

**The US Relationship with Mexico:
How the 2024 Elections will Affect Future Political Dynamics**

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Abstract

The United States and Mexico currently present themselves as nations who are unwavering allies on the international stage. This relationship—close as it may seem—hides a complex truth regarding the inner workings of both governments' policy towards each other. That is that the US-Mexico relationship has, is, and will continue to be defined through neglect and neocolonial power dynamics. As such, while the results of the upcoming 2024 presidential elections in both nations may lead to many changes foreign and domestically, my analysis anticipates that US-Mexico relations will remain the same.

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“Mexico Set for First Female President in 2024 Election” headlines an article by *The Guardian*. Both the ruling National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) and the opposing coalition, composed of the three most powerful parties in Mexico, had nominated female candidates for the 2024 Mexican presidential election. At the same time, the United States is in the midst of its own presidential election, one which is likely to determine much more than the fate of American citizens. With foreign affairs more prominent in the public conscience than ever, an American citizen with Mexican roots asks the question: How will these elections determine the future between my home nation of the United States and my ancestral nation of Mexico?

Since 2018, the United Mexican States has taken a dramatic turn from right-leaning, neoliberal politics to left-leaning, nationalistic policies. Bringing to mind the Pink Tide movement that brought many countries in Latin America their first female leaders and a shift towards the left politically, this paper explores how the United States will respond to this change in Mexico. Unfortunately, for as much literature as there has been about the existing relationship between the two neighboring countries, there is little speculation on where both countries will be in the near future. As such, this paper analyzes the relationship between the US and Mexico, and aims to determine the role neglect and neocolonialism have had historically. Additionally, this paper will compare this with how the US treated Brazil during similar events. The results of the 2024 presidential elections in both nations

will determine many foreign and domestic issues. Thus, the US-Mexico relationship will continue to be characterized by neglect and neocolonial power dynamics.

Literature Review

The Historical Relationship Between the US and Mexico

In speculating the future relations between the US and Mexico, an understanding of past relations is crucial. An analysis of US-Mexico relations by Latin American-oriented political scientists Harry Vanden and Gary Prevost demonstrates the US has utilized neocolonial power dynamics by supporting right-wing Mexican organizations, regardless of which party occupied the White House. Neocolonial power dynamics, in this case, refers to tactics the US used to undermine Mexican independence for the sake of American interests. Furthermore, as the 20th century continued and direct intervention became unpalatable, the US began to employ a policy of neglect whenever Mexico steered away from their control.

The 19th Century: Imperialism Leads to Benign Neglect

The US-Mexico relationship began shortly after the Mexican War of Independence. After Mexican dictator Antonio López de Santa Anna allowed American settlers to inhabit the territory of Texas, a war broke out that led to Texas' secession from Mexico in 1834. A few years later, that territory incorporated itself into the United States, giving the United States a new southern border with Mexico. However, under the influence of Manifest Destiny, which promoted American imperialism, the US declared war on Mexico. This was the first major diplomatic event between the two nations. The Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848 would result in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which forced Mexico to cede several of its

northwestern territories to the US (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). Already, a precedent is being established here, as the US, through adherence to an imperialist foreign policy, undertook a war to secure its expansionist desire. Though Mexico was never directly colonized through this action, the event established the neocolonial power dynamic that the two countries share today.

At this point in time, there was little evidence that the US had any interest in the management of Mexico itself. Rather, due to frayed relations after the Mexican-American War, and the increasing political polarization occurring in both countries domestically, a policy described by political science professor Britta Crandall of Johns Hopkins University as “benign neglect” came to define the relationship (Crandall, 2009). This policy refers to the idea that, unless two nations have mutually agreed upon priorities, their respective governments will not associate closely (Crandall, 2009). As a result, when Mexico’s civil war erupted between conservatives and liberals in the 1850s, which eventually spiraled into a French invasion, the US declared itself as neutral (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). The relationship between the US and Mexico at the turn of the 19th century morphed from an imperialistic relationship, to one where conscientious neglect became commonplace.

The 20th Century: Right-Wing Favoritism as a Neocolonial Tool

The turn of the 20th century led to a dramatic shift in the relationship between the United States and Mexico. The end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century was characterized by the rise of the conservative dictator Porfirio Díaz in Mexico, who used his power to consolidate the Mexican state and integrate it with the world economy (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). Under Díaz, generous concessions were given to US and European investors in the infrastructure,

mining, agriculture, and oil industries (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). This made Mexico wealthy, but the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the men of his regime and the foreign investors who backed it. The result was public outrage and revolution, which undermined the regime. This led to the more liberal Francisco Madero toppling the Diaz government and becoming president. In response to this loss, the United States entrusted US Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson with backing the former conservative regime's General Victoriano Huerta in his coup to overthrow Madero in 1913 (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). The result was a return to conservative politics, which would continue even through the formation of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) that replaced Huerta's government in 1929. This was the first major example of the United States openly favoring a right-wing regime in Mexico enough to topple an existing government, thus infringing on the independence of the country in a neocolonialist manner.

