

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

US-Mexico Relations in an Age of Uncertainty

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This essay reviews the following works:

A Tale of Two Eagles: The US-Mexico Bilateral Defense Relationship Post Cold War. By Craig A. Deare. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017. Pp. vii + 436. \$45.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781442269446.

The U.S.-Mexican Border Today: Conflict and Cooperation in Historical Perspective. By Paul Ganster with David E. Lorey. 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017. Pp. vii + 296. \$29.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781442231115.

American Crossings: Border Politics in the Western Hemisphere. Edited by Maiah Jaskoski, Arturo C. Sotomayor, and Harold A. Trinkunas. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. Pp. vii + 238. \$39.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781421418308.

Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead. By Shannon K. O’Neil. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. vii + 239. \$27.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780199898336.

Binational Human Rights: The U.S.-Mexico Experience. Edited by William Paul Simmons and Carol Mueller. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Pp. 312. \$27.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780812246285.

Mexico and United States: The Politics of Partnership. Edited by Peter H. Smith and Andrew Selee. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013. Pp. vii + 243. \$23.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781588268938.

During the race for the 2016 US presidential election, Republican candidate Donald J. Trump made Mexico a centerpiece of his campaign, alternating between bashing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—which he described as the “worst deal ever made”—and denigrating Mexico and Mexican immigrants. On announcing his presidential ambitions on June 16, 2015, he proclaimed: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”¹ These statements horrified many who viewed him as xenophobic, racist, and crude.

His rhetoric was contradicted by substantial evidence that immigrants do not have higher rates of criminality than do native-born US citizens (in fact, the rates appear to be far lower).² It also went against general public opinion, since most US citizens have quite favorable views toward Mexico (59 percent in February 2016 and 64 percent in February 2017) and Mexican immigrants (60 percent in September 2016).³ To be sure, Mr. Trump occasionally downplayed or back-peddled on his characterization of Mexico and Mexicans—citing the fact that his companies do business in Mexico, that he “loves Hispanics,” and that he enjoys eating taco

¹ Tal Kopan, “What Donald Trump Has Said about Mexico and Vice Versa,” *CNN*, August 31, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/31/politics/donald-trump-mexico-statements/>.

² Walter Ewing, Daniel E. Martínez, and Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States,” Special Report, American Immigration Council, July 13, 2015, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/criminalization-immigration-united-states>.

³ Gallup, “Country Ratings,” <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx>.

bowls from the Trump Tower Grill on Cinco de Mayo.⁴ However, throughout his campaign, Trump was clear and unequivocal on the need to ramp up immigration controls and take a tougher approach toward Mexico: “I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.”⁵ During his third and final debate with Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, Trump insisted: “We’re going to secure the border. ... But we have some bad hombres here and we’re going to get them out.”⁶

Given such statements, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018) was criticized in both Mexico and the United States for his meeting with Trump in August 2016, which gave the candidate an opportunity to appear more “presidential” and a boost in subsequent US opinion polls. After Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2017, President Peña Nieto proved more cautious in his dealings with his US counterpart. While traditionally a meeting between the US and Mexican presidents has been a top priority at the start of a new administration, this did not happen. Instead, in February 2017, Peña Nieto responded to a series of Trump’s abrasive “tweets” by canceling his planned visit to Washington, DC. Later, Mr. Trump allegedly “humiliated” Peña Nieto in a phone conversation, saying “I don’t need Mexicans, I don’t need Mexico. ... We’re going to build the wall and you are going to pay for it, like it or not,” and appeared to intimate that he would unilaterally deploy US troops to go after the “bad hombres down there.”⁷

Arguably never before has the US-Mexico relationship received such prominent attention in a US presidential campaign. Moreover, Trump’s blatant scapegoating represents a dramatic shift in US posturing toward Mexico, throwing into question the future direction of US-Mexico relations after decades of improvement. Thus, perhaps now more than ever, there is a need for scholarly work on the US-Mexico relationship and a careful appraisal of what may lie ahead. Accordingly, this essay focuses on six recent multidisciplinary works that help to inform this discussion. Nearly all of them contemplate an era—from the early 1990s through the early 2010s—during which the two countries became steadfast partners in grappling with the challenges and opportunities posed by an age of unprecedented economic integration, enormous capital and labor mobility, and newfound threats from illicit nonstate actors.

