

Preparing for Toluca: Mexicans and Americans Recognize Benefits of Trade But Want to Keep Focus on Security

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President Obama will be heading to Mexico on February 19 for the North American Summit, where leaders from the United States, Canada, and Mexico are slated to discuss trade, investment, and security issues. To help shed light on public perceptions of the US-Mexico relationship in advance of the meeting, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs partnered with Centro de Estudios Sociales y de Opinión Pública (CESOP), Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), and the Woodrow Wilson Center's Mexico Institute to carry out opinion surveys in Mexico and the United States.¹ This is a preliminary report of the just-released findings. A full report will be released in the spring.

Key findings

- ▶ Preliminary results show that Americans and Mexicans recognize the importance of bilateral relations and characterize the US-Mexico relationship as good. Mexicans generally have a positive view of the United States, though ratings have been declining compared to past surveys. American

views of Mexico are largely unfavorable and are at their lowest point since 1994.

- ▶ Both publics tend to think the two countries are working in the same direction on trade and economic development. Yet Mexicans and Americans are hesitant to turn their governments' primary focus away from border and security issues.
- ▶ Two decades since the implementation of NAFTA, Americans and Mexicans have grown more positive about the impact of NAFTA on their countries. But both still think the other country benefits more from the deal.
- ▶ Mexicans are divided on whether the United States and Mexico are working in the same or different directions to develop new sources of energy (Americans tend to think they are working in different directions). Despite recent energy reforms, a majority of Mexicans still oppose private investment in their oil industry.

Both countries view each other as important

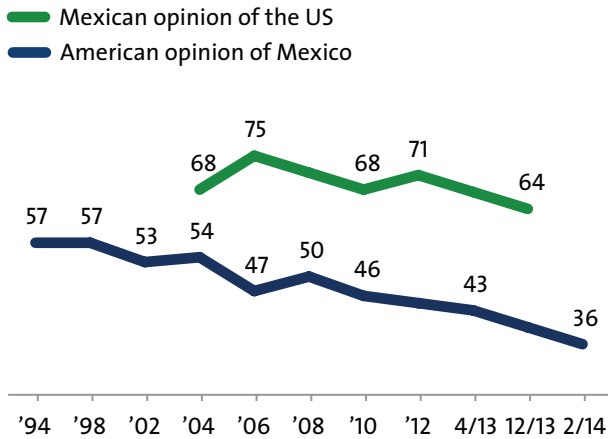
Americans and Mexicans recognize the importance of their ties to their neighbors. Eight in ten Mexicans (79%) believe the United States is important for Mexico. Seven in ten Americans said the same thing about Mexico in April 2013 (69%). Both sides also agree that current bilateral relations are positive: six in ten

1. The Mexican survey is based on face-to-face interviews conducted December 11 to 16, 2013, among a nationwide sample of 1,000 Mexican adults. US survey results are based on two separate surveys conducted online by GfK for The Chicago Council, the first from April 12 to 15, 2013, and the second from February 7 to 10, 2014. The samples were national and consisted of 1,017 and 1,029 Americans, respectively. Unless noted as an April 2013 survey, the American results cited are from February 2014.

FIGURE 1

Mexican and American Opinion of the United States and Mexico, respectively

I am going to ask you to measure your opinion of the United States/Mexico, with 0 expressing a very unfavorable opinion, 100 expressing a very favorable opinion, and 50 expressing an opinion of neither favorable or unfavorable (average rating by Mexicans and Americans).



US and 2013 Mexico data from The Chicago Council on Global Affairs; Mexico data 2004-2012 from Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica

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Mexicans (59%) and Americans (60%) say that current relations between the two countries are good.

There is a hint of resentment behind Mexican opinion, however, with a plurality (42%) saying that Mexico cooperates with the United States “more than it should.” Twenty-three percent say it cooperates less than it should, and 22 percent say cooperation is about right.