However, in 1934, a member of the PNR known as Lázaro Cárdenas won the presidency. His administration betrayed his party's platform by strongly opposing the conservative pro-American and free trade policy that had dominated Mexico. In particular, he opposed the unbridled power that foreign-owned oil companies wielded in the nation (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry in 1938, removing the influence of foreign investors, and antagonizing Washington D.C. (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). As opposed to what occurred during the Mexican Revolution, the US did not directly overthrow the regime. Instead, US diplomats and investors worked with the more conservative members of the PNR to ensure that future presidents would side with US interests (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). Over time, this shift from left to right on the political spectrum led to the PNR changing its name to the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM), and finally, the Institutional

Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1948. The PRI maintained power for the rest of the 20th century as a center-right political party. Once again, we see favoritism being shown to the right-wing side of the political spectrum due to their acceptance of American goals and priorities.

But the PRI also offered the US political stability which translated to longevity. As the party became a bureaucratic authoritarian regime that was friendly to US interests, the superpower found no reason to support the removal of them in exchange for a party like the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Established connections and the ease at which the PRI accepted American doctrine ultimately decided their support, rather than domestic conservative ideology. As the Cold War began, this acceptance of American doctrine further strengthened the relationship between the two governments.

The 1960s saw Mexican students and young adults rally for rights and freedoms that had never before been seen as legitimate by their government. This culminated in a massive demonstration that occurred on October 2nd, 1968, in the city of Tlatelolco, which a paper published by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) described as “politically representing the most important social and cultural change of the mid-century” (Horcasitas, 2014). But the PRI was prepared for this situation. As a rise in leftist sentiment threatened the control that both the United States and the PRI sought to exert in Mexico, the two governments developed a mutual priority: destroying the movement.

Ironically, the left-wing administration of Lyndon B. Johnson (1962-1968) oversaw the CIA working with the Mexican government to undermine these leftist movements. Under a joint operation known as “Litempo”, both governments trained and organized violent student groups, known as “porros,” to infiltrate Mexican college campuses and suppress left-leaning or

communist groups through harassment and hazing (Soltero, 2021). These actions led to a tense political culture where said groups met in secret until the day of the 1968 student-led demonstration. That day, the Mexican government, in conjunction with the CIA, orchestrated a massacre that killed around 3,000 of these student protesters (NPR, 2008), kickstarting Mexico's Dirty War. From 1968 to 1982, more than 1,200 ideologically left-wing people disappeared without a trace (Minetti, 2017). This war stretched beyond party lines in the United States, for although the massacre of 1968 was carried out during Johnson's left-leaning administration, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford's right-wing administrations further continued to support the authoritarian actions taken by the PRI.

Figure 1

Richard Nixon meets with President Diaz Ordaz, 1968



Note. Taken from <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2014/08/president-nixon-journeys-mexico/>.

Overall, the Mexican Dirty War from 1968 to 1982 revealed that in spite of the changing ideologies in the US, the policy of supporting Mexico's government on domestic issues remained the same. The political party in power within the US did not affect the relationship with Mexico.

When the Dirty War period ended, a new issue emerged. As the United States contended with domestic issues and Mexico began to face economic hardship, attention to bilateral cooperation between the two nations lapsed. Like other Latin American countries such as Brazil, Mexico used an economic model known as Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) from the end of World War II to the 1980s (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). This system called for internal economic development that included replacing foreign imports with domestic products by limiting the amount of trade possible with the US (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). The US was not a fan of this policy, but as the Cold War offered a mutual priority in the fight against communism, cooperation remained. Yet a slowdown of the Mexican economy inevitably arrived and the beginning of the 1980s saw Mexico in a dangerous situation. Some in the PRI acknowledged this problem, and sought the right-wing Reagan administration for guidance.

The answer? Neoliberalism, which called for abandoning the ISI model and the privatization of various industries. With the backing of US-educated technocrats, the PRI eventually elected Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988, and he brought neoliberalism to Mexico. Suddenly, cooperation between the private sectors of the US and Mexico spiked and both governments eventually signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992 (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). Although foreign enterprise grew, the rapid loss of jobs to American businesses led to a collapse of the Mexican economy which fueled one of the

largest migration waves the nation ever saw (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). The result of this immigration wave established the roots of the most recent relationship between the US and Mexico.

