Under AMLO, Mexican Views of the US Rebound from All-Time Low

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Many analysts expected that Andrés Manuel López Obrador's landslide electoral victory in Mexico would precipitate a *mano a mano* showdown with US President Donald Trump. Yet both presidents have made conciliatory gestures toward each other, and Mexican public opinion toward the United States has completely shifted course from 2017. A recent Buendía y Laredo survey finds that a majority in Mexico now express a favorable view of the United States and only a minority say that US-Mexico relations are worsening.

In the United States, President Trump is still pushing for an expanded border wall between the United States and Mexico, but a recent Chicago Council survey finds that Americans are more positive toward Mexico now than they have been in over a decade. These developments may signal a window for rebuilding bilateral relations, especially if both governments ratify the new US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.
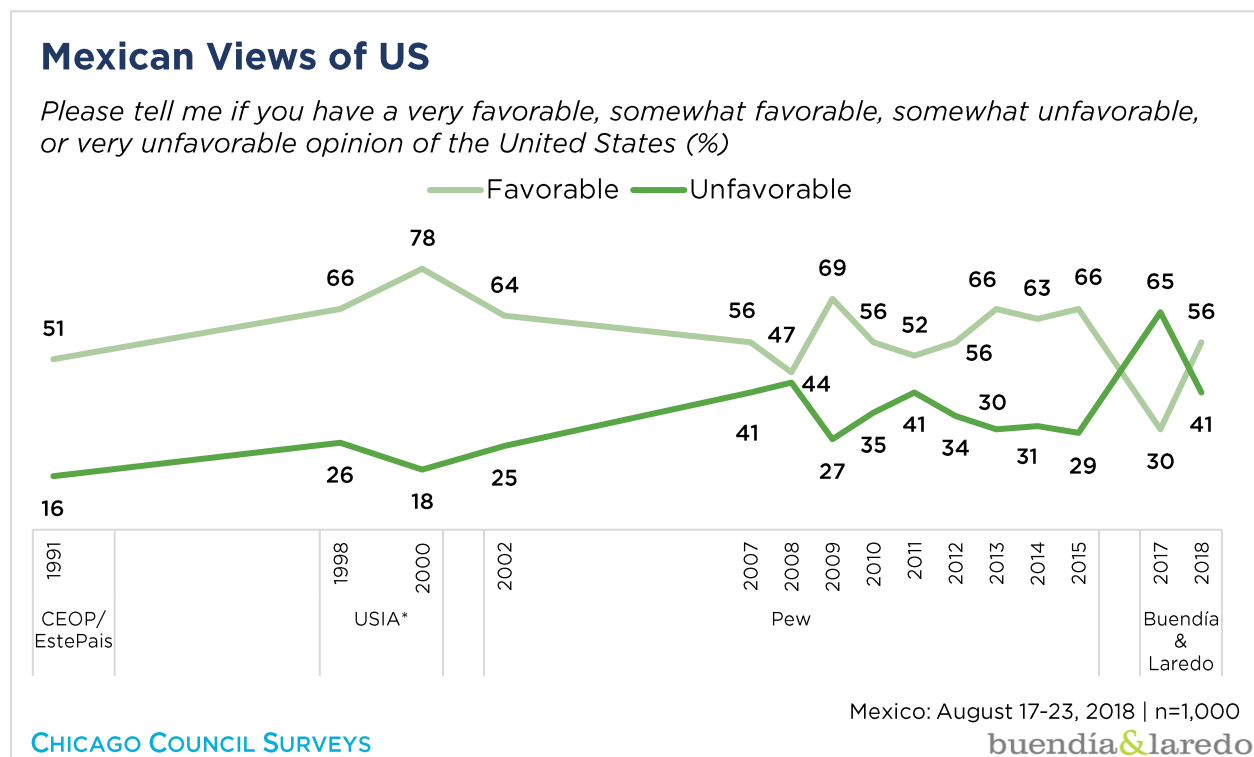
Key Findings

- A majority in Mexico (56%) have a favorable view of the United States, reversing the all-time low (30%) recorded in 2017.
- American views of Mexico continue to warm, reaching an average of 58 on a scale from 0 to 100, up notably from 2013's all-time low of 43.
- Despite warming views, few Mexicans (13%) say US-Mexico relations are improving; instead, a majority (60%) say relations are staying about the same.
- Surveyed before the new trade agreement was reached, Americans (63%) and Mexicans (78%) both think NAFTA is good for their country's economy. The Council's January 2019 survey found that seven in ten Americans (70%) think the new US-Mexico-Canada Agreement will be good for the US economy.

