

MIGRATION ISSUES UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION EXPLORING THE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS*

*Francisco Alba***

Analyzing the long-term implications of the Trump administration's policies requires looking at the president's statements and governmental actions with a historical perspective. That is, it means keeping Trump's before and after very much in mind. He became president of the United States in 2017, preceded by a very divisive domestic immigration debate that has lasted long years without arriving at an agreement about what the country's policy should be, even though most parties seem to see the immigration system as a shambles. At the same time, we must think about what will happen when Trump leaves the presidency. In that sense, my intention here is to understand the Trump government's actions dynamically. By its very nature, this exploration is a speculation about what could predictably happen in the future.

This article has three sections. The first presents the context; that is, the global and national moment in which Trump carried out his campaign and has acted as president. In addition to reviewing Trump's vision of the world and the United States' place in it, I will deal succinctly and schematically with the general context of international relations and migratory phenomena and positions. I will concentrate on a general macro-vision, without going into too much detail.

The second section will deal —also summarily— with the short-term implications of Trump's policies, analyzed in detail by many of the other contributions to this volume. The aim of this section is to be a point of reference for speculating about the future. Will the long-term implications be a prolongation of the short-term ones? Or, will the presumable long-term implications differ from what is going on today? Therefore, I will attempt to lay out a summary appreciation of the short-term effects of this administration's migratory aims as a basis for looking into what we can expect in the longer term.

* Article translated from Spanish by Heather Dashner Monk.

** El Colegio de México; falba@colmex.mx

In the third section, I will explore what some of the long-term implications of the Trump administration's restrictionist policies and actions might be. With that aim, I analyze these policies in terms of continuity and change with respect to preceding ones. With that, I hope to have the elements that can form the basis for the speculation about what can be expected in the relatively near future.

Part of the short- and long-term implications are linked to Mexico, given that Trump's positions aim to affect its migratory trends as well as those of the region as a whole. In addition, those positions are both challenges and opportunities for the design of Mexican migratory responses. Therefore, the fourth and last section deals with migratory responses and policies of the new Andrés Manuel López Obrador administration as well as the possible reactions to Trump administration positions and actions. I also present Mexican policies compared to the migratory policies that preceded them.

Trump's World View

To put the Trump administration's immigration positions in context, in general, and specifically those related to immigration in North America, it is pertinent to present a brief overview of President Trump's vision of international relations and global issues: that is, his world view. Trump sees world relations as competitive, as a zero-sum game, in which what some countries win, others lose. In this view, "other countries" have been taking advantage of the United States for a long time. The following overview is based on two main aspects: isolationism and unilateralism. The Trump administration has ended up adopting isolationist, unilateral forms of behavior.

About isolationism, the general context is that of a United States in retreat. One face of this is in the economy. Trump is trying to distance himself from the liberal world order created after World War II and led essentially by the United States. This distancing can be seen in the adoption of economic nationalism, centered obviously on "America," and its clearest, most succinct expression is "America First."¹ It is a symbol of the United States' new economic nationalism, which also translates into growing protectionist orientations. The latter are manifested, among other ways, in the renegotia-

¹ Words proudly emblazoned on all manner of placards and caps.

tion of NAFTA “in favor of the United States,” in the conversations with China to reduce the trade deficit, or in the imposition of tariffs on aluminum, steel, and many other goods imported from a wide range of countries.

Another face of this U.S. retreat is the promotion of national identity. This consists of the construction of an exclusive and exclusionary identity: the “American” identity. Although it might seem paradoxical, for Trump, the United States needs to be recognized once again. Now, this orientation to identity has not emerged only in the United States: in the entire world, national identity policies have been reinforced, partly as a reaction to globalization, migratory movements, the trade opening and the opening of images and ideas, and in the face of options offering modernization. Fukuyama has argued that identity politics is the lens through which social problems are now seen, with little importance given to ideological contexts. National, social, cultural, or religious identity emerges from those who seek to recover recognition and dignity (Fukuyama, 2018).

We can also identify at least two faces of unilateralism. On the one hand, we can mention the denunciations of international agreements like the Nuclear Treaty with Iran signed in 2015, from which Trump withdrew in May 2018, or the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia. On the other hand, we see the distancing from—even disdain for—international organizations and multilateralism (Boon, 2017: 1075-1091). The administration is reticent to commit itself to “global causes.” Examples are the abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an agreement that had already been practically fully negotiated,² or of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact for Refugees, both of which were signed and approved in the United Nations last December with the United States voting against. These facts reveal the administration’s reticence to take on any kind of commitment—minimal and indirect though it might be—since these compacts are non-binding. In this context, we can also mention the attempts to reduce funding for foreign aid and U.S. contributions to the United Nations. Also important to mention is the withdrawal from previously acquired commitments, pacts, or international agreements, such as the administration pulling out of the Paris Accords, the UNESCO, or the aforementioned Iran nuclear deal, which is multilateral.

