

MARCH 2020



OAS SECRETARY GENERAL ELECTION

PRE-ELECTION REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an overview of the election of the Secretary General of the OAS, which will take place March 20, 2020.

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OVERVIEW - EXPECT A TIGHT-FOUGHT RACE



On March 20, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) will choose the next head of its General Secretariat, to sit until 2025. Eying re-election is current Secretary General Luis Almagro. He faces stiff competition, however, despite being publicly backed by the US, Brazil and Colombia.

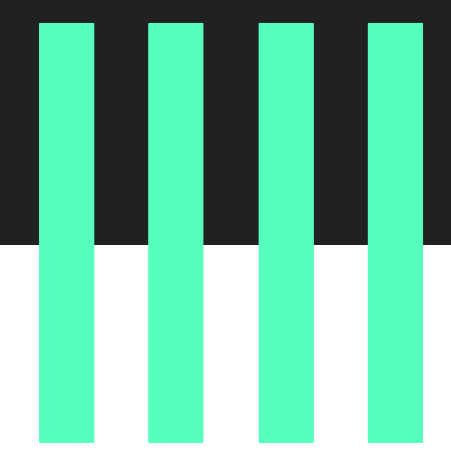
Formerly a chancellor of Uruguay in the government of José Mujica, Almagro secured the OAS' top position in 2015 pledging to promote regional dialogue, and received the near unanimous support of member states. However, his leadership style is seen by many as belligerent, especially over Venezuela, and this, coupled with his closeness to certain governments in the region, has weakened his hand to negotiate. Almagro is now seeing out the end of his term amid rising tensions in the OAS and with the region witnessing multiple threats to democracy, civic space and human rights.

Mindful of the upcoming OAS vote, last year saw some of the governments most critical of Almagro seek out alternative candidates. As a result Almagro now faces two rivals: María Fernanda Espinosa, former Foreign Minister of Ecuador, who has been nominated by two Caribbean countries and is supported by Mexico and Argentina; and Peruvian diplomat Hugo de Zela, put forward by Colombia.

Of these two it is Espinosa - who if she wins will be the OAS' first ever female boss - who enjoys more backing and, as things stand, will offer the sterner test for Almagro. Interestingly, the Caribbean countries emerge as pivotal in this context since in the elections each country's vote counts for the same and this bloc makes up a high number of OAS members.

Espinosa, as such, is attempting to coax the Caribbean states into voting for a single candidate - her - which may be a challenge for her to achieve. Almagro knows it is unrealistic for the Caribbean bloc to back him in unison and so is seeking to splinter and dilute its influence across the three candidates. In this, he will probably seek US support. But while potentially influential, the Trump administration is busy at home including with electoral affairs of its own. At any rate, past ballots show US backing is not necessarily decisive in OAS Secretary General voting.

If none of the candidates receives the minimum of 18 votes to win outright - a plausible scenario - the General Assembly will order a new ballot to be contested by the two front-runners. It is worth remembering that in the 2005 elections, the tightest in 20 years, it took six rounds of voting to settle the result.



The Secretary General is the highest ranking official in the OAS. He/she directs and legally represents the General Secretariat, which is the OAS' central and permanent body.

Among its political functions, the General Secretariat is charged with promoting economic, social, legal, educational, scientific and cultural relations among member states. The Secretary General may submit to the General Assembly or the Permanent Council for consideration any matter that may affect the peace and security of the Hemisphere.

In the exercise of his/her responsibilities, the Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat must not seek or receive instructions from any government or authority outside the OAS and must refrain from acting in any manner that is incompatible with his/her position.

The General Secretariat also has administrative functions, such as advising on the preparation of agendas and regulations, keeping documents and archives, communicating the convening of the General Assembly, and serving as a depository of inter-American treaties and agreements. Finally, its financial responsibilities include preparing the Organization's budget and presenting to the General Assembly, at each regular session, an annual report on the activities and financial status of the Organization.

The Secretary General of the OAS is elected for a period of five years and cannot be re-elected more than once nor can he/she be succeeded by a person of the same nationality. The new term will begin on May 27, 2020.