How well do these works inform our understanding of contemporary US-Mexico relations? First, what do they tell us about the nature of the US-Mexico relationship and how it has evolved in recent decades? Second, to what extent is the relationship a function of the political calculations, worldviews, and whims of leaders in either country, as opposed to more enduring economic, social, and geopolitical forces? Finally, what can we expect in terms of developments regarding the specific policies most relevant to the relationship—trade, migration, and security—particularly along the US-Mexico border?

Fortunately, each of these works address these questions. They affirm well-established understandings of the inherently asymmetrical relationship between the United States and Mexico, famously described as a “Great Divide” (by Tom Barry, Harry Browne, and Beth Sims) between “Distant Neighbors” (by journalist Alan Riding) in a “Marriage of Convenience” (by political analyst Sidney Weintraub) between “The Bear and the Porcupine” (by former ambassador Jeffrey Davidow). With some exceptions, the works reviewed here provide a generally optimistic appraisal of the way in which the two countries have grown closer over time as economic integration has overridden political setbacks. Of course, what remains to be seen is to what extent these assessments will hold true in the era of Donald Trump, particularly since Mexico’s 2018 election of Andres Manuel López Obrador, an oft-described populist and the founder of Mexico’s National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party. The prospect of two strongly nationalist presidents from opposite political perspectives has raised serious concerns that merit consideration in light of recent studies of US-Mexico relations.

Asymmetrical Interdependence in US-Mexico Relations

Understanding international relations requires careful attention to the respective worldviews of people and leaders in each nation, recognition of the power dynamics between states, and consideration of the broader context of the contemporary world system. In this regard, the publication that arguably provides the most comprehensive assessment of the overall state of the US-Mexico relationship is Peter Smith and Andrew Selee’s nine-chapter edited volume, *Mexico and United States: The Politics of Partnership*. The book includes contributions from thirteen scholars with experience in academia, think tanks, government, and

⁴ “Cinco de Mayo Pandering: Trump Eats Taco Bowl, Clinton Releases Deportation Ad,” Fox News, May 5, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/05/05/donald-trump-eats-taco-bowl-and-declares-loves-hispanics.html>.

⁵ Dan Gundersman, “President-Elect Donald Trump’s ‘Big, Beautiful Wall’ May End Up Just Being a Modest, Double-Layered Fence,” *New York Daily News*, November 10, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/donald-trump-big-beautiful-wall-fence-article-1.2867648>.

⁶ “Trump Reportedly Threatens to Send U.S. Military to Mexico in Call with Mexican President,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-pol-trump-mexico-call-20170201-story.html>.

⁷ “Trump humilló a Peña y lo amagó con enviar sus tropas a México, revela Dolia Estévez,” *Proceso*, February 1, 2017.

international organizations.⁸ Most chapters were authored jointly by a US and Mexican expert on the relevant topics, providing perspectives from both sides of the border. Still, critics might rightly demur that the volume does not have a single female contributor.

The first few chapters and the conclusion of *The Politics of Partnership* describe the overall relationship, while the five remaining chapters focus on policy-making, trade and development, migration, the environment, and security. This design lends itself to graduate and undergraduate courses on US–Latin American relations, US–Mexico relations, border politics and policy, and possibly as a case study in courses on US foreign policy or international relations, more generally. The volume is concise but comprehensive. Written nearly two hundred years after the US–Mexico war, a century after the Mexican Revolution, a quarter century after the end of the Cold War, two decades after NAFTA, and more than a decade after the 9/11 attacks, *The Politics of Partnership* helps to define the major issues on the binational agenda and identify the policy options available to strengthen and improve the relationship. Writing at a time when they believed that “the wars on terror have begun to recede” and the “uncertainties of the contemporary global economy might well bring the two countries together,” the editors and authors are perhaps overly optimistic about prospects for a politics of partnership. Like most, they certainly did not anticipate the era of Trump, in which the United States has chosen to brazenly assert its own interests and advantage in the “partnership.”

