering was funded, and creative congressional action is needed to stop it.



ICE agents detain a woman after pulling her from a car on January 13, 2026 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. / Credit: Stephen Maturen/Getty Images

Countries of origin also have a role to play. Effective consular protection and diplomatic action save lives. Welcoming deported nationals and those forced to return, along with their families, many of whom are U.S. citizens, will require decisive political action and inclusive public policies. These governments must rise to the challenge, recognizing that these migrants contributed to national economies through remittances and represent great potential.

The politics of cruelty must be confronted with humanity and care. State action is a reflection of our values. The way forward is to forge an alternative immigration policy that respects the right to mobility, provides a pathway to citizenship, and recognizes the contributions of the immigrant community.

Rights Watch:
Updates from Across the Region

By Vicki Gass

The Trump administration's active support for authoritarian-leaning governments in Latin America, the National Security Strategy of December 2025, and the Shield of the Americas have given a green light to Latin American governments to increase crackdowns on human rights defenders, anti-corruption leaders, and government critics. They have also allowed the region's governments to roll back important, hard-fought programs and pass legislation that undermines human rights. Here's a snapshot of the latest in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Colombia:

Guatemala

On October 17, gunmen assassinated Juan Francisco Solórzano Foppa in front of his son on a soccer field in Guatemala City. A second man, Gustavo Adolfo Aguilar Gamarro, was also killed in the attack. Foppa, as he was commonly referred to, was an attorney and former prosecutor, respected for his dedication and commitment to strengthening the justice system and combating corruption in Guatemala. With elections approaching in 2027, the killing has raised fears that Guatemala is returning to bygone days when assassinations of this type were all too common. LAWG and allies are calling for a thorough and independent investigation to bring both the gunmen and the masterminds to justice.

El Salvador

On October 13, President Bukele announced that his administration was weighing conditional early release for people jailed for allegedly collaborating with gangs. Since the state of exception began in March 2022, more than 96,000 people have been imprisoned—1.5 percent of the population—including nearly 100 political prisoners. Independent experts have warned of crimes against humanity. The plan would review the cases of about 10,600 detainees classified as occasional gang collaborators, roughly half of whom could be released. But it lacks judicial oversight and public criteria or timelines. Those released would remain under conditions that could lead to their re-arrest, a threat that will discourage civic participation. LAWG is working with other organizations to educate Congress on Bukele's announcement and propose an alternative: an independent commission of international human rights experts to guide a lawful process.

Honduras

The Honduran Congress has passed two laws that put campesinos at risk. The first, a reform of the penal code, broadens the definition of terrorist association in ways that could see campesinos and small farmers who occupy land or resist eviction prosecuted as terrorists. The second, the Law for the Strengthening and Protection of the Agroindustrial Sector, shields agribusiness from land claims, disregarding the legitimate rights of campesinos, small farmers, and Indigenous communities, especially the Garifuna people. These laws have instilled fear among farmers, Indigenous communities, and human rights groups that they will be criminalized for demanding their land rights. On May 21, armed men opened fire on members of the Paso Aguán farmers' cooperative in Rigores, Trujillo—a region historically rocked by conflicts over disputed land—killing 20 people.

Colombia

Colombian president Abelardo de la Espriella, who took office in August, is moving quickly to defund important institutions established by the 2016 peace accord, such as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), the tribunal charged with prosecuting individuals on all sides of the conflict responsible for gross human rights violations. These are institutions that the U.S. government has supported since the accord was signed. Congress has approved a 2027 budget cutting the JEP's funding by 170 billion pesos (about $50 million), and De la Espriella campaigned on eliminating the tribunal altogether. With our partner organizations, LAWG is working to preserve these important entities and demanding that no military aid go to a government that is defunding peace institutions, undermining the very programs that help curb the drug trade in Colombia.

LATIN AMERICA WORKING GROUP

1301 Connecticut Ave NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

DONATE TODAY

Like what you see?
Make a donation at
www.lawg.org

Want to mail your donation? *Please fill out the card to the right and mail it to:*

Latin America Working Group
1301 Connecticut Ave NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

Name: _____

Donation Amount: _____

Payment Method:

☐ **Check** *(Please make out to **LAWGEF!**)*

☐ **Credit Card**

Frequency: ☐ Monthly ☐ One Time

Provider: ☐ Visa ☐ American Express
☐ Mastercard ☐ Discover ☐ Other

Card Number: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Security Code: _____

Signature: _____