ELECTION OF THE OAS SECRETARY



The Secretary General is elected by the OAS General Assembly, where each of the 34 active member states is equally represented: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Cuba is an OAS Member State but has not participated since 1962.

For a candidate to be elected Secretary General he or she needs to receive at least 18 votes. If this does not happen the General Assembly may hold up to two more votes between the two front-runners.

ELECTORAL CALENDAR



*Suggested date. Formally, States may submit nominations until the day of the election.



Candidates for the post of Secretary General are usually nominated by one of the member states and in most cases by their country of origin. However, there are no regulations preventing individual nominations.

Candidates must meet standards of personal integrity, professional ability, respect for democracy and democratic institutions, and the defence and promotion of human rights.

The 2020 elections are peculiar in that the two candidates most likely to be elected have not been nominated by their countries of origin.

CANDIDATES: WHO ARE THEY, WHAT THEY PROPOSE?

Until December 15, 2019, three nominations were submitted for the position of Secretary General: Luis Almagro (nominated by Colombia), María Fernanda Espinosa (Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) and Hugo de Zela (Peru).



LUIS ALMAGRO

Nominating country: COLOMBIA

Of Uruguayan nationality, Almagro is a lawyer and a career diplomat. Between 2005 and 2010 he was ambassador to the People's Republic of China. He was appointed Chancellor by José Mujica in 2010 and held the position until the end of his presidency in March 2015.

As Chancellor, he received Guantánamo detainees and Syrian refugees in Uruguayan territory, and maintained Uruguay's presence in Haiti to ensure the country's reconstruction process after the 2010 earthquake.

Nominated by Uruguay for the position of OAS Secretary General, he was elected in March 2015 with the support of 33 of the 34 active member states. His term as head of the Organization was intended to give it more visibility as a hemispheric forum and to put its finances in order. He also developed an agenda geared to the development of SMEs in the Caribbean region and to the promotion of migration, education, and cybersecurity policies.

On the other hand, he has been the target of criticism for his partiality and belligerent personal style in handling the crisis in Venezuela, where he even declared that the option of military intervention should not be discarded, or in Bolivia, where responding to whether there had been a coup d'état or not he said: 'The coup d'état was made by those who made a fraud'. More recently, he praised Sebastián Piñera's actions in handling the massive protests that began in October in which 31 people lost their lives, declaring that "within the framework of the rule of law, of the preservation of democracy, he has defended public order efficiently".

Former Uruguayan President Tabaré Vázquez questioned Almagro's lack of efforts to ease tensions and promote dialogue in Venezuela. For this reason he decided not to endorse his candidacy in 2020, which was finally put forward by the Colombian government.

PROPOSALS FOR THE OAS 2020-2025*

- Promote good practice and discourage bad practice in development.
- Develop cybersecurity policies and competitiveness plans.
- Prioritize development policies in the Caribbean region.
- Promote the development of open information platforms - open data - to increase the availability of public data in open formats.
- Create a repository of good practices for the formation of an inter-American system of open government, give continuity to open government and anti-corruption programs.
- Develop an open ownership platform, containing open data from companies contracted with public funds.
- To give continuity to the projects in association with the private sector for the technological and biotechnological development of the countries of the continent.

*OAS Permanent Council's special meeting, February 12, 2020



MARÍA FERNANDA ESPINOSA

Nominating countries: ANTIGUA Y BARBUDA, SAN VICENTE Y LAS GRANADINAS

Born in Ecuador, Espinosa has a degree in Applied Linguistics and a master's degree in Social Sciences and Amazonian Studies. She also has a postgraduate degree in Anthropology and Political Science.

Between 2007 and 2018 she held various public and diplomatic positions in the Ecuadorian government: Minister of Foreign Affairs (2007; 2014-2017), Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations (2008-2009; 2014), Minister of Coordination of Human Heritage of Ecuador (2009-2012) and Minister of National Defence (2012-2014).

On June 5, 2018, the United Nations General Assembly elected her as President of its 73rd session, making her the fourth woman to hold that position in the agency's history and the first since 2006.

