Latin America and the Caribbean is a region divided politically and economically, with one group of countries subscribing to global competitiveness and adherence to democratic principles, and another group characterized by authoritarian tendencies and increasing government control of the economy, media, and civil society. Across both camps, weak institutions generally prevent governments from providing adequate accountability for its use of public resources. High levels of public dissatisfaction serve as a reminder that challenges to democracy are constant and consolidated democracy is not guaranteed even in countries that seek to be competitive and adhere to democratic principles.

In this context, CIPE and its partners are bolstering democracy through programs that improve both the internal functioning and public image of private sector associations, foster the role of think tanks in the economic policy-making process, develop entrepreneurship and leadership skills among youth, and cultivate private sector-led solutions to corruption and citizen insecurity.
In Nicaragua, women businesses owners face many challenges in starting, maintaining, and scaling up their businesses due to cultural norms and economic policies. CIPE is working with the Red de Empresarias de Nicaragua (REN), also known as the Network of Nicaraguan Businesswomen, and a consortium of women entrepreneurs and business organizations to develop a National Businesswomen’s Agenda (NBWA) - a tool to identify policy priorities and present them to the relevant authorities. With the agenda in hand, REN and its allies are promoting policy and operational changes that reduce gender disparities in access to and control over resources and services. As a result of REN’s advocacy efforts, there is now a greater understanding among business leaders and policymakers of the challenges facing women entrepreneurs, helping to increase the interest of key actors such as banks, credit institutions, universities, and the government in collaborating with organizations such as REN to reduce barriers that women in business face. Having garnered significant media attention and positive reception from key stakeholders, women entrepreneurs in Nicaragua are beginning to recognize the benefits of organizing and cooperating to actively promote their interests. This project is increasing access to the policymaking process for women and contributing to a better business environment for women entrepreneurs. At the same time, it is leading to a greater awareness in Nicaragua about the importance of making women’s voices heard, a key element of strengthening democracy in the country.

From left: The Nicaraguan Businesswomen’s Agenda is presented during International Women’s Day in Managua; REN member and entrepreneur, Florita Ortiz, shows the ins-and-outs of her business, Delicias del Norte; More than 300 women entrepreneurs show support for the National Businesswomen’s Agenda on International Women’s Day.

In Nicaragua, advocacy efforts around the National Businesswomen’s Agenda have resulted in: the Government of Nicaragua acknowledging the need to revise the law for the promotion of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME); the creation of a vice minister position within the Ministry of Economy focused on promoting MSMEs; tax exemptions for certain products needed to make artisan bread, a business segment that is 60 percent women-owned; and the Central American Bank (BAC) organizing financial education workshops for REN members – a service it extended as a result of its involvement in the CIPE-supported National Businesswomen’s Agenda working groups.

In Argentina, CIPE teamed up with the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) to increase the level of concrete policy discussion in advance of the 2015 presidential
In Mexico, corruption has become so ingrained in everyday life that it is often incorrectly perceived as being synonymous with democracy, which represents a threat to Mexico’s democratic future. CIPE is working with the Center for the Study of Institutional Governance (CEGI) at IPADE Business School (Pan-American Institute for Top Business Management) to educate Mexican businesses about corruption risks and anti-corruption strategies. This approach to combating corruption in the Mexican business community centers on a series of focus groups and anti-corruption workshops for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. SMEs, which collectively constitute the majority of registered businesses in Mexico and employ roughly 80 percent of the workforce, are often less likely to understand their legal protections and more likely to be vulnerable to corruption risks. The focus group discussions hone in on the specific impacts corruption has on small- and medium-sized business owners. Anti-corruption workshops provide a forum to share international collective action efforts against corruption and work with the business owners to tailor strategies for combating corruption at the local level.

In Mexico, CIPE and CEGI’s comprehensive survey of more than 1,000 owners and managers of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) helped identify vulnerabilities and focal points for strengthening a culture of integrity in Mexico, such as:

- 70 percent believe corruption in the private sector had increased in the last five years
- A mere 17 percent of respondents were optimistic that corruption in the private sector would decrease in the next five years, despite recent anti-corruption reforms
- When asked to which government entity businesses should report an act of corruption, the most common response (27 percent) was “It is not reported”; highlighting both a cultural issue and a lack of confidence in government institutions.

Recommendations include tackling the gaps between laws and implementation, and developing stronger values and ethics among civil society, public and private sector, and the general public.
ARGENTINA
Developing Public Policies to Enhance Democracy and Economic Freedom
Fundación Libertad

BOLIVIA
A Platform for Democratic Dialogue

ECUADOR
Creating a Democratic Consensus for Development
Quito Chamber of Commerce

GUATEMALA
Fostering Institutional Reform IV
National Economic Research Center

MEXICO
The Private Sector’s Role in Citizen Security II

NICARAGUA
Raising the Voice of Women Entrepreneurs III
Red de Empresarias de Nicaragua

PERU
Fostering a Culture of Democracy and Free Enterprise
Instituto Invertir

VENEZUELA
Injecting Debate of Economic Reform into National Assembly Elections
Center for the Dissemination of Economic Knowledge

REGIONAL
Bolstering Reform Approaches to Democratic Challenges in the Region

Promoting Transparency and Corporate Governance in Mercosur Countries
Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth, Brazilian Institute for Corporate Governance, and Transparencia Venezuela

The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) strengthens democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform. CIPE is one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy and an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Since 1983, CIPE has worked with business leaders, policymakers, and civil society to build the institutions vital to a democratic society. CIPE’s key program areas include enterprise ecosystems, business advocacy, democratic governance, and anti-corruption & ethics.

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CIPE PROGRAMMING IN LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

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