The Modern Relationship Between the US and Mexico

In 1971, the Nixon administration began a domestic campaign known as the War on Drugs, which initially focused on policing and controlling the drug trade within the US. However, as the waves of immigration from Mexico to the US began to take shape in the 1990s, the War on Drugs became a lightning rod in Washington D.C.. Under the center-left Clinton, the conservative Bush, the liberal Obama, and the far-right Trump administrations, the US priority in the relationship with Mexico was the reduction of immigration and the destruction of the drug cartels.

Clinton's administration saw the first major actions in handling these issues with the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, after undocumented immigration became a talking point in the American political mainstream (Office of Inspector General, n.d.). The operation called for significant militarization of the Border Patrol Agency and a change in strategy to ensure that undocumented immigrants crossed through wilderness to reach the US, making capture or death for the migrants more likely (Davies, 2019; Office of Inspector General, n.d.). The PRI's reaction to this violent border policy was muted. Though drug-related crimes began to grow exponentially, the PRI was more preoccupied with pursuing further trade relations with the US under the Gortari administration. These relations, though they received a boost through the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, ultimately collapsed after a sharp

devaluation of the Mexican Peso. This resulted in the US bailing Mexico out of a potential financial crisis through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Vanden & Prevost, 2012). This action soured the US Congress' attitude towards any immediate pursuits by the PRI for increased trade relations, and due to the latter's lack of appetite for cooperation in border patrol, political cleavages between the two nations grew. As such, the 20th century ended with Mexico suffering from neglect by the United States.

2000-2011: Changes and Promises Eroded by Neglect

The 21st century, though, saw a dramatic change in Mexican politics. For the first time in 70 years, the PRI lost control of the government. In 2000, a more right-wing rival party of the PRI known as the National Action Party (PAN) managed to get their candidate, Vicente Fox, into the presidency. Given that the United States has historically supported right-wing governments and George Bush had just entered office, both administrations projected hope that US-Mexico relations would improve.

An ABC article on February 16, 2001, detailed what Bush intended to discuss with Fox during his trip to Mexico, stating, "Among some of the hot topics that Bush and Fox are going to discuss include expanding trade throughout the Americas, immigration issues...and how to fight drug trafficking and other types of organized crime on both sides of the border. Migration being a hot-button issue." (ABC, 2001). As talks continued, though there were certain disagreements between the two leaders regarding the specifics of immigration policy, such as Fox suggesting amnesty for existing undocumented immigrants, and Bush actively supporting

Operation Gatekeeper, analysts saw the meeting between the two leaders as a step towards closer relations (ABC, 2001).

However, the September 11 attacks of 2001 crushed this step and resurrected the policy of benign neglect. Operation Gatekeeper continued, but the 9/11 attacks led to the Bush administration pausing cooperation with the Mexican government to combat the War on Terror in the Middle East. In fact, though the two leaders still met on occasion to espouse cooperative rhetoric, US relations with Mexico worsened. The War on Terror saw the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) further militarize the Border Patrol Agency and introduce both high-tech surveillance technologies and physical infrastructure projects such as increased fencing (Correa, 2013). Mexico, meanwhile, did not have the same political pressure as the United States to further strengthen the border on their side. President Fox focused more on trying to cultivate free trade with private American enterprises and increasing exports to the US. But as Washington D.C. expanded its free trade agreements with nations like China, this facet of US-Mexico policy also weakened. Once again, a lack of mutual priorities and policy cleavages led to the return of benign neglect.

In 2006, Mexico elected Felipe Calderón and the leader immediately took an anti-crime stance (Perret, 2023). An international review by the Red Cross states, “Shortly after Calderón ‘declared war’ on organized crime, the United States put its support squarely behind the administration, supporting the militarization of the fight against drug traffickers which dramatically escalated the situation of violence” (Perret, 2023). Once more, drug and border issues emerged as the primary arena for American and Mexican cooperation. But Mexico was also facing a multitude of crises at home that went beyond the drug trade. The largest of these

was the economic recession that began in the US in 2008 which resulted in Mexico's economy once again being in peril, leading to even more immigration to the United States, and with it a rise in cartel activity.

After 2008, the liberal Obama administration took charge and preached greater cooperation, eliciting hope from scholars and citizens alike that relations would improve. Though the US had previously been neglectful of Latin American foreign policy, with Mexico's significance coming from their cooperation on border and drug issues, the election of Barack Obama signaled a positive change to many, including Director Andrew Selee of the Mexico Institute in the Woodrow Wilson International Center. As Selee writes in the journal *Nueva Sociedad*, "The election of someone with such a strikingly different worldview than his predecessor sends a signal about the ability of U.S. democracy to correct course after a period of estrangement with the international community" (Selee, 2009). The Obama administration promised vast immigration reform and created programs like the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which gave certain young undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship (ADL, 2017). Nonetheless, Operation Gatekeeper and the militarization of the Border Patrol Agency still continued.