Even though she backed her candidacy before the UN General Assembly, the government of Lenin Moreno announced through the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry that it would support the re-election of Luis Almagro and that "the candidacy of Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa is being managed on an individual basis".

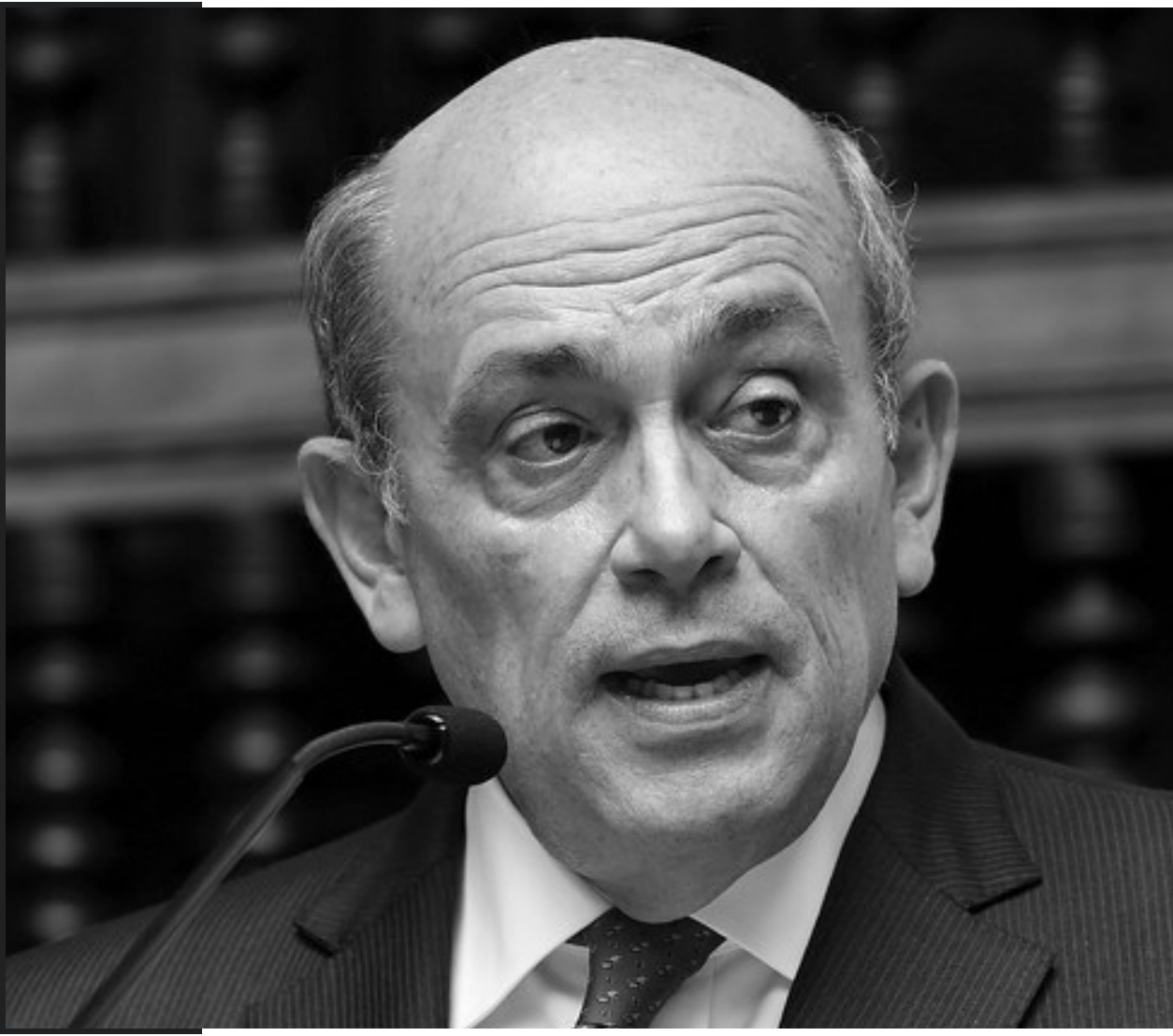
If elected, Espinosa would become the first woman to serve as OAS Secretary General.