Mexican Views of US Back in Positive Territory

As a Mexican presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador called Trump's anti-immigrant policies "irresponsible" and "racist"[1] and promised that under his administration "no threat, no wall, no bullying attitude from any foreign government, will ever stop us from being happy in our own fatherland."[2] But since taking office, his approach to President Trump has been cordial. In a letter he sent to Trump last July, he even asked for a reset for the US-Mexico relationship.[3] Trump has also reached out to López Obrador, tweeting him congratulations on his electoral victory and praising him for being an "absolute gentleman" as the US-Mexico trade negotiations advanced this past August.[4]

Apparently, Mexicans have reacted positively to these interactions. In a dramatic reversal from 2017, Mexican views have rebounded sharply. Today, a majority of Mexicans (56%) say they have a favorable view of the United States, a 26-percentage-point increase from an all-time low of 30 percent in 2017. Four in ten (41%) have an unfavorable view of the United States, down from 65 percent in 2017.[5]

Mexican Views of US

Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of the United States (%)

Mexico: August 17-23, 2018 | n=1,000

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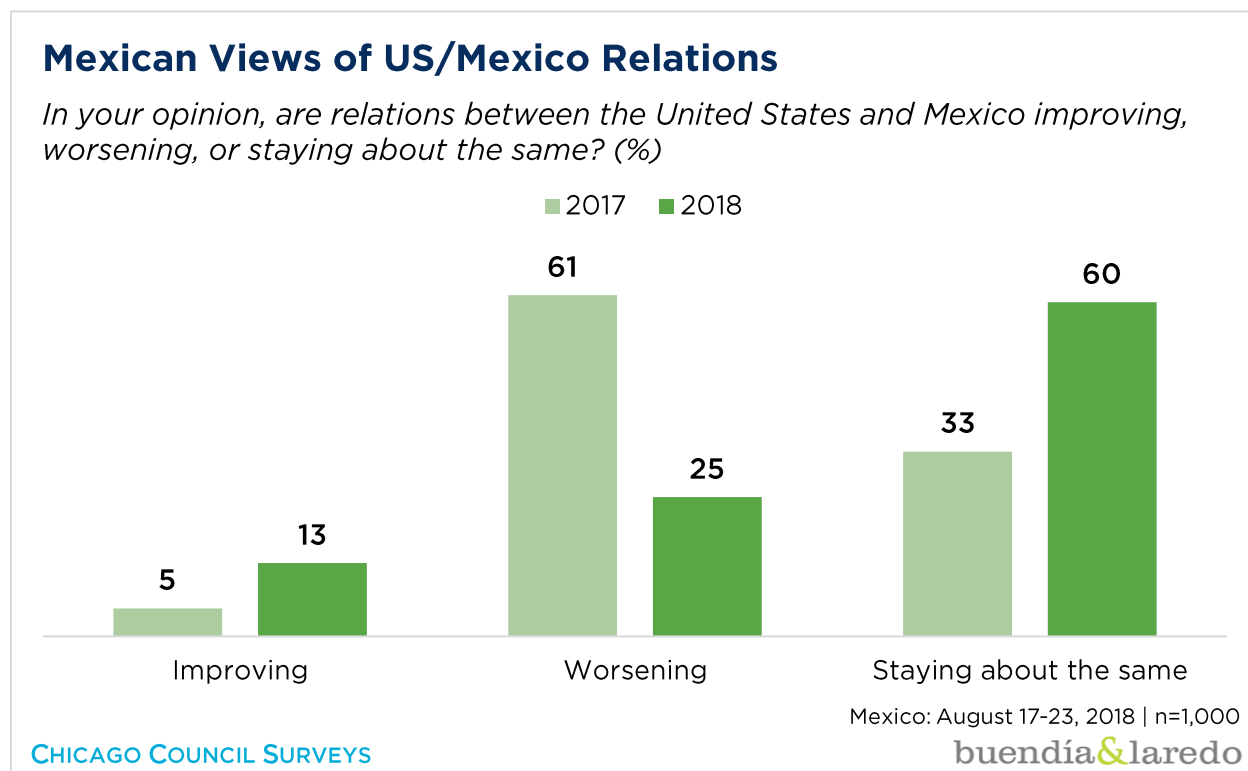[1] BBC Monitoring Miami, "Who Is Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador?", November 29, 2018.
[2] New Yorker, "A New Revolution in Mexico," June 25, 2018.
[3] Letter from Andrés Manuel López Obrador to President Donald Trump, July 12, 2018.
[4] Huffington Post Internacional, "Trump destaca negociación con México del TLCAN y llama a AMLO 'caballero absolute'," August 10, 2018.
[5] Despite an upturn in favorable views toward the United States, this Buendía y Laredo poll finds that President Donald Trump remains deeply unpopular in Mexico. Among the 93 percent of Mexicans who know of Donald Trump, 81 percent have a bad opinion of him, and only 6 percent a good opinion.

