

# Mexican-U.S. Relations

## A Presidential Campaign Issue

*Alejandro Becerra Gelóver\**

The year 2000 will be crucial in Mexico-U.S. relations. Every 12 years, the two country's presidential elections coincide, the last time in 1988 when George Bush won in the United States and Carlos Salinas in Mexico. Though both countries are holding legislative elections as well, clearly this year's presidential races attract the most attention.

Over the past few years the bilateral agenda has revolved around topics like migration, drug trafficking, trade and investment, energy resources and ecology, frequent topics of heated debate for both countries' governments and societies. Other issues such as human rights, border problems and organized crime have also become important items on the agenda.

In Mexico, six candidates are running for president, but only three have any real possibility of winning.<sup>1</sup> Vicente Fox Quesada heads up the conservative Alliance for Change backed by two parties: the National Action Party (PAN) and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM). Francisco Labastida Ochoa is the candidate for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), currently in power and considered to be at the center of the ideological spectrum. The center-left Alliance for Mexico, represented by presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, is made up of five parties: the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), Convergence for Democracy

(CD), the Party of the Nationalist Society (PSN), the Labor Party (PT) and the Party of the Social Alliance (PAS).

Each of these three leading candidates have outlined their proposals in the political platforms<sup>2</sup> their respective parties have registered with the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), the country's highest authority in charge of organizing and acting as arbitrator in the federal elections. The platforms all have foreign policy planks, and more specifically, on Mexico's relations with the United States.

### VICENTE FOX QUESADA

Alliance for Change candidate Vicente Fox Quesada includes ten planks in his electoral platform. The tenth, "An Active Role in the World," refers to foreign policy and emphasizes the influence of globalization in Mexico. Four main courses of action are outlined: a proactive and diversified foreign policy, greater participation in international organizations, broadening out foreign trade and the defense of human rights of Mexicans living abroad.

Mexico's relationship with the United States is one of the most important items on its foreign policy agenda. Therefore, the alliance proposes broadening and diversifying Mexico's relations with the rest of the world by strengthening its ties with Europe, Asia and Africa. According to the alliance, Mexico's unique geopolitical location—a natural "bridge" between North and Latin America—should be used to the country's advantage.

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Translated by Andrea Martínez.

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in the platform, concretely the abuse suffered by Mexican migrants in the United States. Three courses of action are suggested: fostering respect for the civil and political rights of Mexicans living abroad; denouncing cases of abuse to the appropriate international authorities; and developing, together with the United States, temporary work programs in order to offer legal protection to immigrants. On the other hand, despite the importance it places on Mexico-U.S. relations, the alliance does not suggest concrete courses of actions on questions of trade and investment, drug trafficking or ecological and border problems.

FRANCISCO LABASTIDA OCHOA

Labastida's political platform is divided into six parts. The first, under the heading "A Sovereign Mexico Open to the World" suggests courses of action in foreign policy. In general, the PRI proposal sees Mexico in a changing world context which

has gone from bipolar confrontation to relative detente, characterized by a trilateral economic polarization in which the United Nations has been unable to establish and maintain conditions for peace. The PRI recognizes the importance of the United States as the world's great military power, an economic, technological and ideological-political leader with the leverage to pressure and set the rules of the game in the world economy.

The platform also suggests taking advantage of benefits stemming from globalization, pointing out the need to define strategies to secure national interests and sovereignty as well as to foster cooperation, disseminate national culture abroad, predict world financial and economic behavior and reaffirm the principles of Mexico's foreign policy.

Although the PRI's political platform diversifies Mexico's foreign relations, most of its proposals attribute great importance to the United States. They refer to topics on the bilateral agenda, stressing cooperation, ecology, migration, human rights, culture, drug trafficking, organized crime and border problems.