Of course, Trump’s policies toward Mexico are only possible because of the asymmetry that characterizes the relationship, which is a major focus of Smith’s solo chapter, “Global Scenarios and Bilateral Priorities.” Focused on US–Mexico ties in the early twenty-first century, Smith dedicates much of this chapter to analyzing the multiple “world views” of US policy-makers, with considerably less attention to those of their Mexican counterparts. Arguably, the asymmetry in Smith’s analysis may be an inherent function of the relationship itself, though it could also be due to the fact that Smith’s is the only chapter in this volume lacking a Mexican counterpart. Even so, Smith’s chapter is brilliantly written and essential for understanding the dynamics of the relationship. Though a historian by training, Smith draws from international relations theory to examine the dynamics between the two states, in terms of their geopolitical (military), geo-economic (productive), and soft power (persuasive) capabilities. These asymmetries have created very different subjective frameworks, including a tendency by US leaders to view Mexico as insignificant to US interests, and a tendency of Mexican officials to concentrate on the United States as their sole foreign policy concern.

Selee and his Mexican coauthor, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros, build on these points in their chapter by noting that asymmetries “in size and development levels shape every encounter, every policy decision, and every aspect of the relationship in some way” (39). Since the relationship is also more integrated than ever, this “asymmetrical interdependence” leaves the United States somewhat aloof to the bilateral relationship. Meanwhile, because the United States is Mexico’s single most important foreign policy preoccupation, this sometimes plays to Mexico’s benefit, if its leaders play their cards right. While US leaders are often focused on other priorities, Mexican leaders frequently have a much better grasp of the dynamics of the bilateral relationship and can use this to Mexico’s advantage. Generally speaking, Selee and Díaz-Cayeros suggest that the two countries will continue to grow closer, but—perhaps anticipating the rise of Trump—not without continued obstacles and tensions.

In their contribution to the same volume, John Bailey of Georgetown University and Tonatiuh Guillén-López of the Colegio de la Frontera Norte examine the specific policy areas, or “baskets,” in which these power relationships play out. They describe three of these policy baskets—trade and finance, emigration and immigration, and border affairs—as “structural” in nature because they are a function of demography, economics, and geography. Other policy baskets—such as national and public security, law enforcement and justice administration, and political affairs—are described as “conjunctural” in that they are more a function of policy-makers’ chosen priorities and responses to specific circumstances. This division seems somewhat questionable in light of Trump’s politicization of the immigration issue, and the degree to which security remained central to the relationship despite Peña Nieto’s vigorous efforts to limit attention to that issue at the outset of his term. Nonetheless, Bailey and Guillén-López’s framework helps to highlight the policy areas that present the most complex and enduring challenges for US–Mexico relations—trade, migration, security, and border affairs—which are considered in turn below.

US-Mexico Trade Relations

Trade and finance are areas that Shannon K. O’Neil examines in *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead*. As a recent college graduate O’Neil moved to Mexico to work as a market analyst in 1994, one of the most pivotal years in the country’s modern history. In January 1994, as NAFTA

⁸ It must be noted here that the author of this article co-wrote this volume’s chapter on drugs and security relations, which is excluded from consideration in this review.

came into effect, the fanfare surrounding this bold step into the future was dampened by the simultaneous uprising of the armed guerrilla movement known as the Zapatista National Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) and a descent into chaos, as a massive peso devaluation crippled the country in late 1994 and 1995. In the difficult years that followed, O'Neil returned to the United States for a few years before returning to Mexico as a Fulbright fellow in 2002, newly impressed by the enormous changes that had transpired in the intervening years.

In 2000, out of frustration with decades of political stagnation, Mexicans had elected National Action Party candidate Vicente Fox (2000–2006) as the first president to hail from an opposition party. The country had recovered substantially from the 1994 peso devaluation, thanks to international loans, a major government bailout of financial institutions, and a more disciplined approach to macroeconomic policy. As a result, Mexico achieved a degree of currency stability not seen since the early 1970s, as the peso held at a rate of between ten and twelve pesos to the dollar through most of the decade. In this newly stable economic context, a small but growing middle class emerged as the foundation of a modest but thriving consumer economy, replete with shopping malls, plush movie theaters, mid-sized cars, and foreign manufactured products. Whatever the latest trend, there is now a vibrant, exciting, and prosperous side to today's Mexico. Along with this newfound prosperity, O'Neil points to other societal changes that bode well for the country, including expanding educational opportunities and greater gender balance in both schools and the workplace.

