First and Third World Borders: Shared Characteristics and Strategies

Marcelle Beaulieu
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Introduction

Undocumented immigration has become a major source of contention between Mexico and the United States. Illicit flows of immigration have increased along with the proliferation of economic interdependence, making immigration a top priority for both countries, although for varying reasons. As a receiving country, the United States has focused on immigration control and border militarization to stem immigration. However, Mexico’s role is much more ambiguous as a sending, receiving and transit country. In Mexico’s capacity as a sending country, the Mexican government has continuously sought out protection from human rights violations and exploitation along the Northern border. As a sending and transit country, Mexico has had to find a balance between traditional human rights discourse utilized in the North and increasing pressure from the United States to curtail Central American migration. This conflict of interests has created a contradiction in policy along Mexico’s two borders.

This policy contradiction will be explored in this paper in terms of American hegemonic power and the reaction of Mexico as a secondary state in the current world order. I will discuss the role of American foreign policy in the construction of foreign policy in developing countries as they seek to optimize the benefits of their relationship with the United States, using Mexico as a case study. In this paper, I use a variety of literature to provide a strong theoretical and empirical basis for my argument. I utilize scholarly articles, books, journals, newspaper articles, and governmental reports and documents.

This paper will first focus on the importance of the Mexican community abroad and how Mexican emigration policy has evolved into a key aspect in foreign policy.
Secondly, this paper will concentrate on changing strategies on behalf of the Mexican state along the Southern border beginning in the eighties and continuing today. These changes in strategy exemplify how developing countries have learned to utilize their relationship with the United States in a way that is most beneficial to their own interests. I argue that Mexican elites have completed a process of socialization, which has more clearly aligned their interest in this field with the interests of the United States. I also argue that the Mexican government has found a way to optimize its relationship with the United States through the strategy of bandwagoning, as outlined by Randall Schweller.

By considering these theories together, a more comprehensive explanation can be offered for changing national interests in Mexico and the subsequent strategy changes in the pursuit of revitalized interests that are in alliance with the United States.

**Theoretical Groundwork**

There are two main issues to be dealt with theoretically in this paper. The first is to explain how Mexico has reacted to the emergence of the United States as sole superpower in the aftermath of the Cold War. This will entail changes in a traditionally antagonistic stance towards the United States, subsequent alignment with American interests and a transformation of nationalistic rhetoric in Mexican policy. Secondly, the formation of immigration and emigration policy must be theorized correctly in order to understand how both policies are intertwined and represent certain national interests.

**Secondary States’ Reactions to American Hegemony**

Realist theory cannot account for the persistence of American dominance in world politics. Realist theories purport that states will band together in cooperation in order to counterbalance an external threat, such as the Soviet Union. Once this threat is
extinguished, collaboration will decline as states seek to extend their personal power at the expense of their previous allies.\(^1\) It is further thought that weaker states would seek to form coalitions with other secondary states in order to counterbalance the threat of domination by the hegemon.\(^2\) However, this has not occurred in the aftermath of the Cold War as the United States has emerged as the dominant world power while maintaining preceding partnerships. “Strategic rivalry” has been avoided in the last two decades as regional economic blocs have developed and political conflicts between major states have been minimal.\(^3\)

Various states have had to devise new strategies to achieve certain interests in the presence of American hegemony. Instead of traditional balance-of-power theories, states are finding that cooperation and engagement are more beneficial in the post Cold War era. This is due to increasing interdependence and benefits provided by the United States. Below I will outline how secondary states may arrive at the decision to engage with rather than antagonize the dominant power. I will also discuss a few different strategies to achieve a closer working relationship with the United States.

Josef Joffe refers to a type of positive hegemony that could be achieved in order to ensure secondary states’ cooperation in the world order. He claims that incentives can be created that will placate subordinate states and maintain a favorable balance of power for the United States.\(^4\) Joffe states that international politics is no longer a zero-sum game. States are content with a degree of power imbalance in the presence of incentives

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\(^3\) Ikenberry, “Institutions, Strategic Restraints, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,” 43.

in the form of public goods. “That gives the lesser players a powerful incentive to maintain the existing order and to accord at least grudging acceptance to the purveyor of those benefits.”

William C. Wohlforth discusses three main reasons why it is often difficult for other states to counterbalance the power of the United States. He first cites the presence and overwhelming benefits of collective goods, such as international security, that are shared by all states that cooperate with the hegemon. Secondly, Wohlforth refers to the fact that politics is local. More often than not, states are most concerned with domestic issues and national security rather than imbalances in world politics. Finally, he suggests that states are sometimes willing to sacrifice aspects of sovereignty and autonomy in order to procure certain interests and benefits that can be best secured by a dominate state. This rational explanation assumes that, “Among self-interested states, collective action in pursuit of a single goal—such as counterbalancing a hegemón—is very hard to achieve.” Wohlforth therefore assumes that rational states will logically balance the cost and benefits of creating a working relationship with the United States and will inevitable utilize engagement as a strategy.

G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan agree with Joffe that material incentives are imperative in the quest to obtain cooperation by secondary states. However, they also argue that the convergence of substantive beliefs is also important in the creation of a functioning hegemonic relationship between two states. They claim

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5 Ibid, 178.
7 Ibid, 102.
8 Ibid, 98.
that this happens through the socialization of leaders in secondary countries which leads to increased cooperation. “Elites in secondary states buy into and internalize norms that are articulated by the hegemon and therefore pursue policies consistent with the hegemon’s notion of international order.”

Therefore, non-coercive control is upheld by the dominating state due to the fact that secondary states convert hegemonic ideas of international order into common sense and normative knowledge.

