



THE CARTER CENTER IN THE AMERICAS

What is the mission of the Carter Center's Americas Program?

The mission of the Americas Program is to work toward the collective protection and promotion of meaningful democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

The program strives to enhance the quality of democracy and its ability to improve the lives of individuals in three areas:

- Sustaining democracies and crisis prevention
- Promoting democracy through effective citizenship
- Building regional consensus.

The program works together with the Organization of Americas States, its associated bodies, the United Nations,

and regional civil society networks to accomplish and strengthen its mission. The Center has created two informal groups: the Council of Presidents and Prime Ministers, which brings former hemispheric leaders to lead special projects in the region, and the Friends of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which seeks to improve democracy and make more effective the charter in the hemisphere.

How has the Americas Program's work changed over the last 20 years?

In the late 80s and early 90s, the program focused its work on election monitoring in countries transitioning from authoritarian to democratic governments. During this period, the Latin American region

was undergoing dramatic political changes, restoring or establishing democracies, and opening economies.

The program now works to ensure that democracies work effectively to serve their citizens as the region has had more than two decades of democratic governments. The current focus is on the quality of democracy, including not only elections, but also the ability of governments to meet the needs of the people. There also is a need to assure that democratic transformation occurs within a framework of peace with justice, respect for human rights, and in an inclusive manner that engages a broad array of citizens.

Why does the Americas Program focus its work in four countries: Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Venezuela?

The Carter Center has worked in many countries in the region but has a history of engagement with four countries experiencing rapid changes: Bolivia since 2002, Ecuador since 1998, Nicaragua since 1989, and Venezuela since 1998.

All four countries are led by elected leaders seeking to transform their countries to address poverty and inequality within a reformulated democratic framework. They each claim to represent previously marginalized sectors of society and in some cases represent a fundamental shift in power relations of their societies. As these countries undergo potentially contentious constitutional reform and debate over the very meaning of democracy and how to organize it to be efficient, inclusive, and represent diverse populations, the Americas Program hopes to assist them



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in achieving these goals in ways that are peaceful, tolerant, and respect human rights.

What role does access to information play in advancing democracy in the Americas?

Access to public records gives citizens the opportunity to participate in public life, help set priorities, and hold their governments accountable. A free flow of infor-

mation is an important tool for building trust between a government and its citizens. It also improves communication within government to make public administration more efficient and more effective in delivering services to constituents. But, perhaps most important, access to information is a fundamental human right and can be used to help people exercise other critical human rights, such as clean water, healthcare, and education, and to fight poverty in developing nations.

Since 1999, the Carter Center's access to information project has supported the establishment of access to information cultures in three core countries in Latin America (Jamaica, Bolivia, Nicaragua), and shared those experiences with China and countries in Africa. The Center has provided technical assistance, partnered with the World Bank, and advised the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Development Bank.