



SOFT POWER, LEVERAGE, AND THE OBAMA DOCTRINE IN CUBA

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Introduction

Assessing President Barack Obama's foreign policy achievements in Latin America requires walking through a minefield. Some analysts cautiously suggest he had some success, so for example he is "leaving a solid platform from which to take advantage of new developments in Latin America's economics and politics" (Reid 2015, 46). More common is the refrain that the president "lost" Latin America, suggesting that inattention reduced U.S. influence in the region. The more charitable version is that an "auspicious start" was followed by "disappointment" (Lowenthal 2011, 11). Under that logic, crises in Europe, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe dominated the president's attention and kept Latin America very low on the list of foreign policy priorities. The less charitable argument is that he simply "caves to Castro" (Noriega 2015).

The assertion that the United States under Obama has lost influence in Latin America has been widespread. This was because his policies seemed the same as President Bush's (Randall 2013); because extrahemispheric actors have become more active in pursuing relations, to the point that "Latin America feels less of the predominance of the United States" (Russell and Tokatlian (2011) while others are ascendant (Carpenter 2016); or because opportunities are routinely lost (Whitehead and Nolte 2012). The nature of "influence" itself tends not to be examined too closely.

This paper challenges the assumption about loss of influence, arguing that it ignores soft power and the concrete advances it fostered. The Obama administration represented a policy shift that, though gradual, has paved the way to achieve stated policy goals. Using the case of Cuba, it will argue that the United States is increasingly its influence in ways that are typically not taken into consideration. Even the single case of Cuba has regional implications.

Leverage and Soft Power

Leverage in foreign policy "involves using resources and/or relationships in a creative way to bring about certain effects in the world" (Anderson 2010). In bilateral relations, it involves creating incentives for other governments to behave in ways that are favorable to your own policy goals. The term is underdeveloped in the foreign policy

literature, often used in passing but rarely examined on its own in detail.

Leverage is important for understanding U.S.-Latin American relations after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Two concurrent processes were taking place. First, under the administration of George W. Bush the United States pursued an aggressive global policy against its perceived enemies. The so-called “war on terror” lens alienated many Latin American leaders (Emerson 2010) because the U.S. government placed considerable pressure on them to support policies they disagreed with. Second, conservative, pro-free market governments across Latin America were replaced by left or center-left governments suspicious of U.S. motives and sometimes hostile to U.S. policy (including what President Bush called the “war on terror”). These two processes clashed for most of the eight years of the administration, to the point that polls showed Latin American confidence in President Bush as lower than anywhere else in the world (Pew Research Center 2008).

This paper links leverage to soft power, a concept developed by Joseph Nye. He defines it as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (p. x). With regard to U.S. policy, in the post-9/11 era numerous studies have argued that U.S. soft power has been on the decline. Some argue that the United States had a more difficult time gaining support for UN votes (Datta 2009); others that China is wielding soft power more effectively (Kurlantzick 2007); or that U.S. policy engendered “soft balancing” that countered U.S. policy (Pape 2005).

Hard power entails using force (which could be military or economic) or the threat of such force to compel certain policy decisions. This kind of power has been the norm in U.S. policy. In the history of U.S.-Latin American relations, examples included invasion, covert action, sanctions, and/or cut-off of economic or military aid. The accumulation of such experience has tended to make Latin American governments wary of U.S. hard power and of intervention in general.

Soft power fosters leverage by increasing mutual trust and creating space for dialogue, especially with other states that may be otherwise resistant to policy goals. Hard power’s focus on the use or threat of force can sometimes compel other states to behave in a way you desire, but can also backfire. Especially when there is long-standing distrust and/or suspicion, relying on hard power has the potential for generating resentment, which in turn makes states even less willing to follow your preferred policy avenues. In other cases governments respond by intentionally rejecting demands and thereby becoming more entrenched in a contrarian foreign policy stance.

The point of leverage is to make hard power unnecessary. Other states choose to follow your policy lead because they agree it will lead to a beneficial outcome for them. It is primarily carrot rather than stick. The notion of being “creative” is difficult to measure empirically. This article utilizes a single case study of U.S. policy toward Cuba to begin fleshing

out the concept. The issue of creativity also bridges foreign policy and international relations. Any U.S. president must work with Congress to fund programs and approve international agreements while also working with the leaders in foreign governments with regard to those programs and agreements.