At the same time, far fewer Mexicans sense that US-Mexico relations are deteriorating now than did in 2017. Only 25 percent say that the bilateral relationship is worsening compared to a six in ten (61%) in 2017. While few believe that relations are improving (13% vs. 5% in 2017), the relative assessment is much more positive than in the prior year.

Mexican Views of US/Mexico Relations

In your opinion, are relations between the United States and Mexico improving, worsening, or staying about the same? (%)

■ 2017 ■ 2018

	Improving	Worsening	Staying about the same
2017	5	61	33
2018	13	25	60

Mexico: August 17-23, 2018 | n=1,000

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American Feelings toward Mexico Continue to Warm

Donald Trump tempered his tweets about Mexico once López Obrador won the presidency and as trade negotiations between the two countries progressed, but he continues to press for the expanded border wall between the two countries.[6] Many polls have found that a majority of Americans oppose the expansion of the border wall (55% in the most recent Council survey).[7] Moreover, American views of Mexico are also on the rise.

Today, Americans rate Mexico an average of 58 on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 represents a very unfavorable feeling and 100 represents a very favorable feeling. This brings American opinion of Mexico in line with mean ratings from 1978-2002. It is also an increase from 2017, when Americans rated Mexico a lukewarm 51, and up sharply from an all-time low of 43 in 2013. The current ratings show that Republicans

[6] "Mexico's next president thanks Trump for holding back on his 'offensive comments' about Mexicans." *Los Angeles Times.* August 24, 2018.
[7] "Majority of Americans Oppose Expanding US-Mexico Border Wall." Craig Kafura, Dina Smeltz. January 24, 2019. Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

(on average 48) are significantly less likely than Democrats (65) or Independents (59) to express warm feelings.[8]