Ikenberry and Kupchan also identify three conditions that are usually present when the process of socialization occurs. The first hypothesis is that socialization can happen in the aftermath of a war and/or political crisis. Following the loss of legitimacy after a crisis, governmental leaders may search for a revised approach in thinking in order to create new political opportunities. The second hypothesis posits that elite cooperation and internalization is essential in the socialization process. It is only when elites are ready to convert to hegemonic thinking that socialization will take place. Finally, Ikenberry and Kupchan argue that socialization can occur in the aftermath of the excessive use of force.

This idea of socialization is parallel to Max Weber’s ideas on legitimate domination. The entire concept of hegemony rests on the acquiescence of those who are being dominated. Hegemony is characterized by a non-coercive form of control and legitimacy that flows from the bottom up. Therefore, socialization is indispensable for the continued success of any form of hegemony. “The vision of international order articulate by the hegemon comes to possess a ‘quality of oughness.’ In this way, socialization can lead to the consolidation of the hegemon’s position and to acquiescence

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10 Ibid, 283.
11 Ibid, 284.
12 Ibid, 289.
among the states participating within the system.”¹³ As it takes on a normative characteristic, it will become increasingly difficult for states to attempt to counterbalance the dominant state.

Ikenberry and Kupchan contend that socialization can be instigated by the introduction of external inducement, which can be manifested in the form of economic or military incentives.¹⁴ They reason that material inducement will lead to policy change on behalf of the secondary state, which will inevitably lead to a norm change, or socialization. Ikenberry and Kupchan argue that policy change by secondary states that is newly aligned with hegemonic powers is often unpopular with the populace of that country. Therefore, elites in the secondary state often preface the policy change with a change in normative thinking about that certain policy area, thereby making the alignment more acceptable to the public.¹⁵ Alternatively, these norms may be altruistically embraced by elites and a legitimate policy change may follow.¹⁶

Finally, Ikenberry and Kupchan argue that socialization works for three main reasons. The first is that socialization is convenient in times during which international restructuring corresponds with domestic moments of crisis and instability. The second hypothesis states that socialization only occurs when the elite community is open to normative transformations in policy and strategy. Thirdly, Ikenberry and Kupchan ascertain that hegemonic ideas are not enough to initiate socialization. Material incentive and political gain are additional factors that influence elites in the process of socialization. “Material incentives and opportunities for political advancement thus play

¹³ Ibid, 290.
¹⁴ Ibid, 290.
¹⁵ Ibid, 291.
¹⁶ Ibid, 292.
a crucial role in making elites susceptible to the socializing efforts of the hegemon.”¹⁷

Therefore, one of the most important aspects of socialization is its characteristic as a two-way process. Elites in both the hegemonic and secondary state have much to gain from establishing a normative world order in which interests and benefits are shared.

Another way to describe acquiescence to the hegemon is through a strategy referred to as bandwagoning. Randall L. Schweller presents bandwagoning as the opposite of balancing against the dominant state.¹⁸ However, bandwagoning is not a simple act of forfeit to the hegemon, rather, it seeks to acquire certain benefits.

The aim of balancing is self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed, while the goal of bandwagoning is usually self-extension: to obtain values coveted. Simply put, balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses; bandwagoning by the opportunity for gain.¹⁹

The concept of bandwagoning differs from traditional ideas of balance-of-threat strategies due to the fact that a primary reasoning is for the acquisition of profits and not solely the acquirement of security and protection.²⁰ Therefore, the two-way process referred to by Ikenberry and Kupchan is completed as both states receive benefits from their participation.

Schweller also emphasizes the importance of positive inducements as utilized by the hegemonic force. He argues that negative incentives are too often accentuated at the expense of positive sanctions. Schweller states that bandwagoning can also be

¹⁷ Ibid, 293.
¹⁹ Ibid, 74.
²⁰ Ibid, 79.
encouraged through positive actions as opposed to strictly coercive means. Positive sanctions can include economic aid or military assistance on behalf of the hegemon.

_Theoretical Foundations for Mexican Emigration/Immigration Policy_

Perhaps the most helpful approach for explaining trends in Mexican emigration policy is that of Sherman, which contests that trends of incorporation are utilized in times of crises in order to solidify state legitimacy in both economic and political terms. She also takes into account the transnational characteristic of citizenship and how it has continuously affected emigration policy over the last century. She states that,

"My interest here is the state's role in defining who belongs to the nation, both culturally and politically, in a case in which there are not competing nations (or ethnic groups) attempting to forge states of their own, but rather in which the territorial boundaries corresponding to the state's jurisdiction are continuously transcended, often permanently, by its citizens." This line of thought also incorporates tendencies towards Mexican nationalism and political rhetoric concerning a national identity.

Sherman differentiates between introverted and extended incorporation. The former refers to the ultimate goal of the repatriation of emigrants whereas the latter strategy recognizes that emigrants are not likely to return. This approach is highly contextualized and dependent on historical eras and varying national tactics. The most important feature of Sherman's theory is the focus on the state's utilization of emigration policy in the constant pursuit of national political and economic interests in relation to corresponding geopolitical and international factors. This will help explain how the Mexican state comes to value migrants living abroad and how a foreign policy plan focusing on their well being is subsequently developed.

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21 Ibid, 89.
23 Sherman, 839-840.
In my discussion of the formation of policy, I will be utilizing Alexander L. George's theory on policy legitimacy first found in *Change in the International System*, edited by Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alexander L. George. George argues that policy legitimacy is imperative in order to overcome domestic constraints and achieve internal support for foreign policy. Therefore, the president and other authors of foreign policy must couch their objectives in legitimized terms accepted by the public and Congress. This legitimacy will aide in the development of a long-term, successful foreign policy and will sidestep constant haggling and negotiating.