O'Neil also notes the important role that Mexico has played in increasing US competitiveness through economic integration. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Mexico was the second largest (after Canada) source and destination country for goods and services entering or leaving the United States. While China's exports to the United States surpassed Mexico's in 2003, total US-Mexico trade continued to climb to well over a billion and a half dollars a day—over half a trillion dollars annually—since 2013. Yet, much more so than with Chinese goods, US imports from Mexico are the result of production sharing, with an average of 40 percent of their content previously manufactured in the United States. No longer a zero-sum game, North American manufacturing relies on a web of small and medium-sized suppliers that are separated by geography but highly integrated. Thus, when a US company “offshores” production to Mexico (or Canada, or elsewhere), they effectively preserve the remaining US jobs that would have been lost if global competition had killed off the entire company. Also, thanks to freer flows of private capital investment under NAFTA, Mexican companies now make products and employ people in the United States, including well-known brands like Sara Lee and Entenmann's baked goods, Dairy Fresh milk products, Thomas' English Muffins, and Boboli Pizza.

Yet, rather than recognize Mexico's contributions to the North American economic partnership, many in the United States have tended to see Mexico as a primary scapegoat for US job losses in the postindustrial era. This is clearly inaccurate. First of all, economists such as Gordon Hanson have presented strong evidence demonstrating the greater role that technology (as opposed to trade) has played in displacing US workers.⁹ Also, as Robert A. Blecker and Gerardo Esquivel point out in their contribution to the *Politics of Partnership*, despite some gains under NAFTA—and despite Trump's claim that Mexico has taken advantage of the United States—Mexicans are hardly the big winners in the US-Mexico economic relationship. In particular, Blecker and Esquivel note Mexico's lack of economic convergence in relation to the United States, both in terms of per capita income and wage growth in Mexico. The resulting wage disparities are not good for either country, insofar as a wealthier Mexico would mean more US exports to Mexico and fewer Mexican migrants bound for the United States. As Blecker and Esquivel note, if the United States wants to reduce unwanted immigration it would be better to focus less on building walls and more on “regional efforts to promote Mexican growth” (104).

Mexican Migration and US Immigration Policy

As a result of Mexico's proximity and historical migration patterns since the mid-twentieth century, Mexican nationals represent the largest category of US immigrants. As David Fitzgerald and Rafael Alarcón discuss in *The Politics of Partnership*, an estimated 11.5 million Mexican nationals presently reside in the United States. Among these, there are an estimated 6.7 million unauthorized Mexican immigrants, who make up more than half the estimated unauthorized population of about 11 to 12 million. According to Fitzgerald and Alarcón, current US immigration policy makes it “all but impossible for Mexicans to legally immigrate unless they have special skills or a nuclear family member in the United States who can sponsor them” (111).

Trump's proposed border wall clearly cannot address this problem. Recent data suggests that unauthorized migration flows from Mexico are now in the negative, with more Mexicans leaving than entering the United States. Of those entering the United States without authorization, perhaps 40 percent to 60 percent cross

⁹ Gordon H. Hanson, *What Has Happened to Wages in Mexico Since NAFTA? Implications for Hemispheric Free Trade*, Working Paper Series #9563 (Washington, DC: National Bureau of Economic Research, March 2003).

the border at (or between) ports of entry. This avenue is often costly, requiring crossers to pay smugglers fees into the thousands of dollars, and with major risk to life and limb. Meanwhile, many immigrants fall into “unauthorized” status by simply violating the terms of their visas. Some “overstay” their visit on a temporary visa by failing to leave the country by their required date of departure. Others—possibly including former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and First Lady Melania Trump—violate US immigration law by accepting employment while visiting on a temporary non-work visa.¹⁰

For most violators, there are relatively few internal controls, despite the fact that interior enforcement of US immigration policy has also ramped up since the early 2000s. While US employers have been largely exempted from investigations and sanctions over the years, an increased number of deportations under both Presidents Bush and Obama has formed part of a larger strategy to achieve comprehensive immigration reform by demonstrating greater federal action on immigration control. This has meant more security agents and wider, higher walls at the border, generally with limited or perverse effects. According to Fitzgerald and Alarcón, due to the dramatic increase in border enforcement since the 1990s, unauthorized immigrants are now actually two or three times more likely to try to remain in the United States permanently once they have entered the country, rather than migrate cyclically to be with their families in the off-season.

Greater enforcement also increases the costs and risks for those entering or remaining in the country unlawfully, as noted by several contributors to William Paul Simmons and Carol Mueller's edited volume, *Binational Human Rights: The U.S.-Mexico Experience*. Adopting a human rights framework, Simmons and Mueller point to the growing susceptibility of the poor and disenfranchised in the age of transnationalism. “In the U.S.-Mexican context, vulnerable people are branded as commodities by the cartels and gangs; while in Mexico, the prevailing ideology brands indigenous peoples and Central American migrants as inferior, and in the United States, unauthorized migrants are branded as ‘illegals’ and therefore deserve little or no protection or social services from the government” (7).