2012-2020: Trading Neglect for Greater Neo-Colonial Control

The year 2012 saw Enrique Peña Nieto win the presidency, bringing the once disgraced PRI back into power. In terms of rhetoric, and to a certain degree, policy, the relationship between the two nations seemingly improved. Various trips and state dinners, including one in 2016, had Obama and Peña Nieto meet and affirm cooperation on various fronts beyond just

border security. Economically, they were both in agreement on the benefits of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which would expand trade with Asia. On education, they found common ground, as Peña Nieto promised to provide scholarships to young mothers in conjunction with the American Let Girls Learn initiative (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016).

There was a more insidious issue behind this front of cooperative rhetoric which demonstrated how little control Mexico had over this relationship during this time. In 2013, National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the US had been spying on Peña Nieto through the interception of his emails and phone communications ever since he became a presidential candidate (Navarro, 2013). Similar revelations were made about several countries in Latin America, including Brazil, thus demonstrating that the American government unilaterally decided to infringe on the rights of privacy in this region. Unlike Brazil's response, where they demanded repercussions for this infraction, Mexico's response was muted on the leadership level. Peña Nieto made no comment on this transgression of trust by the US and instead had the secretary of foreign affairs give a statement condemning any spying on Mexican citizens, not specifically referring to the United States (Navarro, 2013).

Adding insult to injury, though changes in rhetoric indicated a new relationship was coming, long-term policy remained stagnant. The US still sought stringent border security and, under American pressure, Mexico implemented "Frontera Sur" in 2014. This was a comprehensive strategy to increase security on the southern Mexican border (Swanson et al., 2015), essentially creating a Mexican version of Operation Gatekeeper. By having Peña Nieto do this, the US outsourced its priorities of keeping migrants and cartels out of American soil.

Ultimately, though a spirit of cooperation was espoused by the Obama and Peña Nieto administrations, the US still used neocolonial power dynamics to infringe on the sovereignty of Mexico, pressuring them into following the American interests of border militarization and drug-busting. Because Peña Nieto gave in to US pressure for greater cooperation on border security, the relationship between the nations was not defined by neglect, but instead by invasive, neocolonial behavior.

This new neocolonialist dynamic would only increase as Donald Trump rose to power. The 2016 American election had the populist candidate espouse inflammatory rhetoric that directly contradicted everything the Obama administration supported. In particular, where the Obama administration promoted their relationship with Mexico as special and cooperative, Trump bashed the country as a gateway for “cartels and rapists”. He portrayed Mexican and other Latin American migrants entering the US as criminals who ruined American lives and stole American jobs. His rhetoric on foreign policy? “America First”. He made clear his intention to neglect relations with all countries that did not conform with his administration's goals and priorities. And what was his priority with Mexico? Rhetoric-wise, he wanted the nation to pay for the creation of a new and expansive border wall. This eventually became a policy goal as his ultra-right-wing administration entered office in 2017. President Peña Nieto’s response is shown in the image below:

Figure 2

Statement made by President Peña Nieto on Twitter (or X)



Enrique Peña Nieto ✓
@EPN



President @realDonaldTrump: NO. Mexico will NEVER pay for a wall. Not now, not ever.

Sincerely, Mexico (all of us).

8:25 PM · May 29, 2018

Note. Taken from <https://twitter.com/EPN/status/1001635649550663680>.

For the first two years of the Trump administration, this image defined the relationship between the US and Mexico. Trump insisted on the border wall being funded, initially by Mexico, which resulted in Peña Nieto postponing visits to Washington D.C. and vehemently denying any cooperation from Mexico in pursuing such actions (Chandran, 2018). This resulted in a return of the policy of neglect. Although Peña Nieto did work to renegotiate NAFTA and Frontera Sur continued to reroute migrants through more dangerous regions of Mexico, the relationship between the two nations remained distant.

Meanwhile in Mexico, the 2018 election led to a dramatic change in politics. Corruption scandals, a timid response to American interference, and increased inter-party relations between the PRI, PAN, and PRD through the 2012 Pact for Mexico policy left Peña Nieto's administration as one of the most hated in Mexican history, according to Castro Cornejo Rodrigo's essay on the 2018 election (Rodrigo, 2023). Capitalizing on the frustrations Mexican citizens felt, returning presidential candidate Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) antagonized the three main political parties and pitted them against his left-wing party

MORENA in a process known as affective polarization (Rodrigo, 2023). Winning the election, AMLO became the first left-wing president Mexico has had since Lázaro Cárdenas. But did this dramatically damage US-Mexico relations as it did when Cárdenas was in power?