It is true that especially after September 11, 2001 other parts of the world dominated presidential attention. Wars in the Middle East, rivalry with Iran and Russia, uneasy accommodation with China, terrorist attacks, immigration crises, and economic crisis in Europe, among others, received the lion's share of presidential attention. That does not necessarily mean, however, that the region was being ignored. As former Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Mora notes, for example, lower level officials are discussing Latin American issues on an ongoing basis, and then taking initiatives upward. This was true of Cuba more specifically as well, since the president encouraged lower-level officials to communicate with their Cuban counterparts (Erikson 2011, 110). Further, the fact that Latin America was not of central policy importance also does not mean that U.S. influence has dramatically declined.

Background

The eight years of the George W. Bush administration were difficult for U.S.-Latin American relations. When he came to office, the region was undergoing important changes. In particular, many political actors were gaining support by opposing the U.S. emphasis on free markets and reduced government. The Latin American left viewed those policies as failures, and Hugo Chávez's 1998 election in Venezuela was the first in a lengthy series of leftist presidents who were elected on a clear, often strident, anti-market platform. President Bush's conservatism immediately clashed with that message. He gave a speech about Latin America during his presidential campaign in August 2000, asserting that the region was "threatened by the false prophets of populism," clearly referring to Chávez (New York Times 2000). In December 2000, shortly before he assumed office, *The New York Times* cited Republicans' belief that the incoming president would not accept any Venezuelan hostility, and would cultivate whatever ties they could within the Venezuelan military (Marquis 2000).

The Bush administration began by, among other things, pursuing closer ties to Mexico, especially with regard to immigration. The attacks of September 11, 2001 changed that policy orientation, as Latin America policy was subsumed under a more general focus on global terrorism. In practice, this entailed a binary "with us/against us" policy that split Latin America in two. In 2002, the administration was quick to recognize the coup government in Venezuela, and was hostile to the Hugo Chávez government thereafter.¹ By 2003, the administration was publicly threatening both Mexico and Chile to vote favorably for the Iraq resolution in the United Nations, where the two countries were then serving on the two Latin American rotating seats in the Security Council. Chile was also later

pressured not to support Venezuela's bid for a rotating seat as well and to accept waivers (so-called Article 98 exemptions) for United States citizens who fell under the auspices of the International Criminal Court.²

Hostility toward Cuba intensified. In 2003 President Bush formed the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. Its day to day operations were overseen by Roger Noriega, the hardline Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. The committee issued a report in 2004, specifying at length—over 400 pages—what the Cuban government needed to accomplish before normalizing relations, and detailing how the United States would then insert itself into virtually all aspects of Cuban political and economic life (Powell 2004). Taking one of its many recommendations, the administration tightened restrictions on travel and remittances to the island, a decision that proved unpopular with many Cuban Americans (Schultz 2010, 6).

The president framed his effort to pass a free trade agreement with Colombia in security terms, arguing in many fora that failure to do so emboldened terrorists. Such an agreement would “make it harder to recruit people to violence and terrorism and drug trafficking” (Public Papers of the President 2008, 357). The U.S. Trade Representative, Susan Schwab, spoke in apocalyptic terms: “Leaders in the hemisphere and Latin America have said that the single most destabilizing factor in Latin America today may be the U.S. Congress’s failure to ratify the Colombia Free Trade Agreement” (Pethokoukis 2008). President Bush did not succeed in getting the bill passed, which did not occur until President Obama had been in office for over two years.

Finally, the president took on an initiative President Bill Clinton had originally launched, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which would connect all countries of the hemisphere in a free trade agreement. That effort disintegrated in 2005, where at the Americas Summit Hugo Chávez announced in typical flamboyant style that the FTAA “will be buried!” (BBC 2005). That turned out to be correct, as negotiations floundered and the administration stopped pushing it. It was never heard from again.

After 2001 the Bush administration’s policy toward the region revolved primarily around security. The 2006 *National Security Strategy* described the western hemisphere as the “frontline of defense of American national security” (National Security Strategy 2006, 37). Latin American countries needed to be “helped to the path of sustained political and economic development.” That policy orientation fostered broad resistance in a region that—regardless of ideology—did not share the same security concerns and often resented U.S. demands.

The result was that in Latin America the United States had little to no leverage. The focus on threats and intimidation impeded the development of soft power. The tactics used to achieve high-profile policy goals were centered largely on the implied use of hard power. Without leverage, those goals were not achieved. The administration did not pass a free trade agreement with Colombia, did not hasten the end of the Castro

regime, failed to stop Venezuela from gaining a UN Security Council seat, did not receive Latin American votes in favor of using force in Iraq, and overall provided a foil for adversarial governments.

