

## The Fifth Summit of the Americas: Recommendations for Action

### Enhance Democracy in the Americas through Multilateral Action

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#### Executive Summary

Most Latin Americans, like the vast majority of people from other regions, believe that democracy is better than any other form of government. But Latin Americans are largely dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries, particularly when it comes to distributing income and providing social protections. Corruption is seen as a huge impediment to improved governance. Trust in politicians and political parties ranks particularly low. To prevent backsliding toward authoritarian rule, democracy assistance needs to translate into tangible improvements in the judicial system, accountability of public institutions and politicians, greater transparency, and improvement in public services.

It is critical that Washington move in partnership with others. Partners are needed as well to help share the financial and diplomatic burdens of this task. U.S. foreign aid will likely face significant cuts as a result of the global recession. But a serious reduction in democracy assistance, which demands a long-term and consistent commitment of resources and expertise, would undermine our own interests in making sure that scarce taxpayer dollars go to transparent and accountable governments.

The Obama administration, were it seriously to embark on a more multilateral course, should consider new avenues for collaboration on both the diplomatic and development assistance aspects of a comprehensive democracy assistance strategy. It should depoliticize democracy assistance, strengthen the Organization of American States and Its Inter-American Democratic Charter, and internationalize democracy assistance. As Latin American countries look forward to their bicentennials of independence, the United States should join them in celebrating our shared heritage as democratic societies by funding new multilateral projects for building accountable, transparent, and participatory governance.