Though the Mexican politician was critical of Trump's foreign policy on the campaign trail, the two leaders did agree on certain issues. Both Trump and AMLO were in firm agreement that NAFTA was a disaster for both nations. Although Peña Nieto renegotiated NAFTA in 2018, it was AMLO who oversaw the new trade deal's implementation. In addition to this, during a ceremony for the beginning of the new deal, now known as the USMCA, AMLO was quoted as saying to Trump, "During my time in office as president of Mexico, instead of insults against me, and more importantly my country, we have received from you understanding and respect" (Beck et al., 2021). Along with the surprisingly positive rhetoric AMLO gave at that time, Mexican professor of International Studies Humberto Beck and his fellow authors write in "The Immovable AMLO", "Though AMLO always stressed his ideological differences with Trump, some of his supporters have come around to a more favorable view of Trump, who they see, like their president, as a nationalist leader treated unfairly by failing institutions. AMLO's decision not to recognize Biden as president-elect until mid-December heightened these tensions" (Beck et al., 2021). It should be noted that Beck and his fellow co-writers are critics of AMLO, which may affect the picture they paint of the leader, but doesn't change the fact that AMLO has done these actions.

Though this may give the illusion that both leaders were strongly cooperative with each other, the situation was more complicated. As AMLO's administration adhered to the left-wing ideology once espoused by Lázaro Cárdenas, his regime also focused much more on

domestic production and the reliance on nationalized industry. For example, rather than import oil or other forms of fossil fuels from the US, the administration focused more on investing in the state-owned oil company Pemex, and increasing energy production in Mexican refineries (Beck et al., 2021).

In addition, tensions flared as AMLO attempted to enact a campaign promise of rolling back the Mexican immigration policy supported by the US. After a group of Americans were killed in Mexico due to cartel activity, the Trump administration pressured AMLO's government, through the threat of raising tariffs by five percent, to further militarize their border (Beck et al., 2020). The threat was so significant that it dismantled AMLO's original drug cartel policy of "Abrazos no Balasos" (Hugs not Bullets), an example of American interference in Mexico's domestic agenda. The US further coerced Mexico into abandoning its agendas when Trump once again used the threat of tariffs to force AMLO into accepting his Remain in Mexico policy (Beck et al., 2020). Therefore, under Trump and AMLO, the US and Mexico did not have a neglectful relationship, but rather one of forced cooperation.

The 2010s had the US use neocolonialist tendencies to once again subvert aspects of Mexico's autonomy. Obama's administration spied on and pressured Mexico to take over the task of limiting immigration, a prime US interest. Trump's administration continued and expanded on this pressure through threats to Mexico's economy, all the while ignoring cooperation with Mexico on other issues. Ultimately, this shows that while both administrations had wildly different rhetorical stances on their neighbor, policy-wise they shared many similarities.

The Biden and AMLO administrations: Mexico turns Neglect onto the US

Reaching the current administration, 2020 saw the left-wing Joseph R. Biden become the new US president. Although Mexico and the US now had left-wing governments in power, the relationship between the two governments did not improve significantly. Biden's administration attempted to roll back the aggressive policies and rhetoric that Donald Trump espoused as it related to Mexico. AMLO's reaction was ambivalent, according to US Migration Policy specialist Monica Vereá of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Vereá, 2022). If anything, Biden's rise to office seemingly frustrated AMLO, who refused to acknowledge the leader's election victory until after the American Electoral College certified it (Beck et al., 2021). The most positive communication between the two administrations came during their occasional meetings, such as a meeting in 2021 where both leaders affirmed their intention to negotiate the distribution of Coronavirus (COVID) vaccines in Mexico, (Al Jazeera, 2021) and a 2023 meeting affirming cooperation on the migration crisis (Briefing Room, 2023). However, even issues that both leaders affirmed work towards were not resolved. In regards to vaccines during the COVID pandemic, although AMLO sought a deal with the US in regards to buying and distributing vaccines in Mexico, the Biden administration's response was, "The President has made clear that he is focused on ensuring that vaccines are accessible to every American, that is our focus" (Al Jazeera, 2021).