PROPOSALS FOR THE OAS 2020-2025*

Espinosa said she wants to renew a body that, in her opinion, became polarized and overly focused on the Venezuelan conflict during the Almagro administration.

- Create a Code of Ethics for the General Secretariat, in order to prevent the Secretary General from using the position to promote his or her political ideology, from being vulnerable to the influence of governments or external agents, and from seeking re-election to the position.
 - Improve the capacity of the OAS to engage in dialogue with other regional integration mechanisms and international organizations.
 - Expand spaces for civil society participation in the hemisphere and bring the OAS closer to citizens.
 - Promote national policies and efforts to address the climate crisis, develop a platform for exchange of good practices and technologies for mitigation and adaptation, access to financing mechanisms and sources, transfer of low-carbon technologies and disaster resilience.
 - Addressing the problems of migration and refugees.
 - Assist Caribbean countries with the strengthening of networking efforts, both in the logistical and in the information and communications fields.
- Strengthen the functions of human rights bodies.

*OAS Permanent Council's special meeting, February 12, 2020



HUGO DE ZELA

Nominating country: PERU

Born in Peru, Hugo de Zela is a career diplomat. He studied Economics and Administrative Sciences, has a degree in International Relations and a PhD in Political Science.

He was Ambassador to Argentina (1998-2002), Brazil (2006-2010) and the United States (since 2019). In 2017 he was appointed Director General for the Americas at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in April 2018, as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

He also has extensive diplomatic experience in the field of the OAS. He was Permanent Representative of Peru (2010), Chief of Staff of the General Secretariat (1984 - 1994 and 2011-2015) and advisor in the Central American peace process. He also served as an observer for the international organization in the elections of Nicaragua, Guatemala, Haiti, and Paraguay, among others.