In his contribution to this volume, retired Mexican consul Miguel Escobar-Valdez describes the children who watch their parents die of exposure while crossing the border through the desert. Meanwhile, Simmons and Michelle Téllez's chapter contends that sexual abuse may be the norm for women who put their lives in the hands of migrant smugglers (*coyotes*). Drawing on accounts gathered from government officials, humanitarian activists, and social workers, they show that for vulnerable migrants seeking entry to the underworld of the undocumented, sexual exploitation is yet another form of Charon's obol.

Timothy J. Dunn's chapter emphasizes that these horrors are in large part a result of the escalation of border enforcement in recent decades. Yet the increased deployment of immigration control agents and proliferation of physical barriers at the border has had little measurable effect in reducing undocumented migration. To the contrary, Dunn notes, countless studies have shown that the greater costs and risks imposed by heightened border enforcement has simply increased the propensity of undocumented immigrants to abandon previously cyclical patterns of migration and stay permanently in the United States. This, in turn, has led to more women and children entering the United States illegally for the purposes of family reunification, and the increased vulnerability and exploitation that is well documented by the contributors to *Binational Human Rights*. The hardships such individuals face have been intensified in the Trump era, with the United States separating families at the border and refusing refugees seeking protection from widespread crime and violence in Central America.

The Drug War and the US-Mexico Security Relationship

Meanwhile, after more than a decade of elevated violence propelled by organized crime, Mexico's security challenges loom at least as large as trade and immigration in the key policy “baskets” of the US-Mexico relationship. All told, there were more than 230,000 homicides in the ten years from 2008 to 2017, and a large share, perhaps a third to half, of these killings bore the characteristics of organized crime, with government officials and journalists as frequent targets.¹¹ In this context, the United States and Mexico embarked on an unprecedented cooperation agreement known as the Mérida Initiative, with US funding and collaboration to support Mexican efforts combatting organized crime, bolstering the judicial sector, improving border security, and assisting communities affected by violence.

¹⁰ See Frank del Olmo, “An Illegal-Immigration Irony: Schwarzenegger May Have Been in Technical Violation of His U.S. Visa Not Once but Twice,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/sep/28/opinion/oe-delolmo28>; Alicia A. Caldwell, Chad Day, and Jake Pearson, “Melania Trump Modeled in US Prior to Getting Work Visa,” *Associated Press*, November 5, 2016, <https://apnews.com/37dc7aef0ce44077930b7436be7bdf0d>.

¹¹ Laura Calderón, Octavio Rodríguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2017*, Justice in Mexico Special Report (San Diego: University of San Diego, April 2018), https://justiceinmexico.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/180411_DrugViolenceinMexico-12mb.pdf.

Among the works considered here, US-Mexico security cooperation is examined most closely by Craig A. Deare, a retired Army Intelligence and Foreign Area Officer, in *A Tale of Two Eagles: The US-Mexico Bilateral Defense Relationship Post-Cold War*. In February 2017, Deare was dismissed just weeks after being appointed as a top advisor to the Trump administration on Western Hemisphere issues, reportedly due to dissenting views he expressed regarding US policy toward Mexico. Deare's book makes it clear why. A US citizen who spent several formative years in Mexico, Deare has an understanding and sensibility about the country that is uncommon among US citizens, let alone US government and military personnel. Deare recognizes Mexico's importance and potential as a vital ally and he is candid in stating that many US policies and actions toward Mexico—including US prohibitions on drugs—have had negative and unintended consequences.

Deare provides a richly detailed account informed by ample reference to primary and scholarly sources, high-level interviews, and firsthand insights from his military career. Deare's work makes a valuable contribution to the US literature on Mexico and fills a particular gap because it explicitly examines both US and Mexican military views of the US-Mexico relationship. As Deare points out, there are important differences in the institutional roles and military cultures in each country that have implications for military cooperation. The US military has been deployed to numerous conflicts around the world but is limited in its role in domestic affairs by the doctrine of *posse comitatus*. As the instrument and defender of a revolutionary political regime, Mexico's modern military is considerably more insular and domestically focused, particularly as it has become engulfed in Mexico's insecurity crisis over the last decade.