² Regarding trade, the administration prefers bilateral to multilateral agreements.

Regardless of Trump's personality or personal interpretational code, it is important to point out that his world view is a defensive response to world events, to specific adverse effects of globalization, effects that have been sharply felt in recent years. Trump is situated at the vortex of those events; and, he is the product of that vortex. Some of these events are what extensive literature refers to as big global problems or structural factors.

Many of them are partly sub-products, both in the long run and practically the world over, of the evolution of the liberal order set up after World War II and of globalization. Some of these structural factors could be viewed as flaws, inefficiencies, or insufficiencies of globalization. Specifically, in the advanced countries, we find first of all the growing economic and social inequalities that have spread and deepened above all from the 1970s and 1980s on.³ Perhaps de-industrialization, the erosion of the productive foundation of the economy, comes in second place due to the many industrial processes that have moved from previously huge industrial countries to new emerging economies, with the resulting job loss and changes in the labor markets. The advanced countries' markets are overflowing with products "Made in China," as are other more distant countries, and consumers both notice and benefit from this. Other structural factors are part of technological change, automation, and the fourth industrial revolution, which have also produced unemployment and readjustments in the job market, as well as a shift toward services.

Reactions to these structural changes are, of course, forthcoming. In a very unique way, Trump's is a reaction specific to the increasing inequality and economic stagnation: the nationalism of "America First" and identity politics. From this perspective, Trump is perhaps both a symptom and a dynamizing agent of our time.

Certainly, the international liberal order is sick, convulsed, and breaking up. Globalization has created economic insecurity and belittled social solidarity.⁴ A division has been created between the "elites," the experts, the highly qualified, on the one hand, and the "aggrieved," those left by the way-

³ The inequalities are worldwide, but in the advanced countries, they have been significantly reduced in the past, while in the "less advanced" countries they were, and continue to be, profound.

⁴ Michael Zürn (2018) has developed a theory of world governance whose central argument is that world politics has developed a structure of power hierarchies and inequalities, therefore endogenously producing protest, resistance, and distributive struggles.

side, those who seek to protect themselves from economic competition, technological change, foreigners, and the Other. Practically all countries are facing a difficult choice: raising obstacles, barriers, protections, walls—whether symbolic, virtual, or real— or renegotiating the terms of international rules so that all parties can move ahead in an increasingly interdependent world (Benner, 2018). But for Trump, U.S. national sovereignty comes before everything else and before any other country; it is sovereignty with no concessions under any circumstances.

Another product of globalization and the liberal order is the conflict over migration in today's world. Like Trump's unilateral, protectionist, nationalist, and identity-based reactions in the fields of trade, investment, globalization, and integration, he has reacted similarly to immigration. As mentioned above, the United States withdrew from the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact for Refugees. This is a reflection of Trump's negligible determination to adapt to contemporary migratory realities and pressures and to take steps toward minimal alliances for shared world migratory governance.

Trump seems to be concerned with two gaps: the trade gap and the immigration gap. Just as he is attempting to reduce the trade imbalance by reducing the deficit, in immigration matters, he is attempting to limit what he considers a migratory imbalance. It is well known that since his campaign, immigration has been one of the central axes of Trump's political agenda. This centrality is often accompanied with a sense of urgency.

He has sought to reduce immigration by three main policies and actions: restricting immigration, extending regulatory measures, and strictly enforcing immigration laws. With regard to restricting immigration, in the first days of his presidency, he reduced the number of refugees allowed entry and imposed a travel ban on citizens from majority Muslim countries; at the same time, he sought to suppress temporary protection status (TPS) and attempted to cancel DACA. The administration also proposed reducing the number of immigrants for reasons of family reunification. Regarding the expansion of regulatory measures, we can note, for example, the imposition of obstacles, more interviews and questionings, changes in procedures and an increase in their complexity and level of difficulty, or the limitations of rights, including access to due process. Finally, with regard to more strictly enforcing immigration law, we can cite measures such as blocking unauthorized

entry into the country, expulsion of unauthorized migrants, not only of those with no criminal record at all since not having a record is not considered a guarantee of anything (“If you don’t have permission to be here, you’ve got to go.”), or the zero-tolerance policy.

From the very beginning, Trump made clear his intention of restricting immigration in general and that which came from specific countries and of people with specific religions in particular. Mexico and the three nations that have been dubbed Central America’s Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) are among those countries. The citizens of the Northern Triangle enter mainly—though not exclusively—through the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump seems to have focused his anti-immigration attention and actions against that border and that migration. Obviously, this restrictive intent affects both Mexico and the migratory system of North America very directly.