Feelings toward Mexico

Please rate your feelings toward some countries and peoples, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that country or those people. **Mexico** *(mean score)*
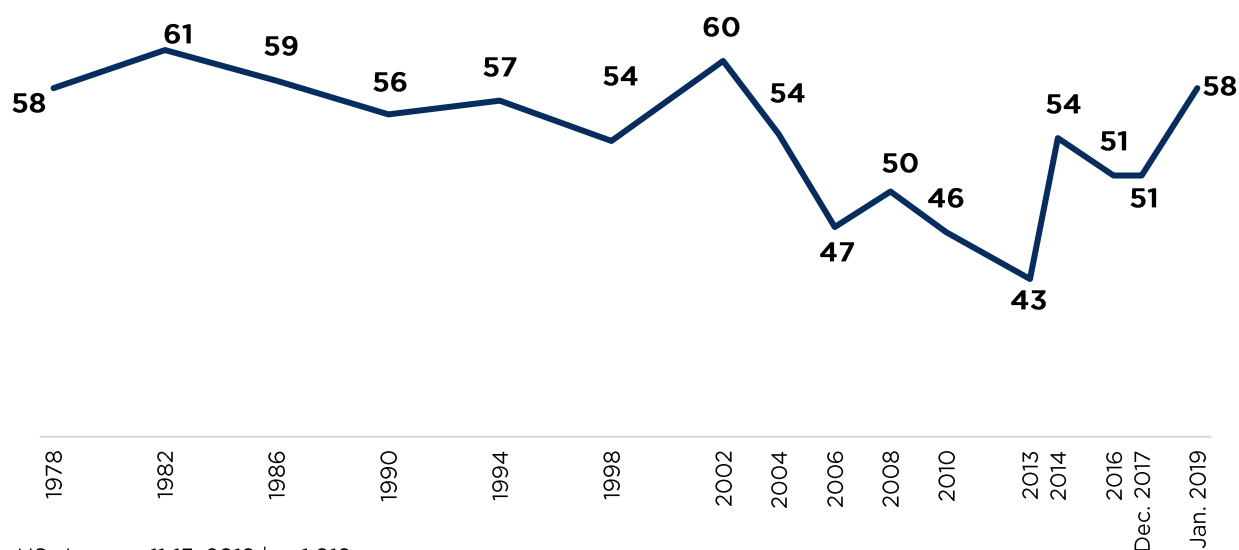
US: January 11-13, 2019 | n=1,019
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Mexican and American Support for Trade Agreement Increases

Along with President Trump's insistence on expanding the border wall, another key element in US-Mexico relations over the past two years has been renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (or NAFTA) between the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Both publics also express support for NAFTA when asked about it in surveys preceding the renegotiated US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (or USMCA, signed in November 2018). Eight in ten Mexicans (78%) say NAFTA is good for the Mexican economy, a sixteen percentage point increase from 2017 (when 62% said NAFTA was good for the economy). Americans also solidified their support for NAFTA in 2018, with 63 percent saying the agreement is good for the US economy, up ten percentage points from 2017 (when 53% were positive).

[8] See page six for a greater discussion of partisan differences.

The USCMA deal has yet to be ratified by each nation's legislature, but a January 2019 survey in the United States shows that Americans are optimistic: seven in ten Americans (70%) think this new US-Mexico-Canada Agreement will be good for the US economy, higher than any of the previous ratings for NAFTA.

Mexican Views on NAFTA

Overall, do you think the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, is good or bad for the Mexican economy?