According to George, policy legitimacy has two aspects. The first is the normative component which endeavors to convince both the government and the public that this policy is situated within national values. The policy must achieve goals and objectives that are "desirable" to everyone. The second aspect is the policy's feasibility, or its cognitive basis. This quality is concerned with the logistical features of the policy and the president's ability to effectively implement the policy. This must demonstrate an understanding of other policy making actors and the geopolitical positioning of the country.

The feasibility aspect is further deconstructed into three categories. The first is concerned with the "design-objective" of the policy. This obviously refers to the main goals of the foreign policy, or the Great Design. The second category is the strategy developed in order to achieve the major objectives. Finally, George speaks to the tactics utilized to implement the strategy. All three categories must be based within the normative assumption that common goals within shared national values will be secured.
This theory of policy legitimacy is helpful in framing Mexico’s emigration and immigration policy. The normative aspect of Mexico’s emigration policy extends not only to Mexicans living within Mexico, but it also applies to the huge population living abroad. Migrants in the United States and their families in Mexico want to ensure that their rights are protected as citizens of Mexico. Therefore, the recent trend of protection and incorporation of these migrants is normatively accepted as being located within national interests and values. In relation to immigration policy, the normative aspect of policy legitimacy first began with the process of socialization outlined by Ikenberry and Kupchan and the repositioning of Mexican nationalism in the foreign policy debate, which will be discussed later in full detail.

**Mexican Foreign Policy Actors and Immigration Enforcers**

All immigration and enforcement policy stems from the 1974 Ley General de Población (LGP). According to the LGP, sanctions for illegal immigration are administrative and not criminal. Furthermore, it authorizes only the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) and the Policía Federal Preventiva (PFP) as the two organizations responsible for enforcing immigration policies and laws. Also, the humanitarian branch of the INM, Grupo Beta plays a part along both borders with regards to the protection of immigrant rights and wellbeing. Additionally, it must be addressed that a variety of unauthorized personnel at the local, state, and federal levels are indiscriminately participating in immigration enforcement. However, the focus on this paper is strictly policy and not necessarily enforcement, although this is an extremely important aspect.

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Prior to democratization in 2000, the Mexican executive was the supreme decision maker in foreign policy. PRI hegemony assured that dissenting voices were few and far in between. However, with the advent of democratization, other actors emerged. The most important new actor was Congress, whose newfound power is based in the need for coalitional support for foreign policy decisions. Regardless of the proliferation of new foreign policy players since 2000, the strategies for emigration and immigration policy discussed in this paper are national strategies imposed by the President. Furthermore, the centralization of immigration law in the LGP ensures a degree of uniformity.

**Mexican Emigration Policy and the Northern Border**

Throughout history, Mexican emigration policy has experienced many different periods of engagement and disengagement with Mexican emigrants. These varying strategies have depended largely on economic and political context along with United States’ unilateral tendencies. However, as discussed by Sherman, the search for legitimacy, especially in times of crisis, has always remained a guiding factor in Mexican emigration policy. I will only begin this history with the 1980s, because a full history is beyond the scope of this paper. However, this time frame should be sufficient to illustrate the importance of Mexican emigration policy and the significance of Mexicans living abroad in the United States. Furthermore, I will trace the history of Mexican emigration policy in this section only until the year 2000. After this time, I will discuss emigration and immigration policy simultaneously as they inherently affect each other.

**1980’s and Liberalization**

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The decade of the eighties was transformative for the Mexican state in several different areas. The 1982 debt crisis devastated Mexico in addition to numerous other Latin American countries. The PRI, quickly losing legitimacy both politically and economically, was searching for a quick fix to regain recognition on both domestic and international fronts. Meanwhile, Communism was facing its demise and the neoliberal paradigm had firmly taken hold of developed countries, most notably the United States. Desperate to recover authority, the PRI began a top down transition towards a market economy and economic liberalization, strictly adhering to the provisions of the Washington Consensus. International financial organizations such as the IMF and World Bank became ultimate authorities in debt restructuring, calling for rigorous structural adjustments and austere economic measures. Free trade became the solution for regaining both political legitimacy and economic stability.

The debt crisis severely weakened the Mexican economy and state of political affairs. The election of 1988 and the rise in popularity of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and oppositional parties led the PRI to establish a focused strategy to increase legitimacy. Initially, the PRI attempted to further centralize political power and advance federal over legal authority. However, it was quickly realized that centralization was not compatible with neoliberal reforms. Neoliberalism inherently changes the role of the state, effectively reducing state interference into the economic realm. Although structural reforms were strictly implemented top-down, neoliberalism took away the possibility of the PRI to fall back on the patronage of the previous welfare state. This paradoxical imbalance and resulting policies of neoliberalism greatly affected Mexican emigration policy.
US immigration legislation in the 1980s also changed the context of dialogue concerning the immigration issue. The passage of the 1986 Simpson-Rodino Law or the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) authorized amnesty for millions and also imposed sanction on employers for hiring undocumented workers. IRCA led to an underclass of workers, leading to mass exploitation of employees and a rush towards naturalization. Despite initial intentions, illegal immigration increased and the community of Mexicans living within the United States grew substantially.

The Mexican government was anxious about negative affects of IRCA for three main reasons. The first concern involved human rights violations due to increased border militarization. Second, the deterioration of workers conditions was a possibility due to the creation of a virtual underground workforce. Finally, Mexico feared the deleterious effects on the Mexican economy as a result of decreased remittances relational to amnesty procedures and the effects of employer sanctions on the ability of the US economy to absorb Mexican workers and provide a job market.\textsuperscript{26} All of these factors combined with changing global paradigms and structures forced Mexico to alter its emigration policy.