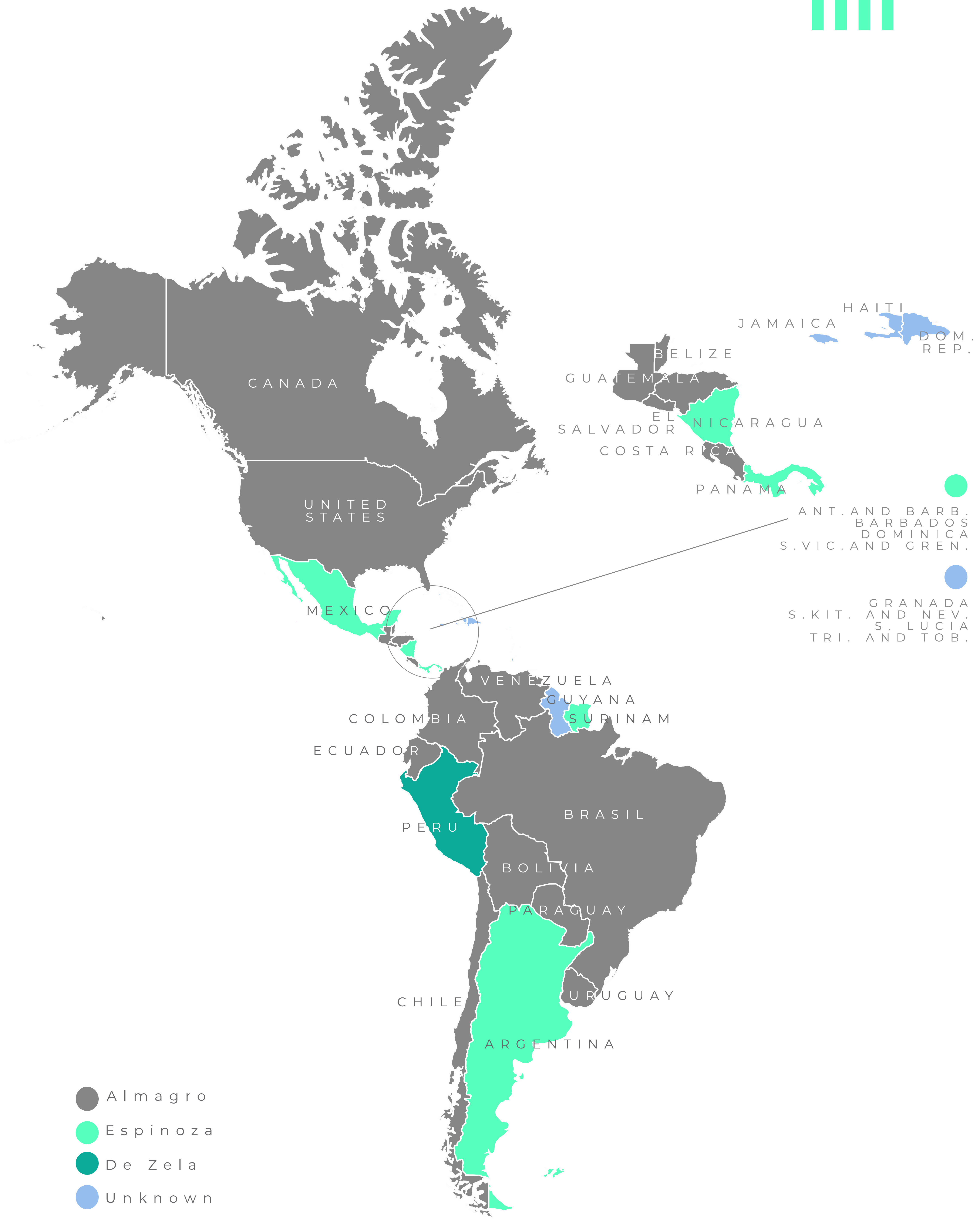
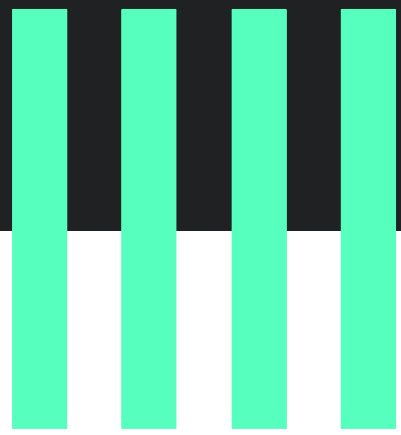
De Zela is presented as a "moderate third party to the other candidates, who hold polarizing political views". His candidacy was announced in April 2019 by Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra.

PROPOSALS FOR THE OAS 2020-2025*

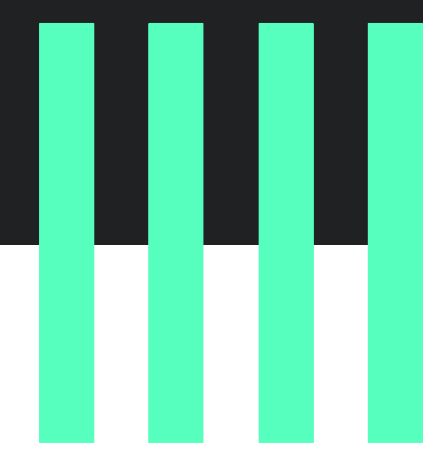
- Promote the implementation of an inter-American system against corruption.
- To submit a regional proposal to the United Nations Special General Assembly against Corruption, scheduled for April 2021.
- Addressing emerging criminal activities in the areas of cyber security and illicit financial transactions.
- Finance with the IDB the establishment of a unit of experts at the OAS to coordinate international cooperation and assistance to facilitate the immediate response to natural disasters.
- Re-launch the partnership with the European Union (EU) to promote development in the Americas.