Regarding cooperation, Labastida suggests developing frameworks of trilateral collaboration (including Canada) in which one country would provide financing, another technical knowledge and the recipient country would participate actively in its implementation. The aim of this type of interaction would be to strengthen ties among the three countries in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The question of ecology is only touched upon, mentioning the intention of solving problems affecting both countries, according to the principle of shared and differentiated responsibility, although no specifics are given as to how to accomplish this.

Labastida's platform addresses the need to respect the basic rights of those who for political or economic reasons are residing abroad. Most Mexican migrants head towards the United States, and therefore the PRI proposes that migration be taken into account in both demographics

and the economy on both sides of the border and that migratory flows be considered an important issue on the bilateral agenda. Consequently, this problem cannot be dealt with through unilateral—and much less authoritarian—courses of action. Along the same lines, the Mexican government should strengthen ties with its citizens living north of the border through the development of health and educational and other programs that would link them economically and culturally to Mexico.

The PRI also includes human rights on its political agenda, pointing out the need to recognize their universal nature and establishing a system that would not apply them selectively or for political gain. In order to protect human rights, programs and concrete courses of action should be developed such as disseminating preventive and legal information or logistic support and providing legal counseling to Mexicans facing criminal charges.

Regarding migrant workers, Francisco Labastida suggests establishing a migratory pact with the United States similar to the one signed with Canada where federal authorities can formulate pacts with individual states requiring Mexican labor for their regional and sectorial markets. He also addresses the right of Mexican migrants who have lost their nationality to recover it, thereby strengthening their ties with their homeland and granting them rights under to Mexican law.

The PRI's platform also proposes facilitating the reentry of Mexicans living abroad, particularly in the U.S., by improving infrastructure and simplifying procedures for temporary or permanent reentry, both of people and their belongings, severely punishing corruption or abuse by Mexican authorities in these cases.

On the question of drug trafficking, the PRI aims to intensify the fight against transnational organized crime and corruption. They suggest establishing a legal framework of co-responsibility to deal with it, taking into account each country's priorities and strategies and rejecting any form of interference and extraterritorial implementation

of domestic legislation, such as that of the United States.

In the commercial sphere, the PRI proposes taking advantage of NAFTA to increase exports and to promote culture, technological development and the competitiveness of the export sector. They suggest broadening the infrastructure and establish-

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ing frameworks of services and support in the fields of design, information, quality control, product promotion and labor training. Along the same line, unfair trade practices would be fought. The PRI's platform proposes fostering foreign direct investment, creating alternative mechanisms of financing, revising legislation regarding the control of financial flows and strengthening legal security, reciprocal protection and investment guarantees.

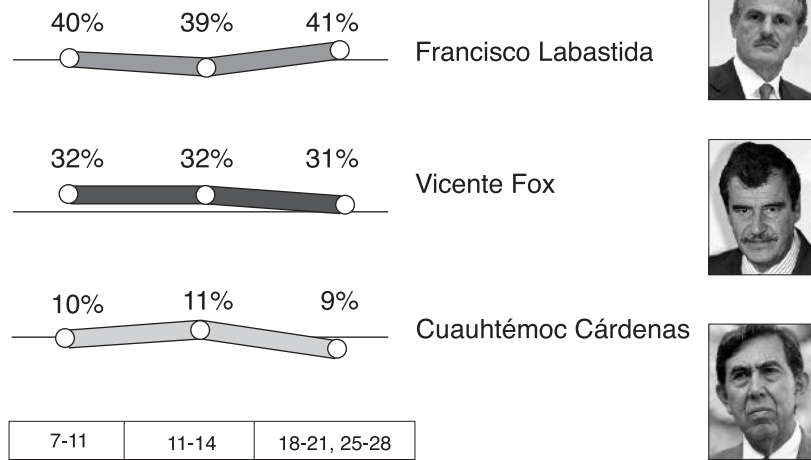
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Labastida believes that Mexico-U.S. relations present challenges, but also opportunities. Thus, an effort must be made to strengthen the legal and di-

## Electoral Trends

In a recent survey, the Reforma Group<sup>1</sup> asked 2,397 Mexicans residing in all 31 states and Mexico City, “How interested are you in politics?” Forty percent answered that they were only “slightly interested”, while 31 percent said they were totally uninterested; 22 percent that they were “somewhat interested”; and only 6 percent stated they were “very interested.” The graph illustrates the answers to the question,

If the presidential elections were held today, who would you vote for?



