

The United States and Mexico:

A Partnership Tested

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United States-Mexico relations are bounded by economic affairs, security, geography and social connection. During the mid-1800s, the United States annexed nearly half of the Mexican territory and occupied Veracruz in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution. Until recent decades, mistrust among the countries has ceased cooperation on issues such as immigration, economic strategies and social connection. However, the mistrust paused for nearly a century when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) took power in the 1930s for several decades, stabilizing Mexican and U.S. relations.

In 1942, the Bracero Program launched, allowing Mexican workers to come to the United States to take advantage of higher wages and better working conditions. The program ended in 1964, after 4.6 million contracts allowed Mexican immigrants to stay in the United States. Despite its end, Mexican workers continued to enter the U.S. illegally. In response, Mexico created an industrialization plan (called maquiladoras) for its border areas to import U.S. components and assemble them, taking advantage of Mexico's cheaper labor, and export them back to the U.S.. By the 1980s, manufacturing was the most successful sector of Mexico's economy.

Due to the rising threat of illegal drugs entering the United States, the Nixon Administration, created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in 1973. U.S. and Mexican drug traffickers were working with Colombian cartels to sell heroin and cocaine in the United States. After a DEA agent was killed in 1985 by members of a Mexican cartel, the United States became more involved with Mexico's fight against its cartels. In 1986, U.S. President Ronald Reagan signed an immigration law which regularized 3 million Mexicans in the United States, but failed to stop illegal immigration, inflicting penalties on U.S. companies which undocumented workers. The 1980s economic crisis in Mexico led to 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

In 1992, the United States, Canada and Mexico signed NAFTA, which doubled U.S. and Mexican trade, increasing relations between the countries. However, the Mexican economy nearly crashed soon after the deal was signed, but with U.S. monetary intervention via loans, Mexico's economy stabilized. During the 1990s, Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) strengthened due to the Colombian cartels being defeated. They gained power and money, becoming the main provider of cocaine for the U.S. market.

In 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush focused on improving relations with Mexico; however, the attacks of 9/11 put the focus of the Bush administration on the War on Terrorism. Congress attempted to pass the DREAM Act, allowing children of undocumented immigrants to stay in the United States, but it failed. Through the Merida Initiative, Bush did give Mexico \$1.6 billion to strengthen President Calderon's fight against cartels and confront the rising violence. As of 2017, over 200,000 have died in Mexico's drug wars. In the United States, drug overdoses surged 328 percent between 2010 and 2015. Under the Obama administration, Mexico faced a central American migration crisis and the United States offered financial assistance to strengthen Mexico's immigration efforts on its southern border.

Today, the United States is still helping Mexico fight against DTOs. President Donald Trump has made border security and building a wall along the southern border a main focus of his administration. Trump successfully got all nations to reconsider updates to NAFTA, which created the USMCA trade agreement. Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's Party of the Democratic Revolution took office in Mexico in December 2018. During his campaign, he promised to take caution regarding relations with the United States and keep Mexican interests first.