\textit{Mexican Policy and Incorporation: 1988-2000}

In 1988, the Mexican government switched to a more inclusive strategy in relation to emigrants living in the United States that continues until today. This was largely a reaction to recent crises in economic and political legitimacy suffered by the ruling party, the PRI. Compounded with increased interdependence and economic integration between the United States and Mexico, emigrants once again became a

valuable resource and a part of the national citizenry. Sherman states that this approach is,

...characterized by the state’s explicit redefinition of the nation as transcending borders, and of Mexican emigrants as central to the national project even without return; concretely, the state has taken measures to allow participation in Mexican affairs from abroad. The emphasis on permanent return is almost completely absent.27

The Mexican government began to enact legislation that reflected this renewed perception of the importance of emigrants. Of course, U.S. policy also played an integral part in Mexican policy, as Mexican legislation and implemented programs were often seen as a reaction to the anti-immigrant U.S. rhetoric and policies of the 1990s. In the late 1980s, Salinas created the Paisano Program through the Ministry of Foreign Relations in order to protect immigration from abuses suffered at the hands of police and border officials.28 In addition, the General Directorate for Mexican Communities Abroad (DGMCA) was created in 1990 in order to foster closer ties between Mexicans living on both sides of the border. The DGMCA was also established as an institutional body to establish hometown committees and provide certain services to emigrants.29

Civil society also reawakened due to liberalization/ The Grupo Unidad Mexicana (GUM) began in 1987 with the intentions of more accurately representing the demands and rights of emigrants. GUM is an organization, composed of Cardenistas, that has continuously fought for emigrant rights, including issues of emigrant suffrage and fair

27 Sherman, 855.
28 Sherman, 855.
elections. In addition, GUM has organized several conferences to establish networks and raise awareness.\textsuperscript{30}

1994 could be considered a watershed year for Mexico. It marks the initiation of NAFTA, the peso crisis, and the EZLN uprising. Throughout this time period, political and economic legitimacy was extremely undermined both in the eyes of foreign investors and Mexican citizens. Mexico had to attempt recovery as quickly and painlessly as possible to the financial crisis. Although the Clinton administration hesitated at first, the US eventually came through with a bailout package, however, the majority of the damage was already done. Countless investors had pulled out and massive capital flight left a destructive wake. In addition, the Zapatistas were demanding autonomy and recognition in the South, while at the same time condemning Mexico’s participation in NAFTA. The PRI had to rely on all resources and sources of possible political support. Therefore, the strategy of incorporation grew in strength as the Mexican state reached out to emigrants in order to rebuild legitimacy.

In 1997, the unprecedented law of no pérdida de la nacionalidad (no loss of nationality) was passed which stated that Mexican emigrants that became naturalized US citizens could retain their Mexican nationality. This law was passed in order to promote dual citizenship so emigrants could receive the benefits offered by both states. This was in part a reaction to US anti-immigration measures and the increased stigmatization of Mexican immigrants. In line with the protection of Mexican nationals abroad,

\textsuperscript{30} Leticia Calderón Chelius and Jesús Martínez Saldaña, \textit{La Dimensión Política de la Migración Mexicana}. (DF, Instituto de Investigaciones, 2002) 221,
naturalization was perceived that the best way to secure rights and safeguard against discrimination in the United States.\footnote{Sherman, 855.}

Furthermore, in March of 1996, it was decided that those living abroad would be able to participate in the Mexican domestic vote. Although this proposition endured years of debate and an initial resistance by PRI officials, Mexican emigrants were allowed to cast votes in the 2006 presidential election. This absentee vote combined with the dual citizenship measures further demonstrates the level of incorporation offered to emigrants during this period.\footnote{Chelius and Saldaña, 111.} Consular action also increased exponentially to further facilitate the needs of emigrants and provide much needed education and health services.

Mexican policy once again shifted directions towards a more inclusive citizenry and pervasive benefits. This has been the product of the regeneration of legitimacy, the utilization of emigrants as a base of support, increased integration with the United States and the improved protection of emigrants against US discrimination.

\textit{US Militarization of the Border and Mexican Reactions}

IRCA began the first of many essentially anti-immigrant US policies that have continued until today, which illustrates an emerging contradiction in the United States. While the United States has been the leader in regional free trade initiatives and the reduction of trade barriers to increase capital flows, labor has not been included in these initiatives. US policy has steadily become more restrictionist when concerning labor flows from Mexico, which does not support the market-structured neoliberalism that has recently emerged,

"Against all logic, we wish to create an integrated, continent-wide economy characterized by the free movement of all factors of production except one. This
schizophrenia is manifest in the fact that, since the mid-1980s, we have moved in two diametrically opposed directions, at once promoting integration while simultaneously seeking separation.”

As stated earlier, immigrant flows to the US are perceived as a threat to national security, which has led to this disparity in policy. Therefore, US immigration policy has increasingly turned towards the militarization of the border in addition to withholding citizen rights from undocumented immigrants to deter immigration. This absence of the institutionalization of labor flows between the US and Mexico has greatly hindered true progress and affected relations.

In response to the challenge of escalated illegal immigration and to citizens’ fears of further impending increases in immigration, the United States has adopted a strict border policy directed at the U.S.-Mexico border region. Wayne Cornelius studies the evolution of U.S.-Mexican border policy and the consequences that have emerged due to its implementation. Beginning with the Clinton administration in the early nineties, stricter border policy became an issue, as the budget for the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) increased exponentially. The build up of the border, a practice that has continued with the current Bush administration, is concentrated on mainly urban areas that have experienced the highest concentration of illegal crossings.