In regards to the migration crisis, even more issues arose. The Biden administration spent its first year in office attempting to end various Trump-era policies, including Trump's Zero Tolerance Policy, which separated children from parents at the border, portions of the Remain in Mexico policy, and many others (Vereá, 2022). In large part due to the conservative judicial

system Trump created, most efforts to end these policies failed, with family separation still occurring in 2022 according to the National Immigration Justice Center (NIJC, 2022). In response to the loosening stance Biden took on immigration, migration further increased, with most immigrants now coming from Central America. Though AMLO and Biden's administrations ultimately agreed to address the root causes of this migration through a diplomatic policy called Sowing Opportunities (Verea, 2022), Biden still pressured AMLO into further militarizing the Mexican border. For example, in exchange for providing the vaccines Mexico sought from the US, the superpower required their neighbor to close their southern border for non-essential travel and station troops in the region (Verea, 2022). As AMLO had increasingly relied on Mexico's military to maintain security throughout the country due to police corruption, this led to increased insecurity throughout the nation. Though Biden attempted to steer clear from the Trump-era coercion the US used, internal pressures from conservative forces and the fear of increasing migration weakening his party's electoral success led to him also coercing Mexico into doing as the US desired.

AMLO, though ultimately complying with US border demands, did still take harder stances against US involvement in Mexico, particularly in the private sector. In August of 2022, the administration sued US gun manufacturers for contributing to violence and instability in Mexico, arguing that said manufacturers deliberately made weapons that were attractive to criminal groups in the country (Beck & Iber, 2022). In addition, AMLO has actively rolled back the energy and economic reforms created by his predecessors in an attempt to return Mexico to the ISI model, according to David A. Gantz of the Southwest Journal of International Law (Gantz, 2022). This model involved divesting from American businesses in the nation, which

increased tensions with the US in 2022. The Biden administration then accused Mexico of breaching the USMCA agreement that AMLO ratified (Gantz, 2022). Finally, we arrive at another major point of contention between both administrations: Mexico not following the American lead on foreign affairs. AMLO's government, supposedly in an attempt to not invite foreign interference within its own borders, has refused to take sides in a variety of international issues (Verea, 2022). An example is the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, where, while the US called on the world to sanction Russia, Mexico refused to do so (Verea, 2022). Another example is how Mexico refused to attend the 2022 Summit of the Americas due to the Biden administration refusing to invite the leaders of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. As AMLO mentioned in a press conference, "There cannot be a summit if all countries are not invited, or there can be one but that is to continue with all politics of interventionism" (Hooper, 2022). However, as the Biden administration has turned its attention towards other diplomatic and domestic issues, this particular assertion of Mexican independence has yet to lead to policy-level repercussions.

Overall, the current US-Mexico relationship revolves around failed American efforts to scale the neocolonial power dynamic to what it was before the Trump era. Mexico, meanwhile, has taken a page out of the US playbook and has now turned to neglecting American-led foreign policy in an effort to assert Mexican sovereignty overlooked by the US across history.

2024 Presidential Elections: US and Mexico Frontrunners

As of the writing of this paper, November 20th of 2023, the 2024 presidential elections in the US and Mexico are less than a year away. The US presidential election will be on

November 5, 2024, and, as of this paper's writing, will most likely be a contest between the left-wing Joe Biden and the right-wing Donald Trump. According to the most recent data, both presidential candidates are fairly close in terms of overall support, with most polls showing Trump in the lead by one or two points.

The Mexican presidential election, on the other hand, will be on June 2, 2024, and will pit the ruling MORENA party's candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum, with the opposing coalition's candidate, Xóchitl Gálvez. Unlike the US presidential election, the support left-wing Sheinbaum has over her competition is very large, with Gálvez trailing her by 30 points. Beyond this lopsided support, perhaps the biggest difference between these candidates, and their American counterparts, is that Claudia Sheinbaum and Xóchitl Gálvez have never been president. So who are they and what do they stand for?

Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, a former scientist and Head of Government of Mexico City, is Lopez Obrador's chosen successor for his ruling party, MORENA. Following in the outgoing leader's footsteps, she subscribes to all of the left-leaning and nationalist rhetoric that Obrador believes in, and has even been seen mimicking AMLO's way of speaking, ultimately portraying herself as a continuation of the populist leader (McDonell, 2023). Xóchitl Gálvez is a computer engineer, businesswoman, and PAN senator (who later switched her membership to the PRD) of indigenous descent who, after winning the backing of a coalition of the three institutional political parties (PRI, PAN, PRD), stands as the most popular opposition candidate to Sheinbaum (Wright, 2023). Though little has come out regarding policies she seeks to implement, the senator has placed herself as a centrist populist who sides economically with the right-wing PAN, but socially with the left-wing PRD, even serving both parties while in office (Breña, 2023).