■ 2017 ■ 2018

Good
- 2017: 62
- 2018: 78

Bad
- 2017: 28
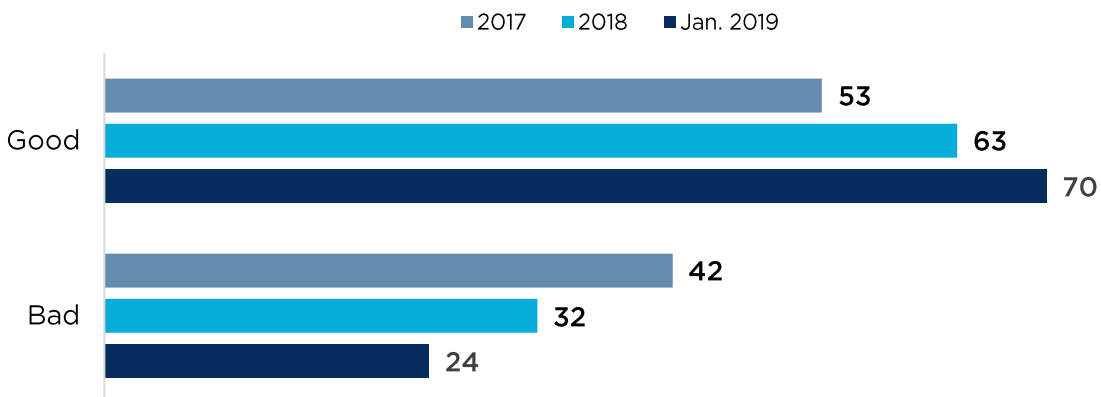- 2018: 11
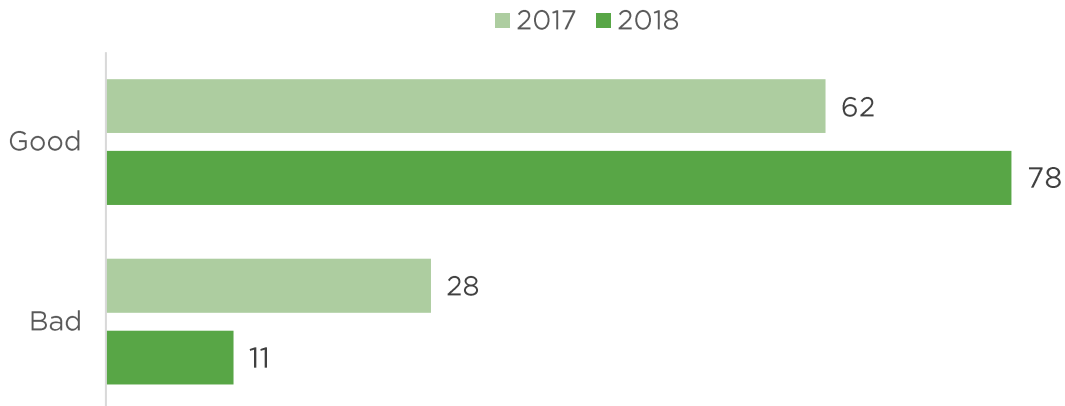
Mexico: August 17-23, 2018 | n=1,000

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US Views on North American Trade Agreements

As you may know, the United States recently concluded a new free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico called the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, also known as USMCA. Do you think this new agreement will be good or bad for the US economy? (%)