The epitome of this focus is the idea to “Build the Wall” along the entire U.S. southern border to stop irregular entries and to reinforce immigration law enforcement inside the country to increase deportations, plus the fight against sanctuary cities, the reinforcement of secure communities, attempts to not renew *DACA* (which benefits above all Mexican migrants), and the announcement of the cancellation of temporary protection status (*TPS*), which affects El Salvador above all, but also Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Sudan. This is the context for the militarization of the border,⁵ as well as the pronouncements about the existence of a border crisis, a national emergency, threats and risks to national security due to the border situation, and the need to “save our nation” from the caravans of Central American migrants Trump says are criminals.⁶

It seems to be a good idea to briefly explain the aforementioned aspects about the general global context of immigration issues under the Trump administration before considering their short- and long-term implications, specifically for regional migratory phenomena regarding Mexico and Central America and for the migrants themselves from those countries.

⁵ Three thousand seven hundred army troops were deployed along the border in early 2019, supposedly to support Border Patrol efforts and also to put up, for example, wire fence, etc.

⁶ The issue of the border crisis and national emergency was the first point on Trump’s State of the Union address on February 5, 2019. About the importance given to immigration in the United States and Mexico, see Alba (2019).

Short-term Implications: Meager Achievements In the Face of Extravagant Objectives

Before developing the short-term implications of Trump's immigration policies, I will present an analytical line of argument to order my assessments of them. This line of argument rests on important premises: that the U.S. system has a solid division of the branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial); that there is ample space for checks and balances; that solid institutions exist; and that federal and state governments have their own spheres of sovereignty.

On this basis, my line of argumentation first of all states that the federal government's actions and policies can face a multitude of obstacles and restrictions as they are implemented. This line of argumentation has been masterfully developed by Pierce, Bolter, and Selee (2018) when analyzing the development of the Trump administration's positions on immigration in his first year in office. The administration has made an enormous number of promises and he has made a huge number of speeches and undertaken a large number of actions (executive orders, bans, impediments, barriers, controls, surveillance along its southern border) to restrict and control immigration.

However, Trump's actions and initiative have met with many brakes, restrictions, restraints, questions, and resistances, and his decisions have faced many checks. Basically, four agents, agencies, or social and institutional actors have been the source of restrictions on Trump's actions and initiatives: the courts; federal and state legislatures; civil society organizations, including churches and academia; and state and municipal governments. I will mention here a few instances, by way of example, of how these agencies have acted, as demonstrations of the separation of powers, of the existence of checks, and the solidity of the institutions.

The courts have played a central role in slowing down many of Trump's initiatives, blocking and revising them. Almost as soon as he makes a decision about a specific group of migrants, a judge approves an injunction against it.

The federal legislative branch has been an important check. Despite there having been a Republican majority in both houses of Congress until the 2018 elections,⁷ neither has approved more than minor amounts when Trump

⁷ The Republicans continue to have the majority in the Senate after the 2018 midterm elections.

has requested funds for building the border wall and increasing border surveillance personnel.⁸ Congress has not substantially changed immigration norms, even though the few measures adopted have been to shore up enforcement.

Non-governmental organizations, for their part, have been very active as checks also, as have churches, the press, and academia. The discontinuance of the zero-tolerance policy and the separation of parents and children in 2018 are examples of the brake effect on Trump's actions due to pressure from society.

Relations between the federal government and the states are ambivalent. Many states have positions in line with Trump's policies, such as Texas. But other state governments have also acted to check his general policies, attempting to slow them down. California may be the most outstanding case: the recently elected governor stated that he was going to withdraw the National Guard from California's border with Mexico. Since Trump took office, state legislative activity has heightened; some state legislatures have passed bills against sanctuary cities, but others have attempted to protect immigrants, forbidding local police forces from acting as arms of the federal government.

This tussle between promises and restrictions has to a great extent cushioned the potential adverse implications of the Trump administration's actions and initiatives. Of course, Trump's anti-immigration initiatives have serious and grave short-term implications.⁹ Nevertheless, those consequences have been much less significant than what the administration sought or "hoped for," perhaps with a few exceptions.

The implications can be divided into two categories: on the one hand, they can be found in the direct spheres that the actions and policies aimed at (the wall, deportations); on the other hand, additional implications involve phenomena that they intend to change, such as immigration trends and behavior.

I will begin with the first category. What has happened to the famous wall that Trump was going to build? First of all, we should remember that its construction began in the 1990s. Trump does not seem to keep this fact in mind, or that the wall was already 700 miles long when he took office, when making speeches. In fact, two years after he took office, Trump has practically not built a single additional mile of wall, although he does seem to have

⁸ In fact, the Border Patrol had fewer agents in 2018 than it did in 2013.

⁹ It is important to say, however, that the short- and long-term implications feed on each other, and that no clear distinction exists between the two. The next section will emphasize the long-term implications.

remodeled some of what already existed. However, there has been a very serious impact: in the past, the wall was used to discourage surreptitious entry into the United States, as a deterrent. By contrast, under the Trump administration, the wall has become a kind of symbol of exclusion: the idea is to really seal up the United States.

