

# Distant Partners? The State Of Mexican-Canadian Relations

## Interview with Canada's Governor General

Leonardo Curzio\*



Dave Chan/REUTERS

Canada's Governor General David Johnston.

**Leonardo Curzio (LC):** Let me begin this conversation with a question that is simple yet tremendously broad in scope: What is the state of relations between Mexico and Canada?

**Governor General David Johnston (GDJ):** It's good and strong, and we can strengthen it, improve it. We have had NAFTA since 1994 and I think the results have been extraordinary: our trade and investments have grown. There's good understanding of security and legal issues, as well as wonderful interpersonal interaction. Five percent of the Canadian population travels to Mexico every year, which is quite impressive. That is, what has been built over all these years is a kind of platform that we can raise higher.

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**LC:** Can we go beyond NAFTA? Some academics and politicians talk about a North American community. Is that a utopia or could we actually create it in the near future?

**GDJ:** No. We are already a North American community, and I believe that it's important to move trilaterally with NAFTA; it's important for Mexico, Canada, and the United States to operate together as we look toward the world. Our economic exchange is consolidating as we develop external policies to have a common position on matters of international trade and diplomacy, while we seek our path forward *vis-à-vis* the Pacific alliance and the trans-Pacific association. These are areas in which the three countries should function together, but I think that another important aspect is also the relationships among people.

Canada has coexisted with the United States very positively and vigorously for many decades. I studied there for four years. Three of my children have done university and graduate work there. I would love to see that between Canada and Mexico: that we use education as a basis for uniting our peoples and developing those relationships for life, from which all the other things like trade and security would flow.

**LC:** In recent years a considerable flow of high school and university students has gone to Canada. A community of people very linked to Canada for diverse reasons has also emerged. I'll ask you straight out, aware that it's a delicate matter: Did the issue of visas complicate the development and the very existence of this community?

**GDJ:** I understand that there's real irritation around this issue, but it must be understood that Canada experienced abnormal growth in the number of refugees. To stop and control that, we had to set up that visa system. Today, I can say that the problem has decreased considerably and for that reason, our government is studying the issue with the government of Mexico. When the Mexican president visited our country, our prime minister told him that resolving this issue is a priority.

**LC:** So, in the near future we might touch on this difficult question?

**GDJ:** What our prime minister said at that meeting—a very cordial and positive one—is that both countries are aware that it's an uncomfortable issue. The visa requirement was set up to deal with a specific problem that is decreasing. So, we must analyze step by step how we will deal with it, attempting to come to a mutual agreement, based on which we will be able to ensure much more freedom for the citizens of both our nations. I trust that there is a firm desire on the part of Canadians to examine the issue and design solutions.

**LC:** As you know, we have a very profound conversation underway with our neighbor, the United States, about security. Do you think that we could establish a new security agenda in the trilateral arena, optimizing, for example, the judicial area in cooperation with Canada?

**GDJ:** Not only can we improve it, but we must improve it as the trilateral partners we are. It's a matter of supreme importance for Canada, the United States, and Mexico, but let's

focus on the positive for a minute. Today, we are celebrating the inauguration of the new administration, the return of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. The elections were a peaceful exercise of Mexicans' democratic rights. That, in and of itself, is a great victory. The rule of law is increasingly present in Mexico and more and more valued; but it must always be based on justice.

We have serious security problems linked to drug trafficking, violence, corruption, etc. However, Mexico has taken a big step forward in terms of the administration of justice: its system has advanced from the inquisitorial investigation that it inherited from Europe and has returned to Roman law. For example, oral trials, the tradition for more than a thousand years in England and used currently in the United States and Canada, are now in use in Mexico. We have worked closely with you for years as you have guided your system in a different direction. The advantage of this system is that it is very transparent: first, trials are held in open court and are reported in the media. Secondly, it's a system focused on enforcing the law and impartiality; that is, of course, the essence of justice. And in the third place, the integrity of the system insures that all the officials are there to serve the interests of everyone and not any specific interest.

I am very interested in this project since my oldest daughter is a prosecutor for the Federal Department of Justice and has already gone on 11 missions, to conferences and workshops in Latin America, working with Mexican officials, who she feels very close to, to implement the system.

**LC:** How interesting! I also know that you're passionate about technological innovation and that sort of thing. Tell us a little about how we can advance in North American integration, specifically regarding competitiveness. How can we improve our region's competitiveness?

**GDJ:** Well, we spent a day and a half in Querétaro, and the last visit was to the Bombardier Aerospace plant. Why does

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Chris Wattie/REUTERS

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Bombardier have eight different companies there, adding more value to the region?

**LC:** A Canadian company...

**GDJ:** Yes, a Canadian company, the builder of Challenger and the Global Express that travels around the world; and it's now building planes with a capacity for 90 to 130 passengers that will compete with the Boeing 737 and the Airbus 320. All of that is possible thanks to the very talented personnel from that region, the honest, intense participation of universities and colleges, and active leadership from the national government. Bombardier has set up in that part of Mexico because it recognizes the enormous advantage of having a supply line to this country. They are building the fuselage and systems here, and that is an excellent example of collaboration among governments, the private sector, and the educational system. And that's happening all over Mexico.

**LC:** We see almost the same example with Blackberry...

**GDJ:** I'm glad you mentioned Blackberry. (I'm taking mine out as we speak.) Blackberry came out of the institution that I was president of for 12 years, Waterloo University. The inventor is a man named Mike Lazaridis, who later became the university's chancellor. He founded Blackberry in 1984 when he was an engineering student. At our university, we alternate one academic semester with a working semester. The students are paid during their working semester so they can

pay their tuition, but some of them don't work for an employer, but found their own company. And so, with the help of others, that's how he created Blackberry, which has been a huge success.

Today, they're preparing their tenth model, and guess where many of those cell phones are manufactured: here in Mexico. So, Mexico will probably be under a lot of pressure producing more telephones than we can imagine.

**LC:** We are trade partners, but sometimes we feel we're very distant. How can we be closer?

**GDJ:** First of all, we're going through a communications revolution that makes it possible for us to be closer, not only through text messages and e-mail, but also using high quality video-conferencing.

**LC:** It's also possible through tourism...

**GDJ:** Tourism is an outstanding option. As I already mentioned, five percent of the Canadian population visits Mexico every year, and personal contacts are very important as we develop strong ties of friendship, not just trade relations.

**LC:** Mr. Governor General, I consider it an honor that you have given us this interview. Thank you very much.

**GDJ:** It was a great pleasure. ■■■