7-11 JANUARY	11-14 FEBRUARY	18-21, 25-28 FEBRUARY	
1%	1%	1%	Other
17%	17%	18%	Don't know/None of these

<sup>1</sup> Reforma (Mexico City), 15 March 2000. The Reforma Group is one of only four firms that the Federal Electoral Institute has stated fulfills its criteria for trustworthiness in its polling practices. [Editor's Note.]

plomatic framework that supports this relationship in order to resolve issues on the bilateral agenda.

### CUAUHTÉMOC CÁRDENAS SOLÓRZANO

The political platform of the Alliance for Mexico headed up by presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas is divided into eight sections. Under the heading “A Sovereign Nation within the Global Context,” the last section addresses foreign policy and relations with the United States. However, the

bilateral relation is also addressed in the section entitled “Sustainable Economic Development with Equity” which links Mexico to the globalization process, and the economy with rural development, as well as outlining the international trade policy that should be followed.

The platform recognizes a world context where the process of globalization, the weight of the world powers (primarily the U.S.) and pressure from international financial organizations and multinational corporations greatly influence the future of all nations. In general terms, the Alliance

for Mexico addresses the issue of NAFTA and links it with others such as the promotion of industry, migration, the strengthening of the agricultural sector and infrastructure as well as the establishment of a realistic strategy for industrial growth.

Along the same lines, the PRD points out the disadvantages resulting from the process of globalization for developing countries, and specifically for Mexico. They mention the absence in NAFTA of protection for local production, above all in the agricultural sector, that would avoid the bankruptcy and disappearance of thousands of small and medium-sized holdings and firms. Other issues absent from NAFTA are the free transit of labor and political and labor rights of migrant workers in the United States. They point out that reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution adapting its legal framework to the needs of NAFTA have only benefited a few fortunate exporting farmers in Mexico and big farming corporations of the U.S. and have created unfavorable conditions for the country's rural population. For this reason, Cárdenas proposes renegotiating NAFTA to protect strategic productive sectors and to aid those which have already been weakened by NAFTA, such as the agricultural sector; to establish an alternative program to become self sufficient in food production; to recover growth in the agricultural sector; to promote rural farming and non-agricultural employment; to combat extreme poverty and diminish rural poverty and to foster the growth of small and medium-sized companies.

On the question of foreign trade, the alliance believes that Mexico is far too dependent on the United States, which leads to constant acts of intervention—either real or potential—by its northern neighbor. Pointing out that while the U.S. represents 70 percent of Mexico's foreign trade, Mexico represents only 4 percent of U.S. trade, they suggest that Mexico try to diversify its international trade. Although NAFTA has benefited Mexico's trade, it also continues to limit the country's dynamic growth. This is a result of the fact that Mexico's

net hard currency reserves still depend on the sale not of manufactured products but of oil.

According to Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, NAFTA did not achieve a diversification of industry, primarily because the most attractive thing Mexico has to offer on the international market is cheap labor. Therefore, Cárdenas proposes the establish-

Cárdenas proposes that the process of globalization take into account international free transit of workers and equality of individual economic, social and political rights of migrant workers in their place of work and residency. Cárdenas is committed, as well, to defending the right of Mexicans living abroad to vote in federal elections.

ment of a realistic industrial strategy, diversifying markets and consolidating advantages gained in trade negotiations, seeing trade as the means to an end, that of national development.