Mexican view of the United States is more positive than the American view of Mexico

On a scale from 0 to 100, in which 100 is a very favorable opinion and 0 is a very unfavorable opinion, Mexicans give the United States a favorable average rating of 64, down from recent survey ratings, especially from an average of 75 in 2006 according to CIDE surveys. For their part, Americans give Mexico an unfavorable average of 36, down from 43 in April 2013 and lower than at any point since 1994 when Mexico’s average rating was 57 (Figure 1).

United States and Mexico are seen as economic partners

Americans (57%) and Mexicans (51%) tend to say the United States and Mexico are working in the same direction on trade and economic development (Figure 2). Majorities in each country also characterize the other country as an economic partner (51% of Mexicans, 64% of Americans) rather than a competitor (31% of Mexicans, 33% of Americans). However, Mexicans are much more attuned to the extent of cross-border economic integration. Six in ten Mexicans (58%) are aware that Mexico is one of the United States’ top five trading partners, compared to just two in ten Americans (20%).

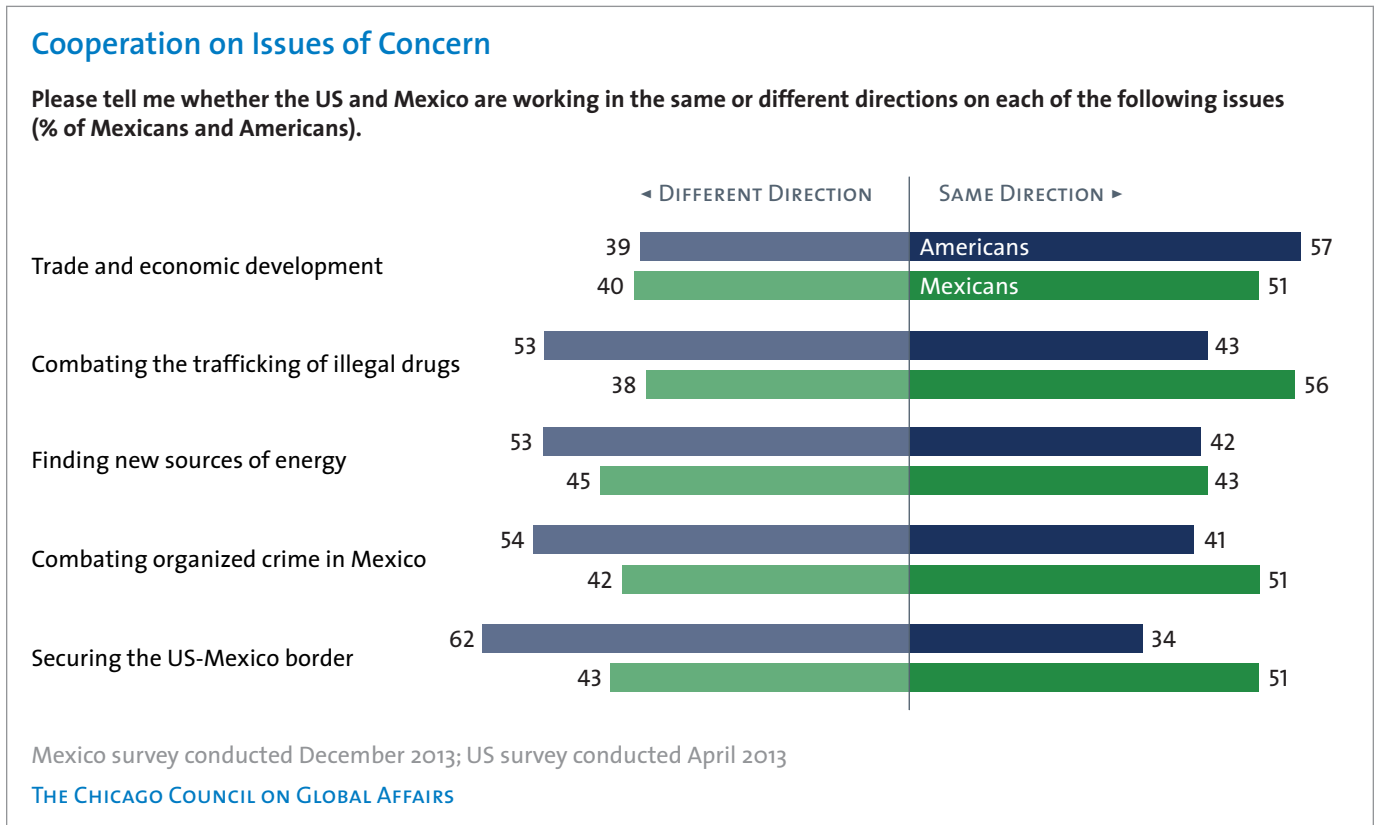
Positive views of NAFTA have risen, but each side thinks the other benefits more