The strategy that has been consistently utilized follows the advice of a 1993 study managed by the Sandia National Laboratories, which is a government-supported facility with the aims of conducting military research. The results reported that the wisest tactic could be found in prevention-through-deterrence. By reducing illegal immigration through known, urban passageways, immigrants would be required to attempt crossing

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through the most geographically challenging areas. The main point of the study implied that these increased costs to the immigrant would discourage additional crossings.

A number of programs have resulted from this strategy, the most visible being Operation Gatekeeper at the San Diego-Mexican border, implemented in 1994. Other such programs include Operation Hold-the-Line in El Paso, Operation Safeguard in Arizona and Operation Rio Grande in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The increased militarization of the Mexican border has become the standard for US border policy. This is a very deliberate, calculated approach with intended costs and deadly consequences. Immigrant deaths have increased substantially since the implementation of such border policy.

"...the current US border enforcement strategy has significantly raised the costs and physical risks associated with illegal entry. These should not be treated as ‘unintended’ consequences, since they were an integral part of the INS’s ‘prevention through deterrence’ strategy from its inception. Indeed, the theory underlying the strategy was that raising the costs, the physical risk, and the probability of apprehension on each entry attempt would eventually discourage the migrant and cause him (or her) to return to the location of origin." This unilateral policy strategy can be seen as an extremely aggressive reaction by the US government to increasing public pressures to secure US borders and develop a safety net for border areas.

The Mexican government has continuously rejected militarization of the U.S.-Mexican border for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the increased number of deaths associated with the geographical restructuring of immigration flows is highly contested by governmental officials. Mexican president Vicente Fox has caused these fatal consequences of militarization “unacceptable” and argues that these policies lead to

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35 Ibid, 661-663
36 Ibid, 663-664
37 Ibid, 667.
criminalization of migrants and rampant human rights abuses.38 Another consequence with serious implications is the institutionalization of coyote networks and other human smugglers. By increasing physical costs of crossing, border control policy also increases rates of and the need for coyotes. Fox has lamented the creation of this “fatal black market in migration” and has continuously requested the demilitarization of the border.39

This history of Mexican emigration policy illustrates the importance Mexican emigrants hold for governmental legitimacy and accountability. The wellbeing and livelihood of Mexicans living abroad is an extremely important measure for government popularity. The widespread acceptance and belief in the significance of the Mexican Diaspora in the United States serves as the normative component of Mexican emigration policy. Furthermore, despite the fact that U.S. unilateral policies have often frustrated Mexican governmental officials, Mexico has continued with the strategy of bandwagoning as economic and political incentives have gained in importance.

**Mexican Immigration Policy**

Mexico’s Southern border began to experience sizeable flows of migration due to the rash of Central American civil wars, especially the Guatemalan conflict. Larger numbers of refugees began to cross into Mexico in the early 1980s, forcing Mexico to redefine immigration policy. Beginning in the mid 1970s until the end of Central American conflict, Mexico changed strategies due to geopolitical positioning and domestic crisis.

**Mexican Immigration/Refugee Policy 1978-1983**

38 Cornelius, 679.
Mexico's initial reaction to Central American conflict resulted in the construction of a foreign policy based in the idea that, "...stability in the area would be impossible without the conditions for sociopolitical change."\(^{40}\) Therefore, the Mexican government followed a strategy based on support for Central American forces initiating change. Mexican support of the anti-Somoza struggle in Nicaragua caused conflict with the United States in 1978 due to the fact that very different ideologies were being pursued in a close geographical context.\(^{41}\) Mexico's foreign policy was often seen as anti-imperialist and essentially anti-American which is often attributed to a difficult history with the United States and continuous threats to sovereignty.

The country's foreign policy is clearly internationalist in scope, the consequence of a history of humiliation, but also of just aspirations and firm positions-a foreign policy that defends the right of peoples to self-determination, peaceful international coexistence, equality among nations, and the right to asylum, just as it condemns the arrogance of any powerful nation that lords its position over a small one.\(^{42}\)

The ideological beliefs held by Mexico were manifested in the construction of foreign policy as Mexico sought out a more autonomous international position that would counterbalance U.S. hegemony in Central American and Mexican issues.\(^{43}\)

Under Mexican law, the status of refugee is not recognized due to the fact that Mexico is not a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees. Instead, Mexico has always focused on the designation of political asylum, which


\(^{41}\) Ibid.


necessitates proof of political persecution.44 However, with the arrival of Guatemalan refugees in the early 1980s, Mexico entered into a bilateral agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) which promises refugee status to Guatemalans fleeing into Mexico.

Mexico also created the Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR) in July of 1980 to synchronize actions by the Secretariats of Foreign Relations, Labor and Social Welfare.45 The three main objectives of COMAR were, "...to oversee emergency assistance to the Central American refugees; to provide them with political representation; and to design temporary and long-term projects for employment and self sufficiency."46 COMAR worked alongside UNCHR and severely restricted the obstruction of additional international forces, such as NGOs, hoping to maintain national sovereignty in dealing with the refugee situation.47 In addition, Mexico was extremely hesitant to militarize its Southern border during this time in fear of offending Central American governments, particularly the Guatemalan government.48 These policies all show a willingness on the part of the Mexican government to work in solidarity with Central America as a regional leader.