In fact, there was significant blowback, so that using hard power ultimately had the unintended effect of, for example, strengthening adversarial governments in Cuba and Venezuela. Even pragmatic politicians in Latin America felt compelled to oppose U.S. policies. Hard power consistently took precedence over soft power, and many major U.S. policy goals in Latin America were not achieved. That outcome made President Bush frustrated, as he felt his administration was not receiving the credit it deserved. In a 2007 interview with CNN Español, he noted the amount of U.S. aid: “And yet we don’t get much credit for it. And I want the taxpayers—I want the American people to get credit for their generosity in Central and South America” (Public Papers of the President 2007, 258–259). He gave a speech saying “it’s important for us—for me to explain to our fellow citizens some of the work we’re doing in the neighborhood” (Public Papers of the President 2007, 919). The following year, the National Security Council Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Dan Fisk, discussed aid and noted, “So again, in terms of the President’s record in the hemisphere, this is, again, I think, a good opportunity to remind people of that” (The American Presidency Project website).

During the Bush administration, then, influence had decreased, but it was due more to U.S. actions—specifically the relentless emphasis on hard power—than simply to the entrance of other actors. Unlike China, Russia, or other states commonly mentioned as potential rivals in Latin America, the United States has a permanent interest in Latin America and therefore it is always a priority.

The Obama Administration

When Barack Obama took office, he promised a new path for Latin America policy. In a 2007 speech he made while still a U.S. senator, he argued that the “United States is seen as supporting democracy when it produces a desired result. It is vital to reverse that trend” (Congressional Record 2007, 5869). While on the campaign trail, he made speeches calling for engagement with Cuba and Venezuela, arguing that “it is time to pursue direct diplomacy, with friend and foe alike, without preconditions” (Zeleny 2008).

What developed in Latin America generally and Cuba more specifically can perhaps be called an element of an “Obama Doctrine” (Moreno and Ilcheva 2016). That doctrine consists in large part of taking strategic risks to reduce tension with adversaries. It rejects the use of force solely as a means to prove credibility, asserts that the United States cannot fix all problems, and maintains that multilateralism is preferable.³ Hard power does not disappear but becomes a secondary tactic. Dialogue and negotiation is more prominent.

The focus on adversarial governments is particularly important for Latin America, where ideological disagreement became widely prevalent after 1999, expanding throughout the Bush presidency. Hugo Chávez assumed office that year, and within a decade many countries—notably Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Nicaragua—shifted from right to left. Those shifts carried with them suspicion of U.S. foreign policy motives and sometimes open antagonism. The years immediately after 9/11 widened the schisms, as the Bush Administration prioritized the “Global War on Terror,” many elements of which Latin American governments publicly criticized. The policy of disengagement had isolated the United States in the region.

In his first *National Security Strategy*, released in 2010, President Obama noted the following:

To adversarial governments, we offer a clear choice: abide by international norms, and achieve the political and economic benefits that come with greater integration with the international community; or refuse to accept this pathway, and bear the consequences of that decision, including greater isolation. Through engagement, we can create opportunities to resolve differences, strengthen the international community’s support for our actions, learn about the intentions and nature of closed regimes, and plainly demonstrate to the publics within those nations that their governments are to blame for their isolation (National Security Strategy 2010, 11).

That commitment to engaging adversaries—or at least those abiding by “international norms,” whatever that meant—would be applied directly to Cuba, but it was connected to Venezuela as well, where the Obama administration moved away from a hostile policy. There was, as one critic of the document noted, “no recognition of the challenge posed by Venezuela and neo-Bolivarianism” (Feaver 2010). That would remain a bone of contention for critics of Obama’s Latin America policy (and policies elsewhere in the world as well).

The 2015 *National Security Strategy* did not address adversaries as directly, but made clear that engagement remained central:

The use of force is not, however, the only tool at our disposal, and it is not the principal means of U.S. engagement abroad, nor always the most effective for the challenges we face. Rather, our first line of action is principled and clear-eyed diplomacy, combined with the central role of development in the forward defense and promotion of America’s interests (*National Security Strategy* 2015, 4).