Deare makes a compelling case that achieving security cooperation between these different military organizations requires US leaders to be informed and thoughtful in their engagements with Mexico. For this reason, he provides a lengthy chapter on Mexican history, intentionally directed to those US military officers who “know the square root of Jack Shit” about their neighbors. However, the bulk of Deare's analysis centers on US-Mexican military relations since the 1970s, as Mexican drug-trafficking networks grew more powerful and US-Mexico security cooperation increased in tandem.

Deare's well-researched account has its limits. In contrast to Mexico's Navy, the Mexican Army declined Deare's multiple requests to interview its officers, which speaks volumes about the internal culture and outward orientation of these two different military branches (the Navy being more cosmopolitan). Also, Deare mainly attributes problems of cooperation to a lack of understanding and political will in the United States, and the reluctance of Mexican authorities that results from long-standing “gringo-phobia.” Yet, widespread corruption, shocking human rights abuses, and high levels of defection by Mexican military personnel are real and serious problems in Mexico that surely give US military commanders pause about working with their Mexican counterparts. Deare is surely aware of these concerns but seems to have left them aside, perhaps to avoid offending Mexican military sensibilities.

Such concerns are most definitely addressed, quite forcefully, by other authors considered here. Julie A. Murphy Erfani's contribution to *Binational Human Rights*, entitled “Politics of Death in the Drug War,” describes the drug war in Mexico as a “quasi-legal civil war.” Murphy Erfani argues that the Mexican government's modified regulations on use of lethal force have contributed to escalating violence that has killed thousands of alleged criminals as well as civilians. In addition, she asserts that drug war atrocities have also been the result of the fact that “the United States has transferred massive quantities of weapons to Mexico; because Mexican officials are complicit with drug gangsters; and because military and police officers in Mexico have tortured, raped, and murdered people with impunity” (93). Whether or not readers accept her view that such transgressions rise to the level of crimes against humanity, Murphy Erfani makes a strong case that decriminalizing and demilitarizing the drug war—as well as labor migration—would help to “broaden and change the focus of U.S.-Mexico relations” (110). A number of contributors in *Binational Human Rights*—notably Simmons and Téllez, Mueller, and Kathleen Staudt—also draw attention to the role that cross-border cooperation by civil society can play to address problems related to Mexico's violence, including the femicides associated with Mexico's decade-long security crisis. In an effort to address Mexico's security situation, López Obrador appears sympathetic to these kinds of approaches, including possible drug legalization, which may well put him at odds with current US antidrug policies.

US-Mexico Border Politics and Policy

All major policy issues in the bilateral relationship manifest intensely along the two-thousand-mile US-Mexico border, as is made clear in *The U.S.-Mexican Border Today: Conflict and Cooperation in Historical Perspective*. Building on two previous editions coauthored with David Lorey, Paul Ganster's latest edition of this book has been thoroughly updated. Ganster is well recognized as a border scholar and policy expert, given his key leadership roles with the Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias, the San Diego

Association of Governments Committee on Border Region Opportunities (COBRO), the Association of Borderlands Studies, the Environment and Health Committee of the Border Trade Alliance, and the US federal government's Good Neighbor Environmental Board. Written in an accessible style with over sixty figures and tables (including numerous excellent photos taken by the author), the book makes a useful text for undergraduate and graduate courses on US-Mexico relations and comparative border studies.

The first four chapters provide an overview of the historical development of the border region from well before its official founding under the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty through World War II. During most of this historical period, the arid US-Mexico border region was largely unpopulated and underdeveloped. In the mid-nineteenth century, this fact proved to be a liability for Mexico and a point of interest to the United States, which was seeking to expand its frontier. Following the US-Mexico War of 1846–1848, this expansion came in the form of a series of “booms and busts” of settlement and economic activity resulting primarily from higher level policies and trends. As Ganster notes in the second half of his book, the border region's biggest boom came from World War II, which resulted in a massive increase in manufacturing capability and population along the border. Ganster provides a dedicated chapter on the environmental and societal consequences of the region's postwar growth, and a concise overview of several contemporary policies affecting the US-Mexico borderlands, including NAFTA, immigration, and the war on drugs, each of which arguably deserves its own chapter (perhaps in future editions). In the process, Ganster shows that despite the forces of globalization, borders remain as relevant today as ever.