Twenty years after NAFTA was signed, Mexicans have increasingly recognized the benefits of cross-border trade. Opinion of the trade agreement has shifted over the past 10 years, with majorities now saying that NAFTA is good for the Mexican economy (64%, compared to 44% in 2004), for creating jobs in Mexico (60% vs. 49% in 2004), and for Mexican companies (65% vs. 50% in 2004). Mexicans continue to believe, however, that NAFTA is more beneficial for the United States, with 72 percent saying NAFTA is good for the US economy and 67 percent saying it is good for creating American jobs. Over time, however, the gap in perceptions of greater benefits for the United States over Mexico has narrowed.

For their part, Americans have also grown more positive toward NAFTA. According to April 2013 results, 50 percent of Americans say NAFTA is good for the US economy (compared to 42% in 2004), good for American companies (55% vs. 50% in 2004), and good for creating jobs in the United States (38% vs. 31% 2004). But far more Americans continue to believe that NAFTA has greater benefits for the Mexican economy (70% good) and creating jobs in Mexico (69%), unchanged since 2004.

Canadians may be the most enthusiastic participants in NAFTA. A separate EKOS poll in Canada (not part of this project) conducted in the fall of 2013 found that a large majority of Canadians (80%) agree that there should be free trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Solid but smaller majorities in Mexico (74%) and the US (65%) also agree.

FIGURE 2



Publics want to keep focus on security

While Mexican and American officials have recently tried to emphasize the potential in the economic relationship between Mexico and the United States, security issues are still at the forefront of public concerns. More Mexicans (51%) say it is important for the future of the US-Mexico relationship to keep the attention on security issues such as border control and drug trafficking than say there needs to be a greater emphasis on economic, trade, and energy issues (38%).

Americans are even more emphatic about staying focused on security. By a 7 to 2 margin, Americans believe it is more important to keep government attention on security issues (72%) than to put greater emphasis on the economy, trade, and energy (23%).

Mexicans are more likely than Americans to say that the two countries are working in the same direction—rather than in different directions—on securing the border (51% of Mexicans, 34% Americans), combating drug trafficking (56% Mexicans, 43% Americans), and combating organized crime (51% Mexicans, 41% Americans). A majority of Mexicans (53%) also believe that US assistance to Mexico to combat drug traffick-

ing has been helpful, with 43 percent saying it has not been helpful.

Majority of Mexicans oppose private investment in energy and telecom

Americans tend to think the United States and Mexico are working in different directions rather than in the same direction to develop new sources of energy (53% different to 42% same). Mexicans are divided on this question (45% different to 43% same). However, a strong majority of Mexicans oppose the government allowing foreign investment in Mexican oil production, distribution, and exploration (68%). Over half also oppose private investment in telecommunication (55%). While President Peña Nieto has managed to push through reforms that open the energy and communication sectors to private investment, he has yet to turn around long-standing public opposition to these changes.

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