What this meant was a drastic reduction in the immediate use of hard power to resolve conflict. Cuba itself was specifically mentioned, in the context of how engagement would improve relations with other countries in the hemisphere. Thus, the shift in Cuba policy was directly linked to the broader goal of greater multilateralism.

The focus on engaging adversaries has been polarizing, particularly with Cuba. As a presidential candidate in 2007, Hillary Clinton called him “naïve” for suggesting he would meet with Cuban leaders (as well as those in Iran and North Korea) without preconditions (Associate Press 2007). In 2014, Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) argued that the president’s policy stance “is about the appeasement of autocratic dictators, thugs, and adversaries” (John McCain website 2014). The core dispute is whether dialogue (particularly without preconditions) necessarily entailed appeasement.

Cuba

The history of U.S. policy toward Cuba after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 is likely the most documented bilateral relationship between the United States and any other Latin American country. In the context of the early Cold War, U.S. policy under Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy progressed rapidly from suspicious engagement to fostering regime change. The foundation of U.S. policy soon after the revolution was that the Castro regime represented a proxy encroachment of the Soviet Union in the western hemisphere. Hard power was the backbone, including economic sanctions, covert action, and invasion.

U.S. policy toward Cuba has followed a well-known path of attempting to isolate the country, with the economic embargo (a series of laws initiated in 1960 and expanded in 1962) serving as a foundation. The original stated purpose of the embargo was to squeeze Cuba economically to the point that Cubans would rise against Fidel Castro. The embargo was strengthened both in 1992 and 1996, with the Cuba Democracy Act and Helms-Burton Law, and further tightened during administration of George W. Bush. In fact, his restrictions on remittances and family travel were not popular with Cuban exiles, particularly those had come to the United States after 1980 (Sanchez 2006).

President Bush was adamant that U.S. policy would not change, and would in fact be more punitive until democratization occurred.⁴ In 2002 he said that the “United States will continue to enforce economic sanctions on Cuba, and the ban on travel to Cuba, until Cuba’s government proves that it is committed to real reform” (The White House 2002). Over time, the embargo had shifted from a policy tool to simply a punitive measure. Policy shifts within Cuba—such as foreign policy—were ignored.

By the first decade of the 21st century, the United States had no leverage at all with regard to Cuba. Cuban leaders demands from U.S. policy makers because there was no way to punish the country further without using armed force.⁵ Likewise, the United States offered no concrete benefits to Cuba. Without a carrot there was only stick, and the stick had been used as much as it could be. Leverage requires that the other government have some incentive to accept your policy proposal. Advances in immigration or foreign policy, which are the two issues of the most importance to the United States in Cuba, were therefore stymied.

The Obama administration's use of soft power in Cuba rested first on the premise that the Cold War had long concluded and so bilateral relations should not hew to the same assumptions. Cold War calculations had included the threat of a close Soviet presence, export of Marxist revolution to other countries, intelligence penetration in the United States, and an antagonistic attitude toward the U.S. government in international fora. U.S. policy was based on countering these activities. Not long after the Cold War ended, however, those threats diminished, a process that accelerated after Fidel Castro stepped in 2006 for health reasons. Raúl Castro was widely and accurately viewed as more ideologically pragmatic than his brother. U.S. policy at the time did not take those changes into consideration, but maintained Cold War-era language on security.

Part of this shift by the Obama administration also reflected acknowledgement that diplomatic relations could thaw even when either Fidel or Raúl Castro was in power, which had been officially off the table for many years (even before it was finally codified in the Helms-Burton Law in 1996). Given the advanced ages of the Castros, some type of transition will occur in the not-too-distant future, and so the shift will make it easier for a new Cuban president to step smoothly into the bilateral relationship.

In April 2009, only three months after assuming office, President Obama announced the lifting of restrictions on remittances and family travel to Cuba, while licensing U.S. satellite and telecommunications providers to engage with the island. Freedom of movement, therefore, became a priority:

In taking these steps to help bridge the gap among divided Cuban families and promote the freer flow of information and humanitarian items to the Cuban people, President Obama is working to fulfill the goals he identified both during his presidential campaign and since taking office (The White House 2009a).

Four days later, the president gave a speech at the opening of the Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain, echoing the theme of engaging with adversaries:

Over the past two years, I've indicated, and I repeat today, that I'm prepared to have my administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues – from drugs, migration, and economic issues, to human rights, free speech, and democratic reform. Now, let me be clear, I'm not interested in talking just for the sake of talking. But I do believe that we can move U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction (The White House 2009b).