*OAS Permanent Council's special meeting, February 12, 2020

MAPPING OF POLITICAL SUPPORT



- The **U.S. government** supports Almagro's re-election. In January, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo toured Central America and, in Jamaica, met with the foreign ministers of seven Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries in a bid to strengthen the country's influence.
 - Some of the 14 states that make up the Caribbean Community (Caricom), promoted by **Mexico**, indicate they support Espinosa, who took advantage of the latest summit of the Community of Latin American and **Caribbean States** (CELAC) held in January to advance in negotiations with these countries.
 - The Caribbean countries were broadly split both during the OAS' discussions over whether to apply the Democratic Charter against Venezuela and Nicaragua, and over whether to recognize the delegate appointed by the National Assembly of Venezuela.
 - The **Argentine** government supports Espinosa, and definitely opposes Almagro, so it is eager to avoid a scenario where opponents of Almagro splinter, clearing the path for his reelection. It has succeeded to this end in persuading **Panama** to also support Espinosa.
 - The governments of **Uruguay and Brazil** have already indicated their support for Almagro, but for the moment it seems unlikely this will serve to attract further backing.
 - Although **Chilean** President Sebastián Piñera met with the Peruvian candidate, he is likely to end up voting for Almagro, who backed him during the protests in Chile last year. In effect, the likelier it considers Espinosa to win the more Chile is expected to get behind Almagro, as opposed to De Zela.
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In a tight election every ballot counts, which is why Venezuela's very particular involvement in the OAS causes such controversy.

In 2017, the Venezuelan Executive branch unilaterally instigated the process of withdrawing from the OAS, without first gaining the approval of the country's opposition-dominated National Assembly (NA). The government of Nicolás Maduro denounced the body for flouting Article 1 of its Charter, concerning non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states. OAS rules dictate that any country that so challenges its Charter may withdraw from the organization two years hence.

However in February 2019, President of the NA Juan Guaidó, who is recognized as interim President of Venezuela by more than 50 countries, sent a letter to Secretary General Luis Almagro announcing his decision to halt the country's withdrawal. In April, the Permanent Council of the OAS voted to resolve this - 18 votes in favor, 9 against, 6 abstentions and one absentee - by recognizing the NA-appointed Gustavo Tarre Briceño as the "permanent representative of Venezuela...until new elections are held". That same month, the Venezuelan government went ahead and withdrew its representative from the OAS.

The tensions triggered by this at the OAS were manifest and clear for all to see at the 49th regular session of the General Assembly (Medellín, June 2019), where the presence of Tarre and his accreditation as OAS representative were opposed by several delegations, notably those of Uruguay, Mexico and some of the Caribbean countries.

In terms of the OAS elections, it cannot therefore be ruled out that in a scenario of parity among the candidates most likely to win, the legitimacy of the Venezuelan vote, which could turn decisive, will once again be a matter of discussion.

SECRETARIES GENERAL FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS



CÉSAR GAVIRIA TRUJILLO

1994-1999 / 1999-2004

Country of birth: Colombia

Nominated by: Colombia

- [Inter-American Democratic Charter](#) adoption as an instrument for the democracy promotion (2001).
- Arbitration in Venezuela between President Hugo Chávez and the opposition during the oil strike (2002-2003).



MIGUEL ÁNGEL RODRÍGUEZ

2004

Country of birth: Costa Rica

Nominated by: Costa Rica

- He resigned October 8, 2004 due to allegations of corruption during his administration as President of Costa Rica.



LUIGI R. EINAUDI

Interim / 2004-2005

Country of birth: EE.UU

- Head of the OAS until the new Secretary General was elected.
- Adoption of the [resolution to promote transparency](#) in the selection process of the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General (2004).



JÓSE MIGUEL INSULZA

2005-2010 / 2010-2015

Country of birth: Chile

Nominated by: Chile

- Repealed the resolution that expels Cuba from the OAS (2009).
- Application of the democratic charter against Honduras and suspension (2009).
- Mediation in the border conflict between Costa Rica and Nicaragua (2010).
- Readmission of Honduras to the OAS (2011).
- Promotion and approval of the [OAS Strategic Vision](#) (2012-2014).



