

Regional Leaders Snub Summit of the Americas as Activists Hold ‘People’s Summit’

In the lead up to the meeting, journalists and activists confronted figures such as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro.

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The Summit of the Americas is off to an inauspicious start after several of the region’s leaders followed through on their commitment to skip the event over US President Joe Biden’s decision to [exclude](#) Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.

The presidents of Mexico, Bolivia, Honduras, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, sent lower level delegations in their place as a show of protest over the politically driven decision by the United States to bar the aforementioned countries from the proceedings in Los Angeles. The leaders of Guatemala and El Salvador also opted not to attend, but for different reasons.

Both Chilean President Gabriel Boric, who is attending the summit, and Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretary Marcelo Ebrard, who is participating in place of President López Obrador, classified the White House decision as a “mistake”.

López Obrador has called for the Organization of American States (OAS) to be [cast aside](#) and be replaced with a new regional body. A rival regional organization, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), witnessed a revival under the leadership of Mexico, which held the pro-tempore presidency of the regional body before passing the torch to Argentina.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro called the US-hosted event a “total failure” and said that Argentine President Alberto Fernández would [represent](#) the voice of Venezuela at the summit.

Maduro went on to propose that Argentina, as the head of CELAC, which brings together all the states of the Western Hemisphere with the exception of the United States and Canada,

should organize a summit and invite Biden as a guest in a sort of role reversal that would underline a non-US-led regional integration.

Despite White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre confirming that the US continues to recognize Juan Guaidó as “interim president” the Venezuelan opposition leader did not receive an invite to the event, and instead received a call from Biden in what AP [called](#) “an attempt at damage control.”

Meanwhile, social media has been inundated with scenes of journalists and activists [confronting](#) figures such as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Organization of American States Secretary-General Luis Almagro over their [interference](#) in the domestic affairs of countries in the region.

A [@pslweb](#) activist disrupts OAS chief Luis Almagro at a Summit of the Americas event, calling out his role in the 2019 Bolivia coup.

The coup overturned the victory of the elected socialist president Evo Morales and inaugurated a right-wing reign of terror that left scores dead. pic.twitter.com/xiSeLP880Q

— BreakThrough News (@BTnewsroom) [June 8, 2022](#)

For their part, Activists and organizers have also gathered in Los Angeles in the People’s Summit of the Americas.

On its first day of activities, the counter-summit welcomed Bolivian Senate President Andrónico Rodríguez, who hails from the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party that was returned to power in the 2020 election after an OAS and US-backed coup ousted Evo Morales in 2019.

“This awakening of the peoples of South America, of Latin America, is beginning to radiate throughout the Americas and the entire world. It is the time of the peoples, not of the empire,” [said](#) Rodríguez.

Speakers at the People’s Summit of the Americas likewise centered their [criticism](#) of the US’ efforts to exclude Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.

“This is a summit of the people, an international meeting of friends, we are uniting in all corners of the world. The other Summit excluded the people of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua as well as our women, our Black and Indigenous people,” said Manolo De Los Santos from the People’s Forum, one of the event’s organizers.

The 9th Summit of the Americas was meant to be an opportunity for the US to show a renewed commitment to the region after former President Donald Trump snubbed the previous summit but has instead turned into a diplomatic debacle for the Biden administration.

Washington engaged in an intense lobbying effort to try to convince all leaders to attend, ultimately pressuring those who had publicly [called](#) for the US to invite every country in the Americas, such as Argentina’s Alberto Fernández and much of the CARICOM community, to

ultimately confirm their participation.

The discussion over attendance also largely overshadowed any substantive talk about the meeting. A press briefing ahead of the meeting with Juan González, National Security Council Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere and Brian A. Nichols, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs was dominated by discussion of invites.

The White House likewise faced criticism for the poor planning leading into the event. On Wednesday, Biden announced the “Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity” that was light on details and largely read as a rehash of previous foreign policy aims in the region. Despite the summit’s stated aim to bring together the Hemisphere’s leaders to discuss regional issues, the agenda appeared largely focused on the US’ priorities.

“It has no agenda, it has no theme, it has no decision points, it has nothing to link the problems and issues of interest to the peoples of the Americas to that meeting,” [said](#) Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro ahead of the gathering in Los Angeles.

US Vice-president Kamala Harris in particular has [faced](#) criticism over her handling of the immigration file, meant to be one of Washington’s priorities at this summit.

Harris was tasked over a year ago to lead the White House effort to address the root causes of migration but has failed to show any progress, announcing modest private sector commitments to invest in low-income countries in the hemisphere. These sorts of measures have been previously [criticized](#) by migrants rights activists for being insufficient as they largely respond to the needs of capital and not those of communities and countries with high emigration rates.

Notably, in addition to the snub by López Obrador and President Xiomara Castro of Honduras, the presidents of Guatemala and El Salvador also chose to skip the summit. With migrants from these three Central American countries making up a large portion of the asylum seekers who cross through Mexico hoping to reach the United States, any significant discussion on the issue of migration at the gathering is largely unrealistic.

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Featured image: Activists and organizers gathered at the People’s Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles to hear opening remarks from Bolivian Senate President Andrónico Rodríguez. (@PeoplesSummit22 / Twitter)

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