With the PRI ultimately siding with her when she became the official candidate for the coalition *Va por México*, Gálvez has become the beacon for the institutional parties that have controlled Mexico before AMLO (Wright, 2023).

Brazil: A Look Into What Awaits Mexico

As was true with the historical US-Mexico relationship, Brazil's interactions with America have also been defined by the whims of Washington D.C. Where Mexico is currently on track to elect its first female leader, Brazil already has. In fact, Brazil has given insight into one of the potential futures for Mexico, that of a left-wing female leader succeeding a populist male leader of the same party for the presidency. Whereas in Mexico this could occur through the election of Sheinbaum, who would replace AMLO, Brazil has gone through this scenario with Dilma Rousseff succeeding Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2010. So how did the US react to the shift in leadership Brazil had?

Throughout Brazil's existence as a state, the United States has consistently flipped between supporting Brazil and neglecting it, depending on whether mutual priorities existed (Crandall, 2009). During the Obama administration, which was in power when Lula's administration was replaced by Rousseff's, the US was focused on the War on Terror. Unlike with Mexico, the US did not share a border with Brazil. As such, the need to directly coerce the nation into participating in US initiatives did not exist, though there was still hope for cooperation. Brazil, however, did not cooperate (Munhoz & Teixeira, 2013). In turn, economic foreign policy stalled between America and Brazil and Rousseff's administration turned its attention towards its fellow South American countries. Finding solidarity with one another, trade shifted from being primarily international to regional (Strassel, 2010). Thus, US neglect

led Brazil to turn its attention away from American support, choosing to solve its issues through non-US means.

Relations further took a hit in September of 2013, when Edward Snowden revealed the United States had been using a massive espionage network to spy on the Brazilian president's administration and her interactions with Petrobras, the state-owned oil company which parallels Pemex in Mexico (Hakim, 2014). Like with Mexico, this demonstrates how the US chose to neglect Brazil on the level of cooperation but was not beneath spying on them in secret, once again indicating the lack of respect Washington D.C. had for Latin American countries.

What does this tell us about the US relationship with Brazil after the election of Dilma Rousseff? Nothing changed. If anything, the relationship only worsened, as although Dilma Rousseff and Barack Obama were two left-leaning leaders, the US continued to demean Brazil as an inferior power that could have its rights infringed upon with little consequence.

Unlike Mexico, where immigration and drug-busting were such a powerful motivator for the US to seek (even if forced) cooperation, Brazil was not a power that the US had a vested interest in. Even without a vested interest, the US still chose to adhere to a neocolonial power dynamic with Brazil at a time when their government, like AMLO's, had little interest in cooperation. This relationship proves regardless of who's in power, what a leader desires, or how important a country is in Latin America, the US will use neocolonial power strategies to assert its dominance. Whether friendly or negligent of the US, this dynamic will not change.

The Future Relationship Between the US and Mexico

With this historical context in mind, what is the future relationship between the US and Mexico? As mentioned before, the front-running candidates for the US are Joe Biden and

Donald Trump, and for Mexico are Claudia Sheinbaum and Xóchitl Gálvez. This paper analyzed how Joe Biden and Donald Trump have interacted with Mexican political parties. Biden was vice president during Obama's tenure which dealt with Peña Nieto's PRI administration, and he's currently overseeing the end of AMLO's MORENA reign. Trump, meanwhile, has been president during both of these Mexican administrations. As such, it is predictable how each of these US leaders will interact with their Mexican counterparts. The only question is how Mexico's prospective leaders will react to them.

Sheinbaum currently presents herself as being no different from AMLO, but Gálvez has only identified herself as a centrist who borrows from aspects of her coalition. Unless Gálvez dramatically breaks politically from the institutional coalition she is representing, her relationship with the US administration in power will mirror that of Peña Nieto's. With that said, it is important to analyze the different combinations of post-election administrations that could occur and the relationships they would have with each other. The following figure gives a brief summary of each relation.

Figure 3*The Potential US-Mexico Relationship After the 2024 Elections*

	Biden	Trump
Sheinbaum	Neglect, pressured cooperation on immigration (Biden/AMLO style)	Neglect, coerced cooperation on immigration (Trump/AMLO style but worse)
Gálvez	Cooperation on threat of Neglect (Obama/Peña Nieto style)	Neglect, antagonistic rhetoric (Trump/Peña Nieto style but worse)

Note: Created by author, Gabriel Preciado.