LUIS ALMAGRO LEMES

2015-2020 / In charge

Country of birth: Uruguay

Nominated by: Uruguay

- Beginning of the procedure to implement the Democratic Charter against Venezuela for alteration of the constitutional order, rupture of the democratic order, and aggressions to the institutionality (2018-present).
 - Withdrawal of the Venezuelan Permanent Representation and recognition of the representative appointed by the Venezuelan legislature (2019).
 - Application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Defense (TIAR) to Venezuela (2019-present).
 - Report on the 2019 presidential elections in Bolivia that called into question the results due to irregularities and fraudulent data manipulation (2019) .
 - Initiation of the procedure for the application of the Democratic Charter to Nicaragua due to the interruption of the constitutional order (2018-present).
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Néstor Méndez

Country: BELIZE

On March 20, the OAS General Assembly will also elect the Assistant Secretary General (ASG), whose five-year term will begin on July 18, 2020.

The ASG is the Secretary of the Permanent Council. He acts as a delegate of the Secretary General in all those tasks that the latter entrusts to him and replaces him in case of temporary absence or impediment. The nationality of the ASG must not coincide with that of the Secretary General.

As of March 18, 2015, this position is held by Ambassador Néstor Méndez of Belize, who will again compete as the only candidate for the position of Assistant Secretary General for the next 5 years. Mendez is a career diplomat in the Belizean Foreign Service. He is a former Ambassador to the United States, Permanent Representative to the OAS, and Non-Resident High Commissioner to Canada.

In 2015, he ran pledging to focus on the following five areas: regional interconnectivity; economic growth, adaptation and mitigation of climate change and natural disasters; partnerships for development; and the needs of young people. For the 2020-2025 period, he additionally seeks to open up new spaces for dialogue between member states and the General Secretariat, strengthen the OAS as a focal point for liaison with other regional supranational organizations, and promote bilingual education in the Caribbean region.

TRANSPARENCY IN THE ELECTION: COMMITMENT O CIRCUMSTANTIAL AGENDA?



Following the resignation in October 2004 of the Secretary General Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, over allegations of corruption from his time at the Costa Rican government, the Permanent Council of the OAS approved a [resolution](#) to promote transparency in the selection process of the Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary General.

Through the resolution it was recommended that the General Assembly use certain criteria in selecting candidates. The following year, the Assembly approved a [directive](#) for candidates to make a public presentation and provide space for dialogue with civil society. Runners in the 2005 elections were also required to submit financial disclosures in a bid to promote transparency.

Since then, however, there have been no further substantial developments to demonstrate the long-term institutional commitment to make the voting mechanism and candidates more transparent. Currently, the agency's Access to Information policy does not include proactive publication of disclosures from candidates, though they are obtainable via an ATI request.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC VISION



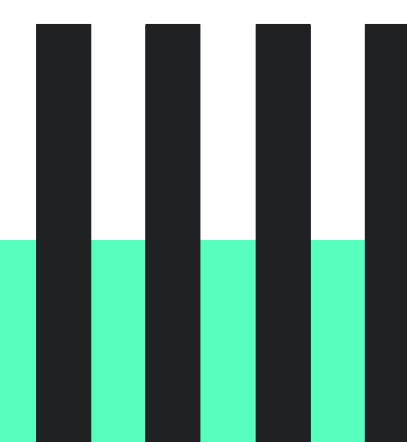
Between 2012 and 2014, the OAS embarked on a review to re-define its strategic vision, driven by then Secretary General José María Insulza. It was agreed to rethink the organization's priorities and focus on improving its efficiency in managing the hemispheric agenda of democracy, human rights, trade, migration and security. All this, in a context of myriad new and existing needs and amid spending cuts.

Since then, the development of the region's political and civic landscape has presented the OAS with a regional outlook that is more complex and fluid than ever and which, many feel, warrants further strategic revisions to tackle the following core themes:

- Threats to democratic institutions.
- Corruption and lack of State transparency.
- Proscription and persecution of political opponents and dissident voices.
- Persecution of social leaders and restrictions on civic space: freedom of peaceful protest, association, expression and citizen participation.
- Migration crises and violations of the rights of migrants.



Political and civic challenges map. Countries get darker as the number of challenges to democracy and civic space increases.



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