The case of deportations or removals is similar. The practice of deportations is, of course, nothing new, and they became particularly intense and visible during the second Bush administration (2005-2009) and continued more consistently and increasingly under the two Obama administrations (2009-2017); President Obama even received the soubriquet of “Deporter-in-Chief.” While under the Trump administration the number of deportations has been lower than in previous years,¹⁰ important differences exist between the Bush and Obama administrations and the current one in terms of their implications. In the two former administrations, what was expected implicitly—and even explicitly—was a trade-off between increased deportations, as shown by the strict enforcement of the law, and the adoption of a more or less broad, comprehensive immigration reform. Under Trump, this trade-off disappears: now deportations can be seen as part of a strategy of migration cleansing. The idea is to clean the United States of unauthorized migration, a qualitative jump with regard to past aims.

Linked to these extensive deportations, Trump and certain segments of the population have also generated open hostility and harassment of migrants in general or specific groups of migrants.¹¹ Both have increased fear above all among the undocumented. Naturally, that fear already existed and has always been present; but undoubtedly the fear and insecurity have intensified under the Trump administration.¹²

I find that there are both continuities and changes—perhaps more of the former than the latter—regarding the short-term effects on the immigration

¹⁰ The annual number of deportations under Trump has not even reached half the number of the Obama era, although during the last years of the Obama administration, the numbers tended to decline; but we cannot say that this trend has consolidated.

¹¹ Trump has directed not only restrictive initiatives and actions but also insults toward specific countries and groups of migrants. Immigrants are suspects, criminals, little more than animals. I will not repeat here more of Trump’s descriptions of certain groups of immigrants.

¹² As others have written, the lives of undocumented immigrants are lives of homelessness, not necessarily in the traditional sense, but in the sense of an unsettled, unmoored psychological state. They live a lie; they are forced to lie to survive, to get by, to “pass” as U.S. Americans and as taxpayers; they live their lives in hiding, hiding from the government and from themselves (Vargas, 2018).

trends and patterns themselves (on policy results, related to the aim of reducing immigration by strengthening control and surveillance on the southern border and the construction of the wall). Certainly, sufficient statistics do not exist yet; we only have preliminary stats and they point to differing results. Several trends seem to have almost completely continued just as they had prior to Trump's taking office. Others seem to have changed, but not profoundly. It is important to point out that many recently observed migratory tendencies already existed before he took office. However, the continuities and changes may be misleading, since it is very difficult to attribute the continued trends, their consolidation, or their acceleration or deceleration to Trump's actions and policies. Some of these trends could have short-term implications, and others, long-term effects.¹³

By the time Trump took office, Mexican migration had already lost the dynamism it showed from the 1990s until 2008. From that year on, emigration, specifically unauthorized emigration, began to drop and has stagnated at "low levels" for several years now.¹⁴ Accordingly, the volume of Mexicans in the United States dropped slightly and has remained more or less stable. Of that number, however, the unauthorized group has declined, given in great part to the fact that the deportations have continued;¹⁵ the group of authorized immigrants has compensated for the unauthorized group. This trend can be attributed to the Great Recession that began in 2008, the increase in immigration controls, and a reduction of the Mexican demographic pressure. It is not very clear if, of the three factors cited, the second was the main factor in preventing an immigration resurgence when the U.S. economy began to recover in the 2010s. In any case, under Trump, the immigration trends and patterns of the last ten years seem to have been maintained and perhaps reinforced.

Central American migration, by contrast, that would seem to have behaved similarly to Mexico's, has become very dynamic and does not look like it will abate or diminish. This renewed dynamism seems to be accompanied by changes in migratory forms or patterns: a kind of restructuring with a higher

¹³ I do not put the accent on specific annual figures because what are important are the trends and changes attributable to Trump, which will only be seen with time.

¹⁴ It is interesting to observe that in recent years, the number of Mexican temporary agricultural workers, who have H-2A visas, has been growing.

¹⁵ The slower rate of deportations cannot necessarily be considered "positive," given that the stocks of certain populations, for example, those easily deported, have been dropping.

family component, a greater presence of refugees, and the appearance of migrant caravans in 2018. All of this would seem to suggest an additional migratory surge, although this is not necessarily the case. In addition to the continuity in the operation of the traditional migratory factors of “rejection and attraction,” what may be operating in this re-dynamization and change in the composition of these migratory flows is the increase in violence and insecurity in the Central American region.