The Alliance for Mexico emphasizes the importance of dealing with issues of migration and the protection of human rights of Mexicans living abroad. Cárdenas proposes that the process of globalization take into account international free transit of workers and equality of individual economic, social and political rights of migrant workers in their place of work and residency. Cárdenas is committed, as well, to defending the right of Mexicans living abroad to vote in federal elections. He also proposes passing legislation to regulate remittances from U.S. residents to their families in Mexico.

In sum, all of these issues would require a gradual renegotiation of NAFTA to establish a more just relation between Mexico and the United States. However, despite the emphasis placed on this relationship, the platform leaves other items on the bilateral agenda untouched.

FINAL COMMENTS

The three main presidential candidates for the upcoming federal elections coincide on certain aspects of foreign policy and relations with the United States. Fox, Labastida and Cárdenas all emphasize the importance of the globalization of the world economy, which is manifested very differently in first world and developing nations. The three candidates recognize the important role the United States plays in this process and are aware of Mexico's dependence on its northern neighbor. They agree on the need to diversify Mexico's foreign relations in order to improve its negotiating capability and strengthen national sovereignty. For all three, the most obvious problem on the bilateral agenda is migration which they link to other issues such as human rights, flows of migrant labor and the restructuring of productive sectors,

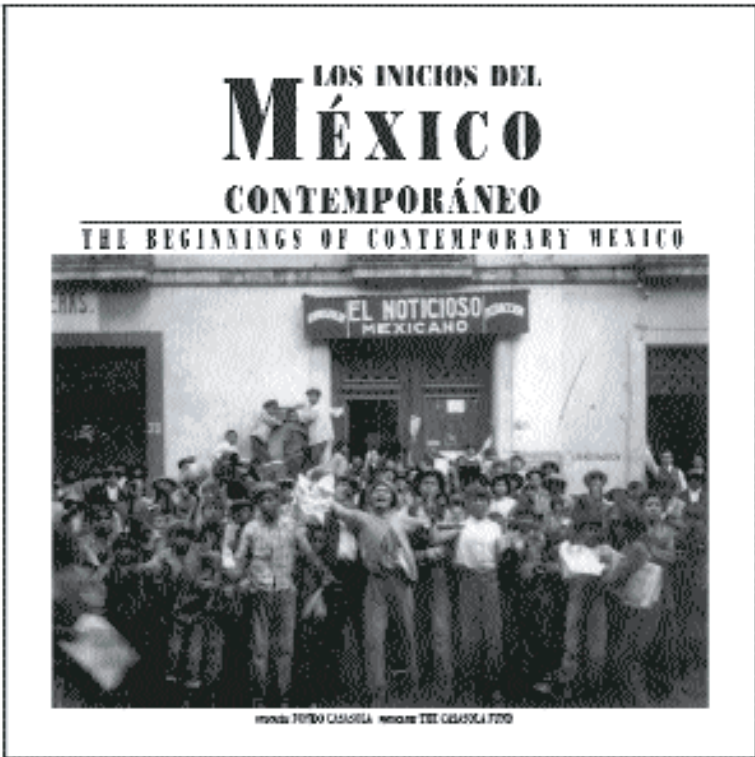
as well as the need to improve courses of action by both governments.

In contrast, there are very evident differences of opinion as to the manner of addressing these problems and whether or not to include other points on the electoral platform. This is most obvious with regard to issues such as drug trafficking, trade policy, the environment and binational cooperation. **MM**

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Other candidates running for the presidency are Porfirio Muñoz Ledo for the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), Manuel Camacho Solís for the Party of the Democratic Center (PCD), and Gilberto Rincón Gallardo for the Social Democracy Party (PDS). They each represent a relatively small fraction of the electorate and therefore have few possibilities of winning.

<sup>2</sup> According to Article 176 of the Federal Code for Institutions and Electoral Procedures (Cofipe), political parties must register their electoral platforms with the IFE.



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MÉXICO  
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