Previous: Overall, do you think the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, is good or bad for the US economy? (%)
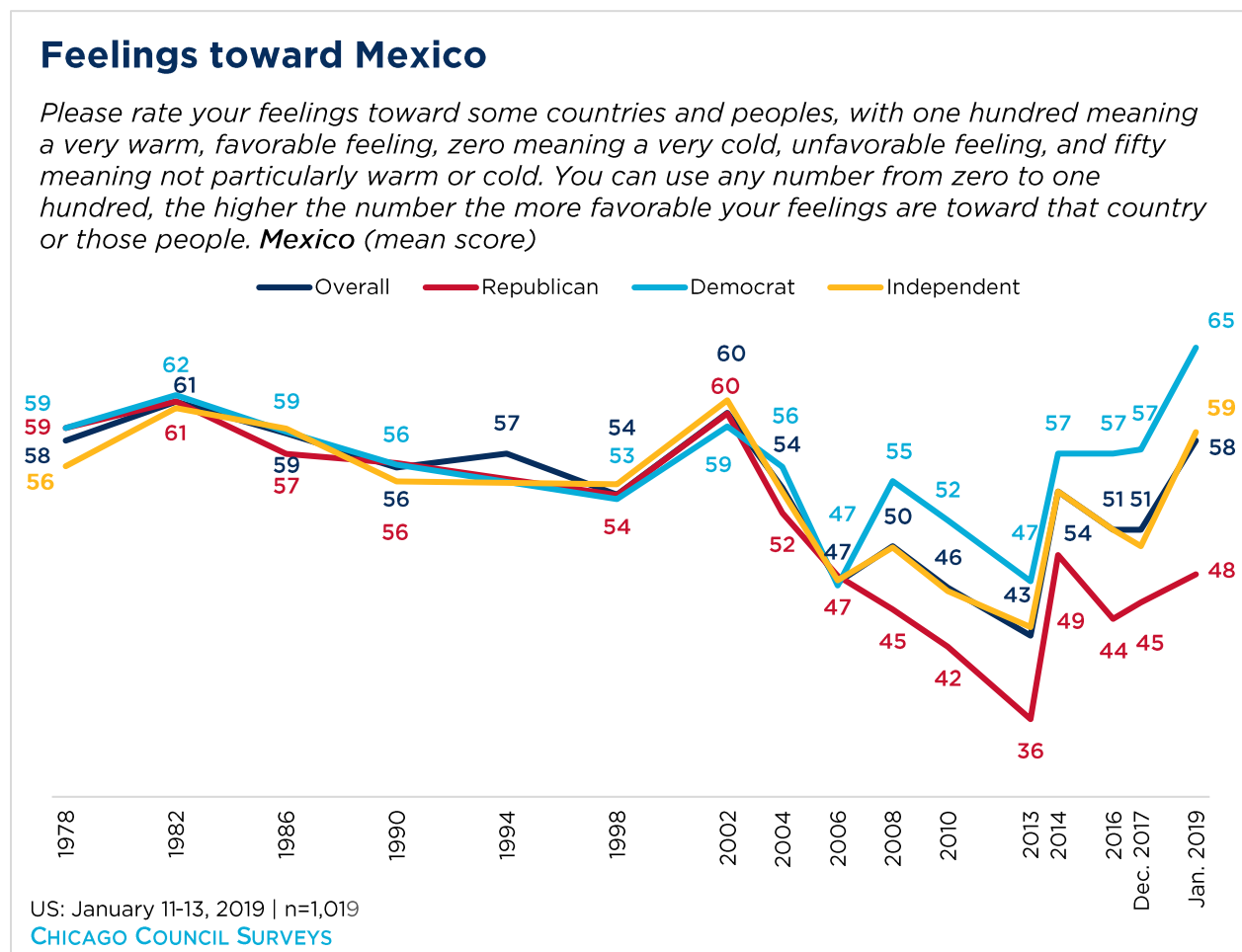
■ 2017 ■ 2018 ■ Jan. 2019

Good
- 2017: 53
- 2018: 63
- Jan. 2019: 70

Bad
- 2017: 42
- 2018: 32
- Jan. 2019: 24

US: January 11-13, 2019 | n=1,019

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Not All Americans Think Alike on Mexico

While overall American opinion toward Mexico is on an upward trend, partisanship now plays a far stronger role in determining American views of Mexico than in past years.

Beginning in 2008, Republican and Democratic feelings towards Mexico have diverged sharply. Today, while Democrats rate Mexico an average of 65 degrees on the feeling thermometer, Republicans give it a mean of 48; Independents fall in the middle at 59. This gap of 18 degrees between Republican and Democratic ratings of Mexico is at its largest since the Council began asking about American feelings towards foreign countries in 1978. But it is worth noting that opinions of Mexico are up across all party affiliations.

Feelings toward Mexico

Please rate your feelings toward some countries and peoples, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that country or those people. **Mexico** *(mean score)*

US: January 11-13, 2019 | n=1,019
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On trade, while majorities across partisan lines think the new agreement will be good for the US economy, Republicans are much more enthusiastic (86%) than Democrats (59%). This is a contrast from patterns on support for NAFTA, when Democrats were more positive than Republicans. In 2018, eight in ten Democrats (79%) said NAFTA was good for the US economy, while just 43 percent of Republicans agreed.