His remarks at the summit were significant because it took place so quickly after he took office. Given the timing, he was required almost immediately to set the new tone for U.S. policy toward Latin America.

Given that President Obama took office both during economic crisis and involvement in two major wars, he relied heavily on lower-level

officials. That included Thomas Shannon as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, a moderate holdover from the Bush administration, who later in 2009 would be replaced by Arturo Valenzuela, a highly respected political scientist at Georgetown. In the White House, Dan Restrepo served as Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council. When President Obama announced the initial shift in Cuba policy in 2009, Restrepo emphasized that the policy should not be “frozen in time” (The White House website 2009c). Frank Mora, a professor at the National War College, became Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs. These lower-level officials reinforced the more moderate policy tone.

The administration immediately launched efforts to change policy. Later in 2009, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Bisa Williams went to Cuba to begin talks on direct mail service (which would not be finalized until 2016) and was given wide access to state institutions (LeoGrande 2011). When U.S. Agency for International Development contractor Alan Gross was arrested in December 2009, it was widely believed that policy initiatives would come to a standstill, but they continued grinding forward.

Nonetheless, radical change was very slow in coming. In 2011, the president opened up more by relaxing “purposeful” travel, non-family remittances, and the ability of airports to use licensed charters to Cuba. This was hardly a major step forward, and Obama was criticized, even by his own party, as a result. Privately, however, much more was taking place.

Creativity involved working with Pope Francis—who as an Argentine knew the history U.S.-Latin American relations well—to develop back channel negotiations. Such channels date back to the years immediately following the revolution, but the prospect of normalizing relations made these negotiations particularly important. The Pope, in fact, initially wrote a letter both to Barack Obama and to Raúl Castro asking them to resolve the case of Alan Gross and also the three remaining Cuban Five, while also encouraging the two countries to develop a closer relationship (Miller 2014).⁶ Representatives from the United States and Cuba worked 18 months to get the prisoners released and diplomatic relations thawed. On December 17, 2014 the president announced the launch of diplomatic normalization, noting that it would “end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests” (The White House 2014). That announcement was followed by President Obama visiting Havana in March 2015, the first president to do so since Calvin Coolidge.

In May 2015 the State Department removed Cuba from its list of “state sponsors of terrorism,” where it had been since 1982, noting without fanfare that although “the United States has significant concerns and disagreements with a wide range of Cuba’s policies and actions, these fall outside the criteria relevant to the rescission of a State Sponsor of Terrorism designation” (U.S. Department of State 2015). In 2014, the Obama

administration had in fact labeled Cuba as a state sponsor despite asserting that “Cuba has taken a number of steps to fully distance itself from international terrorism and has taken steps to strengthen its counterterrorism laws” (U.S. Department of State 2014).

The local effects of Obama’s 2015 trip were evident in the uncharacteristically discordant official responses. Fidel Castro, who at 89 was heard from only intermittently, penned an article in *Granma* reminding Cubans of the revolution and past U.S. policies, and how Cubans didn’t “need the empire to give us anything” (Castro 2016). A Cuban academic wrote in *Granma* about how Obama was “seductive” but still dangerous (Machado Rodríguez 2016). President Obama’s words were parsed and reparsed suspiciously, and even criticized for saying that Cuba’s future was in its own hands “as if that hadn’t been the case since 1959” (Ubieta Gómez 2016). In short, Cubans were not accustomed to soft power.

Effects of Leverage

Critics of President Obama’s overtures to Cuba focused primarily on the fact that the Castro regime’s human rights record did not improve. That is true, though no U.S. policy makers argued that such a result would automatically happen as a result. In the joint presidential press conference in March 2016, Obama announced that there would be a human rights dialogue later in the year. The press conference itself forced Raúl Castro to take uncomfortable questions, which of course he was unaccustomed to doing.

What leverage has clearly accomplished is that Cuba is no longer a barrier to U.S.-Latin American relations more generally. Unilateral U.S. punitive measures against Cuba were unpopular even with friendly governments, which were less likely to criticize Cuba because it would appear to be bending to U.S. policy makers’ will. U.S. treatment of Cuba was a common theme in international summits. Cuba’s own public complaints internationally were limited to the embargo. And even then, during the 2016 United Nations vote condemning the embargo, for the first time in 25 years the United States abstained, not even bothering to defend its own policy. Cuba could hardly gain traction when the administration itself essentially blamed the embargo on the U.S. Congress.⁷

When it comes to tension in U.S.-Venezuelan relations, Raúl Castro maintains measured rhetoric. Normalization reduced Cuba’s proclivity to stand with the beleaguered government of Nicolás Maduro, whose regional support has been thinning. In his statement to the 2016 Non-Aligned Summit, Castro briefly affirmed support for Maduro’s government (not mentioning his disputes with the United States) and then made a positive reference to normalization with the United States (Vigezzi 2016).