To reinforce this position, Mexico and France both officially recognized the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) and the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) as legitimate political forces in El Salvador. Additionally, at

45 Rosalva Aida Hernández Castillo, Norma Nava Zamora, Carlos Flores Arenales, and Jose Luis Escalona Victoria, La Experiencia de Refugio en Chiapas: Nuevas Relaciones en la Frontera Sur Mexicana, 50. (Mexico City, Cupilo Universidad, 1993)
46 Maria Cristina García, Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada, 49. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006)
48 Americas Watch Committee, 32.
this time Mexico entered into the Contadora Group with other Central American countries with the goal of finding a peaceful solution and offsetting U.S. presence in Central America.\textsuperscript{49} Simultaneously, the Reagan administration initiated the Tegucigalpa Bloc with Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador which sought solutions in direct contradiction with the goals of the Contadora Group.\textsuperscript{50} Therefore, Reagan declared Mexico’s actions at this time as extremely “irresponsible” and declared that Mexico did not accurately assess the threat to national security introduced by revolutionary forces. Therefore, throughout the early eighties, Mexico and the United States often took contradictory stances on Central American conflict. Furthermore, Mexico continued to see itself as a regional leader and sought to undercut American hegemony whenever possible. However, this began to change as Mexico entered into a period of crisis and the world system underwent major transformation.

\textit{Changing views of Nationalism}

As discussed earlier, Mexican nationalism played an important part in Mexican political history. The manifestations of nationalism were largely found in the realm of foreign policy, especially in relation to the United States. Nationalism was also used as a political tool to placate more leftist sectors of the PRI. This was a convenient strategy for appeasement that was also politically popular with constituents. However, this nationalistic tendency in foreign policy often impeded good relations with the United States. “Such concessions created friction with the United States, especially during the Reagan years, but it allowed Mexican leadership to retain strong nationalistic symbols

\textsuperscript{49} Hernández, 33.
and to reinforce their legitimacy as a protector of Mexican sovereignty. Therefore, as long as the state remained strong, nationalism could be maintained despite constant clashes in cooperation with the United States.

However, as mentioned earlier, Mexico underwent a period of extreme economic crisis throughout the eighties. As a result of economic problems in addition to issues of fraudulent elections, the political legitimacy of the PRI came into question. Furthermore, at the end of the eighties, the international world order was experiencing rapid change as the Cold War ended. As the United States became the emerging Superpower after the Cold War, the balance of power shifted. As Ikenberry and Kupchan note, socialization is prone to occur in the aftermath of crises of political legitimacy and is even more likely in times of simultaneous domestic and international instability.

At the international level, the emerging hegemon articulates a set of normative principles in order to facilitate the construction of an order conducive to its interests. At the domestic level, crisis creates an environment in which elites seek alternative to existing norms that have been discredited by events and in which new norms offer opportunities for political gains and coalitional realignment. Mexican elites began to search for ways in which to regain political legitimacy and resituate itself into the new world order.

In order for Mexico to more closely cooperate with the Untied States in many different areas, it was necessary to address the traditional issue of nationalism, which held great importance for all Mexicans. Mexico’s relationship with the United States is historically fragile. Mexican nationalism emphasized the underlying resentment that many Mexicans felt towards the United States. Therefore, the Mexican government had

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52 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 284.
53 Ibid.
to address the stigma of working in cooperation with the United States through the transformation of normative thinking on this topic. As Ikenberry and Kupchan state,

The public of the secondary state may associate compliant behavior with imperial manipulation and weakness on the part of its own leaders. Elites in power can circumvent this problem by basing their participation in the hegemonic system on normative claims.\textsuperscript{54}

For this reason, the Mexican government began to speak about nationalism in different terms.

Although the new nationalist mentality still utilized traditional rhetoric, the idea of how to achieve sovereignty and autonomy began to change. Instead of creating an isolationist stance to international politics, Mexico began to adapt a more conciliatory approach to engagement and incorporation. As Reuter and Ronfeldt note, "...the new mentality evinced unusual openness to the outside world and foresaw that openness, properly structured, as enhancing Mexico’s sovereignty and security."\textsuperscript{55} This was an imperative, yet complicated, step in the direction of a new foreign policy strategy. It was a difficult transition due to the complex history of antagonism and cooperation between the two countries.

While it is true that Mexico’s strong sense of nationalism was a natural response to its historical experience with the United States, Mexico has found it necessary, for important economic and social reasons, to modify its traditional posture in return for identifying its future development more closely with the fortunes of the United States.\textsuperscript{56}

Therefore, Mexico began to instigate a change in its attitude towards cooperation with the United States. The normative change in nationalist thinking signifies the final link in the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 291.


\textsuperscript{56} Camp, 236.
chain of socialization as purported by Ikenberry and Kapchan. This shift subsequently necessitated an essential change in the application of nationalism in the construction of foreign policy, which can be seen in Mexico’s stance towards Central America and its Southern border.

*Changes in Mexican Emigration Policy, late 1980s*

As changes in nationalist thinking became evident and the Mexican government tried to overcome extreme economic and political crisis, the bilateral relationship with the United States was reevaluated and the process of bandwagoning was initiated. Although certain principles would be upheld, Mexican foreign policy, “...would seek to avoid, or at least minimize, unnecessary conflicts and frictions with the United States, searching for commonalities that would allow it to put the accent on skillful and complementary management of negotiations on bilateral issues.” Mexico began to implement this new strategy in a variety of ways, one being its posture towards Central American conflict in the eighties.

The main change in Mexico’s stance towards Central America can be found in the nature of its participation in the three presidential summits in Esquipulas, Guatemala. This was a meeting between Central American governments, building on Contadora efforts, to achieve peace in the region. The first two summits met in 1987 and the last in 1989. However, despite Mexico’s fervent participation in the Contadora Group, Mexico’s presence in Esquipulas fully dissipated by the second summit. Seeking to appease the bilateral relationship with the United States, Mexico distanced itself from a process that was actively opposed the U.S. government. Mexico instead sought to pursue

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national interest and the improvement of the economic situation in the latter half of the eighties.

