

North Americans View Themselves

North America has been having a hard time. Lou Dobbs from CNN, Bill O'Reilly from Fox News, talk-radio hosts, Maude Barlow from Canada, and many others have been attacking the three governments for "secretly" moving to create a "North American Union." They charge the three governments and various commentators, Robert Pastor included, with treason as a result of secret efforts to dismantle the borders and construct an 18-lane super highway from Mexico to Canada. The charges are false,¹ but they are doubtlessly influencing the debate in all three countries. One would expect some Mexicans and Canadians to be fearful of embracing their super-power neighbor. The surprise is that the superpower seems to have become even more fearful of its neighbors.

The fear is coming from the two extremes: the right fears immigration, mostly from Mexico, and the left fears globalization and free trade. The two sides have linked arms and intimidated politicians into falling silent on North America. Even the prime minister of Canada and the presidents of Mexico and the United States are shy to make their case. They may think that the extremes reflect public opinion. But they don't.

North America has many voices, but two of them seem especially pertinent. One is the strident and angry voice, personified by Dobbs. This voice is loud and has its echo in each country, but it probably reflects no more than 10 to 15 percent of the population. The second is the voice of the three nations based on public opinion surveys. While Dobbs pretends he is speaking for the masses, the surveys prove he is speaking for himself and a small minority.

We are fortunate that some superb public opinion firms and analysts have taken the pulse of the public in all three countries, often asking the same questions during the past three decades so we know what people think about each other and

¹ For a description of the charges and a response, see "In the Line of Fire: The Scholar Accused of Being at the Center of a Sinister Plot to Merge Canada, the United States, and Mexico Speaks Out," *Intelligence Report*, published by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Summer 2007, Issue 126, pp. 41-43; also see www.american.edu/ia/cnas.

about “North America.” We are proud that the central part of this issue is devoted to an intensive study of public opinion in the three countries of North America.

The first article is “North American Convergence Revisited,” by Miguel Basáñez, Ronald Inglehart, and Neil Nevitte, three scholars who have undertaken the “World Values Survey” in the three countries over two decades. They confront the key questions: Do the three countries have different values? Are those values converging or diverging? A generation ago, Seymour Martin Lipset asserted that the United States and Canada began their nations as opposites: the first one revolted and the second one rejected revolution in favor of order. In a study on America’s identity and immigration, Samuel Huntington recently concluded that Mexico’s value system is very different from that of the United States. More recently, in an unusual analysis, Michael Adams agreed with Lipset and Huntington’s thesis on the difference between U.S. and Canadian values, but he also sought to demonstrate that the values in the three countries are diverging. In response to these propositions, Basáñez, Inglehart, and Nevitte have used empirical data from three major surveys during the past 27 years, based on the “world values survey” and administered in as many as 80 countries. They found that not only is there not a difference in values among the people of these three countries, but there has been a convergence across a wide swath of attitudes related to the human condition. Furthermore, they have found that this convergence is not due to U.S. predominance but because all three publics have become more alike.

Alejandro Moreno tackles the second shibboleth that has been used to make the case for a widening gulf in North America, Mexican distrust toward the United States, and he, too, finds the truth is quite different from conventional wisdom. Beginning in the 1980s, even before NAFTA, and continuing until a few years ago, Mexican views of the United States became increasingly favorable. The level of trust that Mexicans have toward Americans almost doubled, despite the fact that their favorable views of U.S. policy have declined by half. Moreover, Mexicans trust Americans more than they do Latin Americans. The explanation for that growing trust, according to Moreno, is “interconnectedness”—growing social integration. Nearly half of all Mexicans have a close relative living in the United States, and, so, the distance that Mexico once felt toward the United States has narrowed.

Finally, Frank Graves, president of EKOS, a Canadian-based polling firm, has done the most interesting and longest-running surveys in all three countries on attitudes toward North America and each other’s policies. He finds that public opinion in each of the three countries on NAFTA and on coordinating policies among each other is almost the opposite of popular notions. His polls show that the views of the three countries toward the benefits of NAFTA have changed during the past 13 years, but they are favorable today. Still, while all of these authors feel that all three coun-

tries have benefited from closer cooperation, each country thinks that the others have benefited more. That is the political logic of trade and explains why it is always difficult to approve trade agreements, even though the public understands their importance. More startlingly, all three publics believe that the three countries are moving to an economic union, and the majority believes it is a goal worth pursuing, provided that increasing integration protects culture and delivers a higher standard of living. A majority of the citizens of all three countries also prefers more integrated and cooperative policies on the environment, transportation, defense (security perimeter), and many other functional areas. This result stands in sharp contrast to the populist opposition to integration.