Similarly, transit migration through Mexico, which seemed to have dropped, has once again recovered the dynamic it displayed before, with changes in strategy: the attempt to make their transit through the country safer with the caravans, making their cause more visible; facilitating access to the United States; and invoking asylum in that country. Of course, we can discern a “Trump effect” in this behavior.¹⁶

In a different sphere, perhaps a third category of short-term implications, we find the growing polarization of the immigration debate. Before Trump, it was clear that different opinions and immigration positions existed: on the one hand, those who favored a “comprehensive immigration reform,” and on the other, the “first-enforce-the-law” group. But with Trump’s arrival on the scene, these opinions have taken on an unusual combativeness; the debate is openly polarized and seems irreconcilable. On one side are those in favor of immigration restrictionism, mostly Republicans, with clearly negative connotations about migrants, particularly Mexicans and Central Americans. On the other are those whose attitudes about immigration are more accommodating, mostly Democrats, who sometimes seek to defend everything they can. I think that the forms of this debate and this split are another example of the qualitative changes in behavior that were already occurring.

In summary, we could say that in general the available assessments in both the United States and Mexico about implications of Trump’s actions and policies tend to point out —although this may be debatable— that the changes in migratory trends and behavior patterns until now have been relatively minor compared to the changes that might have been expected and that Trump promised in the early days of his administration. What is more, some changes and trends are the opposite of what was promised and expected

¹⁶ The caravans have allowed Trump to up the centrality of immigration on the political agenda and given him arguments to create a sense of urgency about border control and the construction of the wall: “We have to do something.”

from the policies and actions implemented. Generally speaking, reality does not seem to have adjusted to the promises, the rhetoric, or the speeches. However, this observation, that the short-term effects do not seem to have materialized Trump's aims or that the changes in migratory trends and patterns have been relatively minor, could lead to misleading implications about the future, since in the future, these effects may not be so minor.

Potential Long-term Implications

Venturing into the terrain of the long-term implications of the Trump administration's positions is, of course, a highly speculative exercise. However, I think sufficient elements exist to hazard some formulations and limit speculation.¹⁷ To understand the Trump administration's positions and proposals for immigration, we must include how they developed on a temporal axis: they have a past and roots in time. From a temporal perspective, we can observe that today's immigration stances display both changes and continuities, or changes amidst continuities; perhaps greater deepening of those continuities, more than an inflection, and at the same time qualitative changes could be brewing throughout that deepening.

By situating Trump in his historic moment, we can observe that his immigration policies have long-standing precedents. I will begin by mentioning some of the main "legal" precedents of today's U.S. immigration policy and then comment about four areas in which those implications could be felt in the long run: the growing importance of immigration issues; the qualitative jump in the restrictive message; the strengthening of border security; and the dilution or blurring of the development-migration perspective. I will finalize with a reflection about the potential short- and long-term implications of Trump's positions and stances for Mexican migratory policy, specifically beginning with the López Obrador administration.

The first observation is that Trump is not the creator of the anti-immigration, restrictive policies of today; they date back more than thirty years at least. This historic trend has presented different nuances, of course. It began

¹⁷ Just as in the case for the short-term implications, it is difficult to discern the long-term, direct and indirect implications of Trump's policies and actions.

with the IRCA in 1986, not to look any further back; then we saw the border control of the 1990s, when none other than the Clinton administration started the “control operations” in key urban areas of the border with Mexico and signed two bills into law, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. Later, the events of September 11, 2001 changed the general panorama of international relations the world over, not only those of the United States. They led to a change in priorities in general terms of U.S. policy and that of many other countries.¹⁸ The antiterrorist fight and border security meant that, from 2001 on, immigration and national security would be intimately intertwined. It is no easy matter in North America nor in other contexts to disassociate this binomial; it has become part of the international and global discussion about migration. In the European Union, the Directorate General of Migration and Home Affairs is in charge both of migration and asylum issues and borders and security.

After September 11, 2001, faced with what was considered “a broken immigration system,” officials sought to reformulate immigration law and the entire immigration system, sparking a debate on the issue. This debate has lined up along two opposing sides, with relatively few points of contact: that of comprehensive immigration reform on the one hand and enforcement first and only.¹⁹ During this debate, deportations are used, first during Bush’s second term and then during Obama’s two terms, to try to arrive at a kind of trade-off between deportations as a sign that the law was being enforced and an agreement to pass a more or less comprehensive immigration bill. However, throughout the process and the years, politicians have not come to agreements nor made major changes, although the second camp has ended up winning more spaces than the first. In fact, it has not been possible to arrive at any agreement.

After this brief historical sketch, I will comment on the aforementioned four areas in which I find potential long-term implications for Trump’s positions. In the first place, immigration has moved to the center of the public agenda, where it can most likely be expected to stay. That is, it will predictably

¹⁸ Those events and that change directly affected the Mexican case; they immediately produced the cancellation of the 2001 migratory negotiations.

¹⁹ Although the division has not been totally along party lines, the first camp tends to be made up mainly of Democrats and the second, of Republicans.

retain its importance in the political debate for the long term.²⁰ This centrality could lead in the future to a redefinition of migration issues, although it is not clear what that redefinition might look like, whether good or bad. However, continuing with the speculation, when immigration reform comes in the United States, it could occur under the weight of anxiety, notoriety, and the threat of immigration, and lean even more toward the restrictionist camp, as has been the case for several years. The centrality and growing importance of immigration issues on public and political agendas are associated with the qualitative jump the restrictionist drift has experienced in many countries.