North American Trade Agreements

As you may know, the United States recently concluded a new free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico called the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, also known as USMCA. Do you think this new agreement will be good or bad for the US economy? (% good)

Previous: Overall, do you think the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, is good or bad for the US economy? (% good)

US: January 11-13, 2019 | n=1,019
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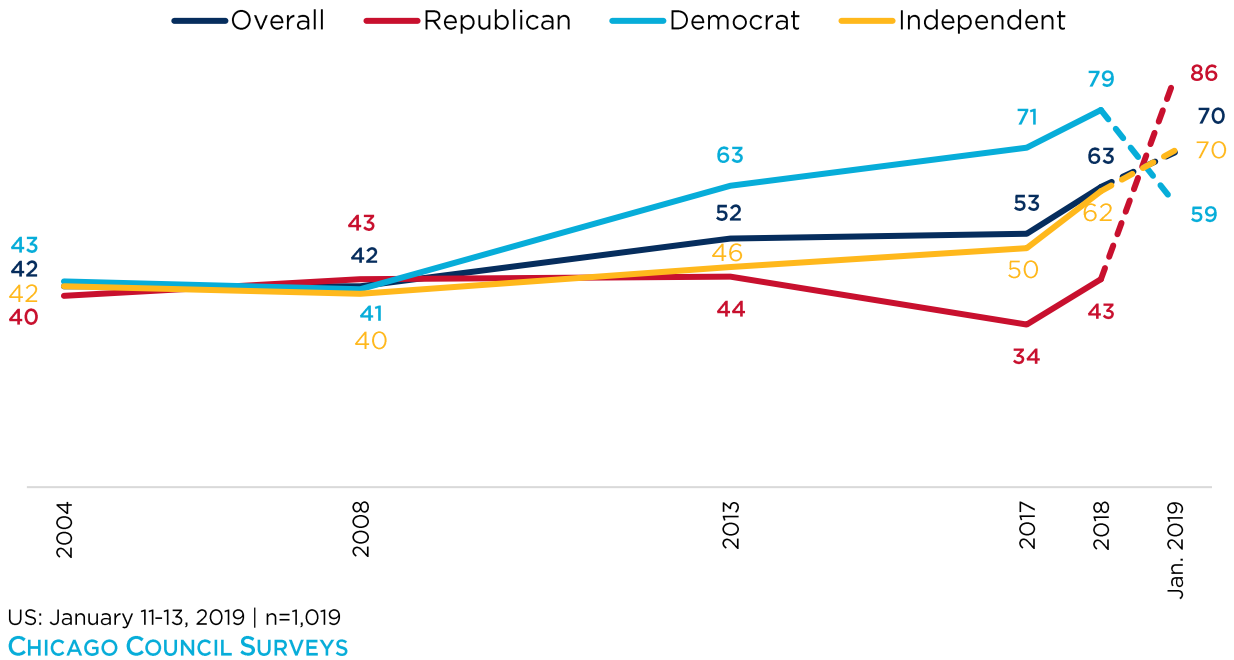
Conclusion

With López Obrador and Trump avoiding damaging confrontations so far, the US-Mexico relationship is on the rebound among both countries' publics. But Trump remains focused on his as-yet-unfulfilled campaign pledge to "build the wall." His declaration of a national emergency in order to begin construction on additional border barriers could put a chill on what is currently a thawing relationship. And with the 2020 elections on the horizon, Trump may well return to his 2016 campaign style of attacks on Mexico and Mexican immigrants. López Obrador and Trump's relationship reset may not survive such a shift.

US Methodology

This report's analysis of country thermometer readings and support for the USMCA are based on data from interviews conducted January 11-13, 2019 by Ipsos Public Affairs using their large-scale, nationwide online probability panel, the KnowledgePanel OmniWeb. A total of 1,019 interviews were completed among a weighted national sample of adults 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error on weighted data is ±3 percentage points for the full sample.

Additional results come from the 2018 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2018 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel July 12-31, 2018 among a weighted national sample of 2,046 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ±2.37, including a design effect of 1.1954.

For both surveys, partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

The 2018 Chicago Council Survey was made possible by the generous support of the Crown family, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the US-Japan Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

Mexico Methodology

Results reported from Mexico are based on data collected by Buendía & Laredo. The nationwide face-to-face survey was conducted from August 17 to August 23, 2018, among a weighted national sample of Mexican adults, 18 years of age or older, who reside in housing units within the national territory. Assuming a design effect (deff) of 1.3, the sampling margin of error of the survey is ±3.53 percentage points. For more details, please contact us at contacto@buendíaylaredo.com

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

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