There are three levels of integration. The first level relates to the economic and social forces that are pulling the three countries together. Since the implementation of NAFTA, trade has tripled, and foreign investment has quintupled. Firms have become North American and the continent's population has increasingly sought work and tourist destinations across borders. There is little doubt that social and economic integration has accelerated since NAFTA. A second level relates to public opinion. As the articles noted above demonstrate, the majority of the public in all three countries is positive about integration and, indeed, wants to move faster toward more functional collaboration. Reflecting increasing integration rather than the strident negative voices, the public of each country want their governments to lead in a cooperative direction.

The third level of integration is institutionalization, the process by which the three governments begin to construct new North American institutions and policies that reflect the need for governance to keep pace with integration. Stephen Clarkson's article surveys the North American landscape, and he concludes that the process of institutionalization has been retarded; the three governments have not kept pace with integration. The explanation seems obvious. The governments are listening to the strident voices rather than to the public, and, while the public views are clear (as demonstrated by the articles in this issue), they are not loud nor are they intense. They are not compelling the leaders to pay attention; they are waiting for the leaders to provide some direction—in short, to lead. Unless that leadership role is recognized, accepted, and embraced by everyone, one of the greatest opportunities for Canada, Mexico, and the United States could be lost.

Still another indication of the under-institutionalization of North America is the dearth of centers to study North America. Vassia Gueorguieva has identified only six Centers for North American Studies in the United States, and only a total of eight others in Mexico and Canada. The U.S. government has spent US\$28 million in funding to the National Resource Centers under Title VI for the last four years. These support 88 centers on Asia, 66 on Europe and Russia, 48 on Latin America,

36 on the Middle East, 26 for Africa, and zero on North America. The United States trades more than four times as much with its two neighbors as with the European Union or China and Japan, and yet North America is not a subject worthy of study. These National Resource Centers are key to helping the United States understand the world, and yet we have left out the region which is most important to the United States.

U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar (D-TX), a border state congressman with a wider vision of North America, has given us an interview which offers insights into future policy and attempts to answer this paradox of importance and neglect. The answer is that the United States is not yet taking its more important trading partners –its neighbors– seriously.

Three chronic problems have plagued North America and preoccupied the U.S. Congress: trade disputes, immigration, and the development gap between Mexico and its northern neighbors. Pastor's proposal for a North American Investment Fund addresses, if not solves, all three. The fund would invest US\$20 billion per year in roads and infrastructure to connect the poorer south of Mexico to its northern markets. In a decade, this fund would narrow the income gap by 20 percent, create jobs in Mexico and exports from the U.S. and Canada, and provide all three countries a sense that Mexico could join its first world northern neighbors.

The other articles in this issue address the principal themes from slightly different directions. The literature on federalism has long suggested that federal countries are more likely to fail to achieve new forms of collaboration than non-federal governments. Alan Tarr's article shows that the opposite may be true. He analyzes the institutional influence of federalism within all three countries, and he perceives that influence to be a potentially positive force for greater cooperation. Moreover, because NAFTA has such weak institutions, it poses little threat to federalism. Susan Karamanian focuses upon trade disputes in North America and the way that the principles being used to provide justice are shaping important areas of international law.

As for the role of minority populations in North America, César A. Velázquez Becerril and Gabriel Pérez Pérez study Quebec and its long political struggle for acceptance within Canada. They consider Quebec's cultural concerns within the context of finding strategies for a foothold within continental politics as well. They explore the possibilities that continental cooperation can provide for Quebec's desire to achieve both greater prosperity and greater expression for its sense of a distinct identity within both Canada and North America, especially since the transformative years of Quebec's "*Révolution tranquille*." Their article introduces the possibility of evaluating this complex framework in terms of a multicultural game theory. That analysis leads to the consideration of diverse political strategies in this

“game” of multiple identities within Quebec in its relationship to Canada and the search for unity amidst that diversity.

Stéfanie von Hlatky offers another Canadian perspective with continental implications. The controversy regarding sovereignty in the Arctic has been a source of ongoing contention between Canada and the United States. Historically, Canada has jealously guarded its claims to sovereignty over this territory and its waterways while the United States has challenged that claim in order to advance its own interests in asserting that the Northwest Passage should be considered international waters. Traditionally, security within this region of the continent was perceived in asymmetrical terms. Now, she proposes an approach that extends beyond a military solution, allowing Canada and her neighbors to consider the multiplicity of the implied stakes that protection of these waterways, their environment, and the issues of sovereignty and international status pose for all concerned.

This issue consciously continues the continental vision of this journal. Themes of attitudes, values, institutions, and public policy are particularly prominent. American University’s Center for North American Studies is grateful to CISAN for granting to it the responsibility to edit this issue. We look forward to the continued success of *Norteamérica* and its important and laudable scholarly mission of enlightening its continental audience.

Robert A. Pastor
James T. McHugh
Anthony Elmo