Associated with this area is the second, that of the restrictionist message. With Trump, a “very tough” restrictionist message has expanded, and its expressions have experienced a qualitative jump. The message is direct, virulent, brutal: migrants are criminals; they are a threat; their arrival represents a national emergency; the door must be closed to them; they must be gotten rid of.

In the face of this message criminalizing migration and rejecting migrants, fear and dread have been sown among the immigrant population, above all, I believe, in the United States. That fear is well documented and has always existed, but it has jumped qualitatively with Trump, with migrant communities experiencing a quantum leap and its predictable long-term consequences, such as isolation and a tendency to not make many second-generation immigrants into citizens with full rights.

A third area that shows the effects of serious long-term implications is strengthening border security. In my opinion, enhanced border security will be further entrenched in the future. I would go so far as to say that border control will probably be a position of the two large U.S. political parties, that is, it will be a bipartisan issue. This attention to strengthening the border is by no means recent, but with Trump it has consolidated, and it is likely to consolidate even more. The increase in resources and personnel for controlling the United States southern border is a tendency that has existed for

²⁰ Immigration is a central issue on public policy agendas the world over, not just in the United States or in North America, but also, and very particularly, in Europe—think about Brexit and the rise of extreme or ultra-right parties in France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Poland. In terms of the long-term implications, not all the attention goes to restrictionism; there are also encouraging signs like the recent adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

many years now, under both Republican and Democratic administrations.²¹ Amidst the present confrontational climate in Congress, although the Democrats resist earmarking funds for the wall, they are willing to apportion monies for greater border surveillance.

Obviously, a central component of border security has been the construction of a wall all along it. I have already mentioned the background of this wall, as well as the fact that it has been extended under Democratic and Republican administrations. However, under Trump, it has gone from being a wall to being *The Wall*, and from being a deterrent to being a symbol of exclusion. So, regardless of momentary rhetoric and the electoral use of the discourse about the wall, the message about its being finished undoubtedly has long-term implications—as well as those for the immediate future—: it sends a message that it is acceptable to exclude, it is acceptable to want to exclude as far as possible, as much as is possible and feasible.

A fourth area with serious potential long-term implications is the growing divorce between development and migratory phenomena; the conceptual links between them have begun to dissolve. I am apprehensive about the possibility that in the immediate future, the prospect of shared responsibility for promoting regional development may fade. This prospect existed when NAFTA was being negotiated and “sold politically.” It was a kind of trade-off between trade and migration, discouraging emigration.²² The trade renegotiations that led to the USMCA produced what I consider a dissipation of that link between development and migration, if not its complete disappearance. It will be difficult in the future to recover that perspective not only conceptually but also politically. In Trump’s view, the two are completely separate issues.

In summary, it is my opinion that, while there has been great continuity in the historic restrictive position, Trump could also represent a great leap, perhaps a qualitative leap along the line of that restrictive vision. His taking office may have represented a significant deepening of that trend. This opinion is full of long-term implications: today’s restrictive deepening shows all

²¹ This is the case regardless of an apparent standstill in growth and even a slight decline in Border Patrol personnel in recent years.

²² The relative inefficacy of that discouragement is another matter altogether. From the start, doubts existed about whether that discouragement of migration was going to fully work (Alba, 1993: 343-349).

indications of continuing in the immediate future, but, given that restrictive migratory momentum, it could also be prolonged in the long run. That might be “for the wrong reasons,”²³ but, nevertheless, due to real, factual reasons.

And, it is the case that the short term predicts the long term; every short term is also a long term. A legacy of this is the validation, at the very least, of a less accommodating attitude toward immigration, if not a position diametrically opposed to immigration in general and to refugees in particular; opposition to immigration from the region. Trump’s new discourse confirms this: the United States is full, and there’s no more space for immigrants or for refugees.²⁴

Finally, all the implications cited above, both short-term and the potential long-term ones, affect Mexico one way or another, directly or indirectly, and, therefore, Mexican policies in terms of its bilateral and regional relations and its migratory relations. In the last section, I will reflect on Mexican migratory policies and stances, to a great extent in the light of U.S. policies and actions, as well as the implications of those policies and actions.

Mexico’s Migratory Positions

Mexico’s government under Peña Nieto had to deal with the migratory policies of the last two U.S. administrations, both that of Obama and that of Trump. In general, we could say that, regardless of its own reasons and objectives, Mexico’s position had to accommodate to a certain degree some of the demands and pressures that these administrations brought to bear toward controlling the migrants that transit through our country toward the United States.²⁵ It is now of interest to observe and analyze the Mexican government’s position on migration since Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office as president of Mexico.