Normalization has prompted more intense dialogue between the Obama and Castro governments. Anticipation that the Cuban Adjustment Act will be abrogated and the preferential status of Cuban migrants ended has created a surge of migration. Officials from the State Department and

the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs held two rounds of talks in 2015 (U.S. State Department Media Note 2015) and the continued into 2016. The Cuban government opposes the Cuban Adjustment Act, arguing it encourages human smuggling, while the United States pushes for greater freedom of legal travel for Cubans.

Effects of the 2016 Election

In November 2016, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. His campaign statements were intended to show that his policies would diverge widely from President Obama, with building a wall on the Mexican border as the most infamous and repeated. With regard to Cuba specifically, he initially supported Obama's overtures. In 2015 he said that "the concept of opening with Cuba is fine" (Caputo 2015). As the election neared, he took the opposite view. He visited veterans of the 1961 failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in October 2016, telling them, "The United States should not prop up the Castro regime economically and politically, as Obama has done and as Hillary Clinton plans to do" (Mazzei and Hanks 2016).

At the time of this writing, it is impossible to know the exact course the Trump administration will take with Cuba. From his latest rhetoric, it appears very likely that at least some part of the Obama administration's efforts will be rolled back. If that occurs, then leverage is also reduced as a result. A return to the policies of President George W. Bush would return the United States to an isolated and weakened political position.

Conclusion

Despite a chorus of voices to the contrary, U.S. influence in Latin America generally and Cuba specifically has waned much less than commonly argued. Much more so than its predecessors, the Obama administration has employed a soft power strategy that has increased policy leverage. The Cuban government is more willing than it has ever been to acknowledge U.S. concerns about human rights and liberty. Regionally, the use of soft power in Cuba alone has opened up more opportunities for multilateral dialogue. Working with the Pope to end over fifty years of isolation was creative diplomacy.

This is what we can call an "Obama Doctrine" for the Americas. The administration initiates dialogue with adversaries in pursuit of specific policy goals. The very act of engaging in that manner can suggest weakness, especially given the hegemonic position of the United States, which domestic opponents have used to criticize the administration. But the gains have been real and antagonizing across the region has decreased.

Increasing policy leverage does not mean drastic or rapid changes in Cuba or elsewhere in Latin America. But it does mean making progress in achieving policy goals, which in many areas had stalled during the administration of George W. Bush. Increased leverage can also mean altering the Cuban government's political calculus when it makes foreign policy

decisions that can affect the United States. Knowing that the advances in bilateral relations can be reversed means the Cuban government is less likely to pursue antagonistic policies. Success in maintaining these advances depends upon the continuation of soft power tactics. It is unlikely we will see that from the incoming Trump administration.

Soft power remains an oft-used term that has had relatively little empirical testing. Especially for the study of U.S.-Latin American relations, such testing would be very useful future research. There are certainly signs of effectiveness, but tracing them precisely is less simple.

Endnotes

¹ In April 2002, Hugo Chávez was forced from office but popular protests restored him to office within 48 hours.

² Under Article 98 agreements, countries agreed not to surrender U.S. citizens to the International Criminal Court, which the Bush administration believed was a concern after September 11, 2001. The penalty for refusing to sign was cutoff of Economic Support Funds.

³ See, for example, extended interviews with President Obama in Goldberg 2016.

⁴ The 1996 Helms-Burton Law expressly requires that a “transition” means “the Cuban government does not include Fidel Castro or Raul Castro.” More so than any post-Cold War president, George W. Bush made that an explicit part of his own policy.

⁵ The same can be said of Venezuela over time, where Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro ignored the intermittent U.S. calls for reform.

⁶ The Cuban Five were Cuba intelligence agents who were arrested in the United States in 1998 and convicted of espionage as well as other charges. The Cuban government insisted they were only protecting the country from Miami-based anti-Castro extremists.

⁷ On this point, see Weeks 2016.

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