Biden and Sheinbaum: Continuing Biden/AMLO

In a situation where Biden wins re-election and Sheinbaum is elected, the current relationship between the US and Mexico would remain. As Sheinbaum styles herself as a continuation of AMLO, she is likely to continue Mexico's path of neglecting the US's foreign policy directives. However, the Pew Research Center shows that nearly half of Americans find undocumented immigration to still be a major issue (Dunn, 2023). Thus, it is likely that the Biden administration will continue to pressure Mexico into accepting border/migration

responsibilities. So far, this pressure has not reached the level it has under the Trump administration, which threatened damage to the Mexican economy if their demands were not met. Yet, as already demonstrated, Biden's administration is not averse to trading essential goods to Mexico in exchange for actions on immigration. So, although Mexico may continue to neglect US foreign policy directives, coercion is likely to still occur to force action on issues Biden finds most useful.

Biden/Gálvez: A Return to Obama/Peña Nieto

In the event that Gálvez wins, however, we may see a more amicable relationship appear on the level of rhetoric. Although precedent has been established proving that two leaders sharing political ideology doesn't guarantee an attentive or equal relationship, Gálvez is representing a return to the status quo that AMLO interrupted, putting herself in a position to seek the re-establishment of old American ties. This is exactly what Biden has been seeking with AMLO, yet failing to achieve. Under a Gálvez administration, it is thus likely that Mexico will side with the US more often in foreign policy and will not snub the nation for failing to include all Latin American countries in leadership summits. This would lead to more meetings between the two leaders where cooperation on various economic and social issues could be exchanged, similar to Obama and Peña Nieto. Of course, action will still be demanded on border and immigration issues, and it is unlikely that Gálvez will disobey American pressures. After all, as the Bush and Fox administrations showed, inaction on US interests leaves Mexico exposed to potential neglect, though perhaps Biden would prefer to pressure Gálvez the same way his office pressures AMLO.

Trump/Sheinbaum: Trump/AMLO with more coercion

Given the continuation that Sheinbaum plans to be of AMLO's government, it is likely that a Trump victory would see a return to the heavily coercive policy the US had under the right-wing leader. In fact, perhaps the relationship will be even worse. AMLO and Trump, for as much as they may seemingly attempt to differ on the ideological spectrum, managed a form of limited respect for one another given their similar circumstances. Both leaders rose through populist rhetoric that employed a strategy of affective polarization, which is defined as the fear and loathing between two opposing political parties (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). This, combined with the similar nationalistic policies both leaders employed, created a common ground the two could use for communication. Sheinbaum would not have this background in entering politics, and though she may stand as a follower of AMLO's vision, it is unlikely that she will be as positive with Trump as her predecessor. Given that Trump has also demonstrated misogynistic tendencies, which involve denigrating women in power (Tumulty, 2015), it is likely that Trump will lean more on the neocolonial power dynamic he strengthened during AMLO's tenure to try and force Mexico's aid in border and drug cartel issues. On all other fronts, he may neglect Mexico, which Sheinbaum may see as beneficial on the level of foreign policy.

Trump/Gálvez: Worse than Trump/Peña Nieto?

The Trump administration's relationship with PRI was short-lived and early in their four-year tenure, which may explain why Trump's later forms of coercion were not as prominent during the administration of Peña Nieto. However, with the power dynamic established during the Trump/AMLO administrations having successfully led to Mexico obeying American border

interests, this will be Trump's strategy. As is true for a Trump/Sheinbaum future, a Trump/Gálvez relationship would lack the little tolerance built between the US and Mexico under AMLO's leadership. Furthermore, Gálvez's status as a woman may further fuel Trump's desire for intense coercion through the use of economic threats. Overall, this relationship may not differ too much from the potential Trump/Sheinbaum relationship, with the exception that perhaps Gálvez's attempts at rebuilding foreign relations may open the door for further American intervention in Mexican affairs.

Conclusion

So what is the state of US-Mexico relations? Historically, it has been characterized by neocolonial power dynamics, leading to the US employing right-wing favoritism to mold a loyal and pro-American government and periods of neglect where the priorities of Washington D.C. lay outside of Mexico's focus. In modern times, this relationship has changed in some respects, but has remained constant in others. These powers have primarily been used in immigration and foreign policy, alternating between neglective or supportive rhetoric. Moving forward, though the specific administration in power within the two nations will determine what amount of each is most employed, the next six years of US-Mexico relations will be defined by these same concepts: neglect and neocolonial power dynamics.

As the case study of Brazil has shown, these two concepts are not exclusive to the relationship between the US and Mexico. While the proximity of the two nations makes these concepts more common, many other countries that are of less importance to the US still suffer the same effect, particularly in Latin America. Even when the US makes neglect the defining policy with several of its hemispheric allies, they still cannot help but assert regional dominance

through the use of neocolonial power dynamics, be it right-wing favoritism, espionage, or coercion.

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