This message is complemented by the nine contributors to *American Crossings: Border Politics in the Western Hemisphere*, the edited volume compiled by Maiah Jaskoski, Arturo C. Sotomayor, and Harold A. Trinkunas. Employing a comparative framework to examine several case studies in border politics and policy, Jaskoski, Sotomayor, and Trinkunas expand on many of the themes and issues discussed by Ganster in reference to the US-Mexico case. *American Crossings* is intentionally focused on building a theoretical understanding of the subject through comparative analysis. The volume examines case studies from both North and South America: the US-Mexican border, the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay tri-border area, the Argentine-Chile border, the Colombia-Venezuela border, and the Colombia-Ecuador border. While, oddly, no Central American country is examined as a case study, there are a few chapters that make comparative references to some Central American cases. In terms of unifying themes, the editors of the volume point to four vital aspects of borders, which are addressed in detail by the various contributing authors: as geopolitical phenomena, as economic institutions, as police jurisdictional boundaries, policing boundaries, and as spaces defining imagined communities.

The sources of conflict and cooperation are a key point of focus for the contributing authors. For example, in “Border, Rivalries, and the Racketeer State” Cameron Thies examines the role that interstate territorial conflicts played in fueling geopolitical rivalries and limiting state-building the border regions of the Americas. Meanwhile, both Arturo Sotomayor and Kristina Mani note in the same volume the Chile, Argentina, and other countries in the Americas have increasingly turned to international institutions and tribunals as a means to resolve territorial claims and avoid major interstate conflicts. Thus, as Robert Pastor warned, NAFTA's ability to survive a Trump-like ebb perhaps hinges on the strength of its institutions, hence the need for deepening North American ties.¹²

On a separate note, some contributors suggest that the region's generally peaceful history along national boundaries helps to explain the weakness of state capacity at borders, their vulnerability to transnational criminal organizations, and the fact that the region's militaries are not oriented toward national defense (and far more likely to become embroiled in domestic political affairs). For example, Arie M. Kacowicz asserts that “the outbreak of regional peace has contributed to the loosening of borders” (105), opening a Pandora's box of new transnational threats, including criminals and terrorists (e.g., Hezbollah).

Yet, as Adam Isacson notes that, despite dramatic increases to US border security controls over the last two decades, public perceptions and rhetoric describe the border as lawless and out of control: “Most U.S. citizens and their political leaders continue to believe that the border is insufficiently guarded and that a variety of cross-border menaces are worsening” (146–147). Sadly, this moral panic over transnational threats is nothing new, according to Peter Andreas's contribution to the same volume. Indeed, history shows that “attempts to secure borders and tighten controls have often had the perverse and unintended consequence of creating a more formidable smuggling challenge” (153–154). Trump's America, take heed.

¹² Robert Pastor, *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Concluding Observations: Future Directions for US-Mexico Relations

A brief survey of some of the most recent published works on US-Mexico relations shows that the two countries have made important advances in recent decades. One might conclude, in view of these advances, that the rise of Donald Trump and what he stands for is an unexpected and temporary aberration from an inevitable trend toward increased integration and cooperation. Yet, while the US-Mexico relationship has progressed, much remains the same: most importantly, the power asymmetries between them. Mexico's leverage vis-à-vis the United States will certainly increase if Mexico can continue to develop a healthy, well-educated middle class. However, its ability to do so hinges on achieving significant advances in education, economic opportunity, democratic accountability, and rule of law, each of factored into voters' historic election of López Obrador. However, none of these is on Mexico's immediate horizon, even in the best-case scenario.

In the meantime, those who hope for a better US-Mexico relationship in the future must develop a more coherent vision for a responsible US foreign policy in the twenty-first century, and help chart the course for Mexico's development as a full partner in the North American community. Otherwise, the vulnerabilities, insecurities, and resentments of a passionate minority of both Mexicans and Americans are likely to be exploited for political gain. Yet, Mr. Trump and Mr. Obrador are not the sole deciders of that future. The forces of integration are already at work, as millions of Mexicans interact daily with their US neighbors. In this sense, every one of the 420 million US and Mexican citizens who has a direct stake in the US-Mexico relationship will play a role—whether as protagonists or antagonists—in shaping progress of diplomatic relations between the two countries. By helping to educate the next generation of US-Mexican citizen diplomats and elevate public discourse, the scholars whose works are examined here lay an important foundation for a better relationship.

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