

The Carter Center

The Carter Center is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization founded in 1982 in Atlanta, Ga., by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter in partnership with Emory University. The Center seeks to wage peace, fight disease, and build hope in a world where people live every day under difficult, life-threatening conditions caused by war, disease, famine, and poverty. The ultimate goal is to help create a world where every man, woman, and child has the opportunity to enjoy good health and live in peace.

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THE AMERICAS PROGRAM

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Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.

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THE AMERICAS PROGRAM
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The Carter Center established the Americas Program in 1986, when the Western Hemisphere was undergoing dramatic political changes, restoring or establishing democracies and opening economies. The program, a pioneer in monitoring elections, made important contributions to these profound changes in the region. Since the late 1990s, the program evolved from an emphasis on observing elections in Latin America to ensuring that democracies in the region work effectively to serve their citizens.

Many countries in Latin America now have achieved more than two decades of democratic governance. In some countries, however, dissatisfaction with the performance of their democracies has been growing, and problems still prevail such as weak political institutions, persistent poverty and income inequality, and insufficient economic growth. There is a growing demand from citizens for expanded political, civil, and social citizenship rights.

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: a) democratic sustainability and crisis prevention, b) promoting democracy through effective citizenship, and c) building regional consensus.



Sustaining Democracies

Through ongoing engagement, the Americas Program assists countries in sustaining strong democracies and preventing crisis from threatening governability. The approach includes facilitating dialogue and mediation as needed, building consensus and capacity on issues, issuing periodic public statements, and discussing issues that may generate conflicts or deepen democracy. The program provides a flexible and secure environment for diverse groups to reflect on the divisions within and between their countries and identify opportunities to improve their relations.

The Carter Center has a history of involvement with four countries in particular: Bolivia since 2002, Ecuador since 1998, Nicaragua since 1989, and Venezuela since 1998. The program seeks to ensure 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.

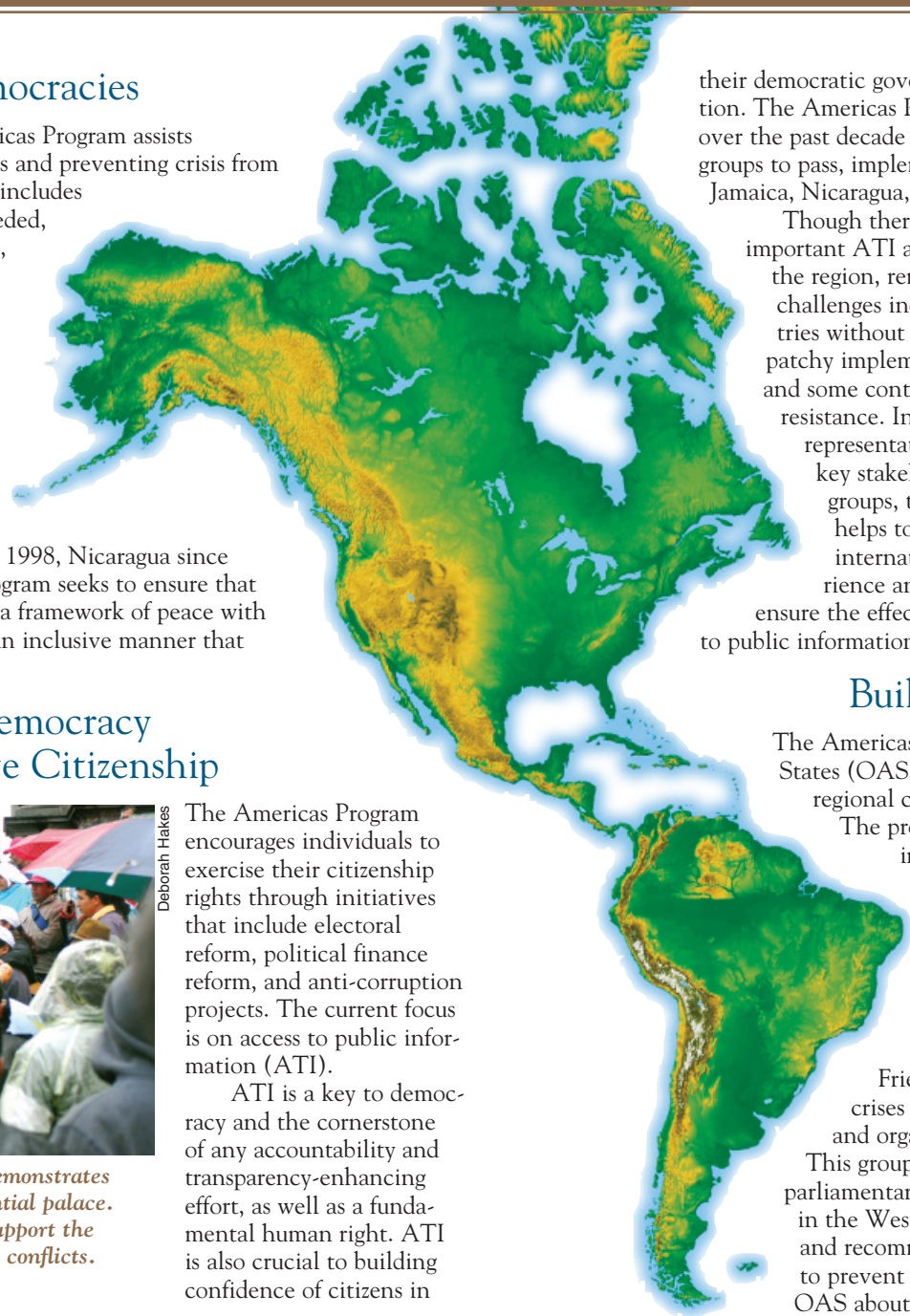
Promoting Democracy Through Effective Citizenship



A group representing local governments demonstrates in Quito, Ecuador, in front of the presidential palace. The Carter Center works in Ecuador to support the Constituent Assembly process and prevent conflicts.

The Americas Program encourages individuals to exercise their citizenship rights through initiatives that include electoral reform, political finance reform, and anti-corruption projects. The current focus is on access to public information (ATI).

ATI is a key to democracy and the cornerstone of any accountability and transparency-enhancing effort, as well as a fundamental human right. ATI is also crucial to building confidence of citizens in



their democratic governments and to improving effective public administration. The Americas Program has been working to promote ATI in the region over the past decade and in partnership with government and civil society groups to pass, implement, and enforce ATI laws in key countries such as Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Bolivia.

Though there have been important ATI advances in the region, remaining challenges include countries without laws, patchy implementation, and some continued resistance. In convening representatives from key stakeholder groups, the program helps to share the international experience and identify the specific necessary steps and measures to ensure the effective creation and implementation of universal access to public information.

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Building Regional Consensus

The Americas Program works with the Organization of American States (OAS), its associated bodies, the United Nations, and regional civil society networks to accomplish its mission.

The program helps to establish regional consensus on specific international norms to protect and promote democracy and citizenship. It also encourages individual state compliance and regional evaluation mechanisms.

The program tracks key issues in inter-American relations and has given advice in the development of a key document: the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was adopted by the OAS in 2001.

The program serves as the secretariat for the Friends of the Democratic Charter, tracking democratic crises and emerging issues of democratic governance and organizing fact-finding trips and meetings of the group.

This group is composed of former presidents, prime ministers, parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, and human rights officials in the Western Hemisphere. The group visits stressed countries and recommends ways for governments, citizens, and the OAS to prevent tensions from erupting into crises, and advises the OAS about alternatives for more effective implementation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.