Mexico’s worsening economic problems—with their consequent political impact—and the importance of the United States to the country’s prospects for solving them (especially where the renegotiation of the external debt and Mexico’s economic reconversion process were concerned), played a significant role. Thus, the Mexican government made a tangible effort to seek an improvement in bilateral relations with its U.S. counterpart, at first, chiefly at the international policy level. Therefore, Mexico abandoned the antagonistic stance in Central American conflict and forfeited its role as regional leader as an act of submission to the United States. Instead of trying to counterbalance American hegemony in the region, Mexico instead sought to procure interests and advantages of a close relationship with the United States through the strategy of bandwagoning. This paved the way for additional sacrifices to be made along the Southern border as the issue of immigration gained in importance.

**The Evolution of the Southern Border’s Importance to Policy**

As Central American conflict subsided, Mexico’s Southern border began to represent different threats. Illegal immigration due to economic stimuli increased exponentially throughout the nineties, causing concern for the relatively lax regulation of the Mexican Southern border. In addition, drug trafficking proliferated and the War on Drugs intensified, calling attention to the classification of Mexico as a transit country and as a point of entry of illegal drugs to North America. These issues became pivotal as Mexico and the United States started negotiating increased economic interdependence through NAFTA and immigration became a point of sensitivity for both countries. The Southern border became an actor in these negotiations, and in order for Mexico to

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achieve economic stability and protection of Mexican emigrants, the Southern border needed to be modified, even if only rhetorically.

**NAFTA and the Southern Border**

The Southern border gained importance for both the United States and Mexico upon the signing of NAFTA in 1994. It was thought that NAFTA would introduce Mexico into the first world, thereby pushing the boundary between first and third world to Mexico’s Southern border. Trade liberalization would draw Mexico closer to the United States and Canada and increase the gap between Mexico and Central America.\(^{59}\) NAFTA marks the beginning of this new perspective on Mexico’s Southern border, signifying its importance in future migration and trade negotiations. The Mexican government was willing to reevaluate the purpose of the Southern border in order to pursue economic stability through NAFTA in the wake of the Peso Crisis.

**The Fox Administration: The Whole Enchilada**

Vicente Fox was elected to the Mexican presidency in 2000, thus marking the end of PRI rule and the beginning of a new democracy in Mexico. His validation as a democratically elected president afforded him a more aggressive approach towards the immigration debate with the United States. His first plan of action was to appoint well known scholar Jorge Castañeda as Foreign Minister. Castañeda, a close friend of Fox’s and who possessed substantial political influence, had many progressive views of the direction that immigration policy should take as a bilateral subject. Under Castañeda’s influence, Fox initially proposed a plan called “NAFTA plus” that would include the free

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flow of labor in addition to other NAFTA initiatives. Although this was unlikely due to massive wage differentials, it was a bold move on Fox’s part.

Bush and Fox met in February of 2001 at Fox’s Guanajuato ranch. Fox’s plan had somewhat shifted to focus more on amnesty for those living in the United States and a guest worker program. As a result of this meeting, a bilateral group was commissioned to further develop immigration negotiations. The group agreed on an agenda that included, “…regularization, a guest-worker program, a special regime for granting more visas to Mexican workers, security for and humane treatment of Mexican migrants, and economic development as a means of reducing incentives for migration.”60 Furthermore, Mexico demanded that the package be deliberated upon and enacted at once in opposition to partial negotiations, advocating a “Whole Enchilada” approach. Although this plan was a bit unrealistic within the time frame given and with regards to political opposition in the United States, it was well received.

These migration talks and the demands of the Mexican government for better treatment of Mexican emigrants in the United States were bolstered by Mexican initiatives along the Southern border. It was pragmatically thought that if stricter measures were taken along the Southern border by the Mexican government, then the U.S. would have a more conciliatory approach to the bilateral immigration talks due to the geographical importance of the Southern border to both human and drug trafficking. Mexican spokesman, Santiago Creel, admitted the new strategy when meeting with U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell. “In exchange for greater facilities for Mexicans working in the U.S, our government is preparing to increase measures aiming to arrest

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60 Iglesias, 126.
foreigners crossing the country heading for the U.S." Therefore, stricter controls along the Southern border were seen as the feasibility aspect of immigration policy in the North.

In congruence with this strategy, Vicente Fox implemented El Plan Sur in June 2001. Plan Sur was an "unprecedented" attempt to stem illicit flows through Mexico's Southern border. Plan Sur was to be established through increased militarization of the border and augmented enforcement including road blocks. The Mexican government budgeted $11 million annually to contribute to the different aspects of Plan Sur, including anti-corruption campaigns and an increased budget for Grupo Beta to provide more equipment. The United States pledged $2 million per year to assist in the deportation of Central American migrants through Plan Sur, although this was quickly retracted in the aftermath of September 11th.

Many see Plan Sur as a replication of the militarization policies traditionally opposed to by the Mexican government along the Northern border. "With the plan, the Mexican government is recreating the US border control model in operation on the Northern border." This new strategy has drawn much criticism as it is viewed as hypocritical and unjust to Central American migrants. The same grievances are named against militarization in the South as for militarization in the North, including human rights abuses, the criminalization of migrants, and the institutionalization of smuggling networks.

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61 Johnson, 15.
62 Ibid, 15.
Civil society, interest groups and international representatives have all expressed concern over this contradiction in Mexican policy. The United Nations Special Rapporteur, Gabriela Pizarro, connected negative consequences militarization of the Southern border would have on Central American migrants and linked these abuses to the right of Mexican emigrants moving North.66 Other groups point out the hypocrisy of Mexican policy. As Patricia Bezares of la Mesa Nacional de Migraciones (MENAMIG) stated, "México mantiene intacta su posición de aliado de Estados Unidos, aunque el discurso reciente de sus autoridades vaya por la defensa de sus migrantes, no va a parar las deportaciones masivas de Centroamericanos. El país sigue siendo un retén."67 Many have called for the abandonment of this policy due to its likeness to U.S. militarization in the North and the subsequent consequences for migrants.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 redirected Bush’s attention and priorities. Mexico and immigration policy fell by the wayside as the United States attempted to recover. Fox once again approached Bush in 2002 in an attempt to initiate immigration negotiations, but received a lukewarm response. Castañeda resigned his position as Foreign Minister in 2003, definitively ending the most recent round of immigration debates.