The analysis of the current Mexican position must be made from a dual perspective: on the one hand, that of a temporal central axis. Just like in the analysis of the Trump administration, in the Mexican case, the obligatory question is, change or continuity or change and continuity? On the other

²³ When I write “for the wrong reasons,” I am referring to the fact that frequently there is no empirical basis—or at least an insufficient basis—for espousing radical restrictive arguments.

²⁴ Statement at the border in early April 2019 (Kim and Perry, 2019).

²⁵ Since 2014, the Southern Border Plan could be—and has been—interpreted as a position that accommodated to U.S. pressure.

hand, the second perspective we must use to examine Mexican migratory policy is to explore the extent to which it could “respond” to Trump’s migratory positions and to the implications of those positions for Mexican and regional migratory reality.

First off, López Obrador’s government presents its position as “a new migratory policy.” So, we should first note that the new administration wants to distance itself from all previous Mexican governments and their behavior. In the same way, and perhaps as part of that distancing from previous governments, it emphasizes that the new migratory policy “is sovereign”; this means that, therefore, it is not reactive to the actions, policies, and aims of the Trump administration.

The new migratory policy rests on two pillars: one, using a human rights perspective; the other, using a development perspective to solve emigration problems. Regarding change or continuity or change and continuity, I am inclined to think that what we have is change and continuity because this “new policy” is anchored in traditional Mexican positions. To a great extent, the two pillars of this new migratory policy fit in with the traditional Mexican narrative. However, the existence of more or fewer continuity components does not mean that there are no relatively new components or qualitative jumps, which may even be long-lasting with regard to previous traditional positions.

With regard to the human rights perspective, suffice it to remember that since the 1980s—to go no further back—, Mexico has always defended domestically and at international forums the responsibilities countries have toward migrants in another country, even unauthorized migrants.²⁶ Mexico has traditionally argued for the creation of an international institutional framework of rights and obligations for handling global migration. It was a leader in the creation of the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted in 1990 and in effect since 2003 (Alba, 2010: 515-546).

A very important legal change took place in 2011 with regard to the previous legal framework: a new Migration Law was passed, explicitly seeking to bring Mexico’s legal framework into line with the international requirements set out in the convention. This was a law completely dedicated to guaranteeing

²⁶ The international community has seen the activities of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) as good praxis, good practices of everything that can be done to protect migrants both inside and outside the country.

rights. Also in 2011, the Law on Refugees and Complementary Protection was passed. Clearly, multiple firm precedents already existed for this human rights perspective. Its implementation is another matter, and a great deal can be discussed in that vein, but the legal framework has been there and continues in place.

Pointing to the continuity of previous orientations emphasizing the safeguarding of human rights in the new policy does not mean that it contains nothing new. Some of these elements can even be classified as qualitative changes, both regarding the protection of Mexicans abroad—the idea is to turn Mexico’s consulates into migrant defense ombudsman offices—and migrants and immigrants in transit, which is a deepening of the guarantee of rights and a generous attitude. With regard to the latter point, we can list the distribution of cards to people as visitors for humanitarian reasons; a larger number of approvals of asylum and refugee status; and the acceptance of asylum seekers in the United States back in Mexico, who originally crossed into the U.S. from Mexico, so they can wait here until the U.S. courts resolve their cases, all for what is described as humanitarian reasons.²⁷ In addition, just as in the past Mexico made the Convention for the Protection of Migratory Workers its guide for the 2011 Migration Law, the current Mexican government, in the framework of the new migratory policy, is making the conceptual basis of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration the center of its policy, thus making it into “the first country” to comply with what was signed in December last year.

The second pillar of its policy, development as a solution to emigration, is also part of the country’s traditional narrative. This was part of the basis for NAFTA; the idea was to open the Mexican economy to grow more, create more jobs, and achieve better wages, all of which was going to discourage massive migration and take pressure off the migratory issue. This helped the Mexican and U.S. negotiators to sell the treaty politically.²⁸ Along these same lines of development and migration, we could include the attitude—which may be rhetoric—of President Calderón, who sought to develop the country as a way out of the migratory issue when he did not continue with his

²⁷ This could be a mini-, partial, and indirect version of the controversial request to turn Mexico into a third safe country.

²⁸ A completely different matter is the fact that the NAFTA strategy was insufficient for creating the country’s inclusive, sustainable development.

predecessor Vicente Fox's negotiating approach. Peña Nieto, for his part, seems to have tacitly taken the same approach, contributing to the country's eventual development. This approach was also present in the Fox administration's Puebla-Panama Plan, which aimed at developing southern Mexico and all of Central America in order to, among other things, improve living standards and promote people staying in their home regions.