Fox continued the approach of extended incorporation that began in 1988, with an even more cooperative counterpart in the United States. Emigrant inclusion and advancements in bilateral immigration policy with the United States were continuously seen as important resources to further solidify democracy and increase legitimacy.

Fortified by recent democratization and the endurance of NAFTA, Fox sought to further

66 Johnson, 16.
extend citizenship status beyond paper legislation. True protection of Mexicans, regardless of where they carry out their everyday lives, was the ultimate goal of the Fox administration. Procurement of this goal was pursued through the militarization of the Southern border in the hopes that the United States would recognize the initiative and reward Mexico in the form of more lenient immigration policy within the United States. Once again, the buildup of the Mexican Southern border can be seen as the feasibility aspect of Mexico’s emigration policy.

*Felipe Calderón and Current Policy*

The 2007 presidential elections presented more challenges to the Mexican government. PAN member Felipe Calderón and PRD member Lopez Obrador simultaneously claimed the presidency. Both declared the elections fraudulent and insisted in their own win. Followers of the two president elects mobilized, leaving the political state of the country in disarray for several months. Lopez Obrador finally stepped down and ceded the presidency to Calderón.

Seeking much needed legitimacy in his fledgling presidency and attempting to strike a favorable report with the United State, Calderón resituated Mexican foreign policy within the context of Mexico-U.S. relations. He initially stated that immigration would not be the central factor in bilateral relations between the United States and Mexico as it was understood with the Fox administration. Instead, other issues of mutual interest such as the war against drugs and trade will also take the forefront. However, despite his more relaxed perspective on the subject, Calderón condemned the
construction of a 700-mile wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, calling it a mistaken measure due to its inability to resolve the problem of immigration.68

Calderón has pursued an aggressive agenda in the war against drugs and organized crime. He has also worked in the creation of new jobs in order to counteract U.S. accusations that Mexico does not provide enough domestic employment for the Mexican people.69 Furthermore, he has become increasingly critical of U.S. immigration policy and treatment of Mexican immigrants in the United States. In the State of the Nation Address in September 2007, he condemned U.S. unilateral initiatives concerning immigration. He vowed to provide protection to all Mexican citizens, stating, “Where there is a Mexican, there is Mexico.”70 This demonstrates his dedication to continuing the policy of extended incorporation to Mexicans living abroad.

However, despite condemnation of US militarization policies along the Northern border, Calderón has continued the strategy first implemented by Fox. One of his first official trips as president was to the state of Chiapas, where he declared that a top priority would be to decrease the large number of undocumented Guatemalans living in the region.71 In addition, he announced the creation of a new local security force, the Border State Police Force (PEF). The PEF has increased mobile checkpoints and the detention of unauthorized migrants found in border areas.72

71 Johnson, 17.
72 Ibid.
As previously discussed, the security threats of the Southern border are often couched in terms of drug trafficking problems. Through this perspective, the United States can continue to exert pressure on Mexico to secure its Southern border through financial and policy coercion. One such plan is the Merida Initiative. Passed in 2008, the Merida Initiative will extend $500 million in aid to Mexico and $50 million to Central America through 2010 in the hopes of building infrastructure to combat drug trafficking. The Initiative focuses on combating drug trafficking, gangs, and organized crime.\(^{73}\) The largest component of the Merida Initiative is the Counternarcotics, Counterterrorism and Border Security aspect. Two thirds of the requested funds, or $208.3 million, are allocated for this subsection.\(^{74}\) Furthermore, $31.3 million is set aside explicitly in order to revitalize technology used in the INM and to train and properly equip personnel along the Mexican Southern border.\(^{75}\) This is an unprecedented package that further enables the Mexican government to militarize its Southern border with the hopes of establishing better benefits and protection for Mexicans crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and living abroad.

**Conclusion**

The willingness of the Mexican government to closely align itself with conventional U.S. practices and approaches signifies a departure from previous Mexican strategy. Formerly, Mexico had sought out a more autonomous role in the attempt to distinguish itself independently of the United States in international politics. However, as the world system changed and Mexico experienced extreme economic and political crisis,

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\(^{74}\) Ibid.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.
Mexico adopted a new, pragmatic strategy of bandwagoning. Mexico found it beneficial to ease antagonisms in the bilateral relationship with the United States in order to obtain economic aid and political friendship in times of hardship. This strategy of bandwagoning was only possible after a process of socialization had occurred in Mexico to accept a redefined national, political identity in relation to the United States.

Mexican emigrants have a longstanding importance in the political history of Mexico. Incorporation has repeatedly been utilized by the Mexican government in times of crisis in order to regain political and/or economic legitimacy. Therefore, emigration policy has grown in significance and has become a top priority for Mexican politicians. Mexican immigration and border control policy along the Mexican Southern border has come to be viewed as a pathway to ensure the protection of Mexican emigrants. This has prompted the Mexican government to enforce policies traditionally oppositional to Mexican ideology. These policies are also in the extreme likeness of U.S. militarization practices along the Mexican Northern border. However, despite the unattractiveness of these militarization policies, the Mexican government has not faltered in the last several years in the application of this new strategy. In theoretical terms, the militarization of the Mexican Southern border can be viewed as the feasible component of Mexican emigration policy, or a means to an end of protection of Mexican emigrants.
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