With regard to this second pillar, development as the solution to emigration, we of course could speak of a qualitative jump in the new development project with aims to keep people in their home regions and slow emigration from Mexico's Southeast and Central America, specifically the three countries of the Northern Triangle: Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Very important projects of infrastructure and investment in Mexico's Southeast do exist (the Maya Train Railroad, the Trans-isthmus Corridor, the Dos Bocas Refinery, and the massive planting of fruit trees). A greater qualitative jump would be if what has been called a Marshall Plan for Central America and Mexico's Southeast could be institutionalized. This would mean that the current U.S. administration, and perhaps others, would be willing to put in place a development plan like the one organized for European recovery after World War II.²⁹ Mexico seems to be willing to go it alone in this regional development effort, which would also be a true qualitative jump.

In addition to these two explicit pillars of the new migratory policy, a third exists that, although not explicit, is implicitly present at all times: non-confrontation with U.S. initiatives and actions. It is a tacit element indirectly underlying the other two and almost linking them. The statement that this new policy is sovereign is also obviously related to the point of non-confrontation and the issue of the implications of Trump's policies for Mexican policies and responses.

To organize my ideas about the potential impact on Mexican positions of the Trump administration's policies and actions, I will use the analytical axis of "action and reaction" of policies between Mexico and the United States and also a temporal perspective. The migratory relationship between the two countries has historically been so intense in multiple senses that it

²⁹ For the moment, Mexico has only made promises of aid to Central American countries, and the United States has offered guarantees to investments. I am rather skeptical about the results of the support López Obrador seeks from the United States for the development of Central America and southern Mexico.

is unthinkable that they not be mutually involved. Mexican policies have traditionally had a “reactive” component *vis-à-vis* U.S. actions. The analytical thread running through Mexican and U.S. policies in the *Estudio Binacional México-Estados Unidos sobre Migración* (Mexico-U.S. Binational Study on Migration) (1997) was to consider them a field of “action and reaction” (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1997).

This “action and reaction” dynamic continued with the 2001 bilateral migratory negotiations, initially proposed by Mexico. It continued later with Bush’s 2004 migratory proposal, and, amidst the defensive, self-absorbed climate following the events of September 11, 2001, with the Mexican reaction of “shared responsibility,” starting in 2005 and 2006.³⁰

Given López Obrador’s non-confrontational attitude and subdued tone, the foregoing interpretation of action and reaction seems a bit out of place, inappropriate as an analytical tool. However, this is not completely the case.³¹ The apparent non-reaction also qualifies as one aspect of the implications of Trump’s policies.³² Non-confrontation, non-responses, resistance, and not reacting are all forms of action. Naturally, non-confrontation can also be seen as a qualitative change in the way of conducting migratory relations with the United States (Alba, 2019).

Prudence has certainly prevailed in the migratory relationship with the United States; what the other country does is respected, and Mexico will not enter into any conflict with Trump. But the non-reactive attitude implies that there also will not be engagement; there will not be serious, open dialogue; there will be no negotiation; and it will be difficult to arrive at shared responsibility. That is, the two countries could continue on the road of di-

³⁰ The concept of “shared responsibility” has become a central axis of later Mexican positions. The country offers to shoulder its own responsibility in the matter, but demands that there be co-responsibility in handling migration.

³¹ The non-confrontational attitude and distancing in handling migration are also not new. Previous Mexican governments have also distanced themselves, though perhaps not explicitly. In the 1970s and 1980s, given the premise that not very much could be done about migration, they opted for a *laissez-faire* attitude, letting migration take its course. For its part, after seeing that Fox’s attempt to create a dialogue did not receive much of an answer from the Bush administration, the Calderón government opted for a kind of distancing and the issue of migration began to stop occupying a central place on the agenda with the United States.

³² The distribution for a very short time of Visitor Cards for Humanitarian Reasons in the early days of the López Obrador government and the later return to turning foreigners away, as well as Mexico’s receiving people seeking asylum in the United States cannot not be seen also as responses or indirect or implicit reactions to Trump’s positions and actions.

verging policy patterns (Alba, 2016). Today, in times of Trump and López Obrador, to put it in two words, U.S. immigration policy is to a great degree politically incorrect. By contrast, Mexico's is attempting to be politically correct. A politically correct migratory policy seems to include the agreement to accommodate migrants one way or another and to promote the development of southern Mexico and Central America.

But, all interpretations aside, the fact is that Mexico seems to have left behind being above all a country of emigrants on a grand scale, although it will continue to send people abroad, and has begun to become a country that takes in both its returning nationals, many with families born in the United States, and foreign migrants. In the future, Mexico could also change from being a country for migrant transit into one of immigrants, asylum, and refuge, while continuing to be a transit country. It could move in those new directions swiftly or more slowly and gradually, with all the implications that both would have in terms of opportunities and challenges.

Finally, the two countries can operate amidst a kind of tranquil co-existence and overlook the "irritating components" of the migratory relationship. However, an aggressive attitude on the one hand and the non-reaction on the other enclose the potential for turning an "irritating migratory relationship" into a "turbulent migratory relationship." In order not to close on a pessimistic note, it could also mean that that irritating migratory relationship could in the long run move toward a peaceful migratory accommodation and shared regional prosperity.

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