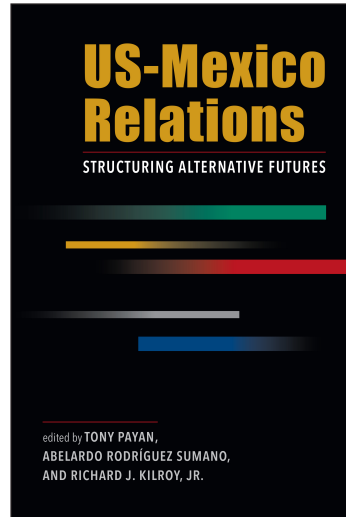# US-Mexico Relations: Structuring Alternative Futures

edited by
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Abelardo Rodríguez Sumano,
and Richard J. Kilroy, Jr.

**LYNNE RIENNER** PUBLISHERS

# Contents

# 1

# Change and Continuity in US-Mexico Relations: Strategic Foresight

*Tony Payan, Abelardo Rodríguez Sumano, and Richard J. Kilroy Jr.*

IN 2018, THROUGH A PROJECT LED BY THE BAKER INSTITUTE'S CENTER FOR the United States and Mexico at Rice University in Houston, Texas, a group of binational experts, along with several universities on both sides of the border, launched an exercise in strategic foresight on Mexico–United States relations for the next two decades. The book that you are holding is the second installment of this project, this time led by Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and the Baker Institute. It uses the Framework Foresight methodology developed by Andy Hines and Peter Bishop.[1]

This second work offers more in-depth analysis with new variables that affect binational relations and that will certainly determine US-Mexico relations over the next decade. Under the initial leadership of Tony Payan and Abelardo Rodríguez Sumano, two workshops brought together intellectual trailblazers in futures studies to explore both US and Mexican perspectives. These workshops were an ideal space in which to evaluate nuances in thought among US and Mexican scholars. The first workshop was led by Peter Bishop and the second by Guillermina Baena, both of whom have extensive experience in strategic foresight. The editors of this volume then adapted the strategic foresight methodology as a guide for the authors in writing their chapters. In July 2023, Richard J. Kilroy Jr. joined the project as the third editor and helped to bring together the efforts of recent years and present them in this book.

## The Strategic Foresight Methodology Explained

The strategic foresight methodology employed in the book is underpinned by Peter Bishop's and Guillermina Baena's contributions and previous experience with it (see Appendixes A and B). Data is provided about the objectives, topics, and reach of the collective project in US-Mexico relations. Strategic foresight planning means building futures that are capable of handling possible situations—what could happen in the short, medium, and long terms. Traditional, linear, procedural, and short-term foresight investigates the past, understands the present, and outlines possible or probable futures. In an uncertain world full of unexpected events, anticipating is a way of organizing life, the government, foreign relations, and the global situation through increasingly necessary, pressing actions to improve the fate of humanity, says Guillermina Baena Paz.[2] Working with anticipation means connecting the future with the present. Anticipating is visualizing and formulating a series of actions in the here and now that are destined to have an effect in the future, before an unimaginable or recurring crisis. Applying a foresight mechanism in planning is an everyday responsibility that results in measures being put in place in the face of unidentified, unexpected, or even undesirable changes.

Every chapter in this text employs the same strategic foresight methodology, which consists of identifying the key drivers that are likely to determine the future, assigning specific values to them, and scanning the horizon for any changes that might occur. Strategic foresight enables the authors to develop multiple potential scenarios of the future. It is not about forecasting the future but about considering the complexity of the world, the pace of change, and the factors that influence the future in order to establish relevant alternatives. In this work, each author identified four kinds of future scenarios: continuity (status quo); desirable (positive change); catastrophic (negative change); and disruptive (which could represent positive or negative change). As a result of this analysis, the authors then developed public policy recommendations to facilitate the desirable scenario and prevent the catastrophic scenario. In the book's conclusion, the editors provide additional policy recommendations that build on the chapter authors' analyses.

## How This Book Contributes to a
## Further Understanding of US-Mexico Relations

US-Mexico relations include promising opportunities and difficult challenges. Urgent alarming signs underly the tension between the two

nations, making the future of bilateral relations uncertain and unsettling. Some of this uncertainty stems from the countries' geographic proximity, the historical background of their relationship, the evolution of the international system, and globalization processes. Taken together, these factors influence the future of US-Mexico relations.

The collaborative work in this book lays the groundwork for understanding and anticipating, through disciplined exercise of strategic foresight, the trajectories that can be extrapolated from the interaction of these factors and other causes. The authors' work is at the cutting edge of the present's transformation into the future and proves fascinating reading, with new findings, new questions, and interesting proposals for how to confront the future. The book also helps highlight the differences between a great superpower (the United States) and a country from the Global South (Mexico) that is part of North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Although the chapters span diverse topics, the reader will find one question asked in common: What will be the future of US-Mexico relations? The expert knowledge herein strengthens our ability to understand the complexity of the consolidating state, regional, and global trends that cause uncertainty and sometimes chaos. We have grouped the chapters by recurring and differentiated trajectories, as explained below.

*Recurring, Differentiated Trajectories*

The expansionist nature of the United States enabled it to grow from its nineteenth-century imperial ambitions into a great superpower at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, the United States is presumed to be in relative, not total, decline. Even so, its great superpower status has allowed it to influence world politics to the highest degree, especially after World War II. Mexico has constantly had to deal with and adapt to the structural constraints within the US sphere of influence. The key turning point in bilateral relations came early, when Mexico lost more than half its territory to the United States in the nineteenth century. Many chapters in this book cast this transfer of territory as the event that sowed irrevocable mutual distrust between the two nations. Even during times of rapprochement, such as with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), mutual suspicion never fully dissipated, and it will likely continue in the future. Mistrust on the Mexican side also results from the United States changing the border, first territorially and today virtually. In the twenty-first century, for example, Donald Trump's rise to power in the United States was a tangible reminder that the old fears of the past, including potential military conflict, were not left behind in the

nineteenth century. Today, anti-Mexican forces in US politics, especially in the Republican Party, still bring up this possibility, and an attack on Mexican sovereignty cannot be ruled out. Thus, over more than two centuries, bilateral relations have moved from divergence—the United States–Mexico War, the invasion of Veracruz—to convergence—201st Fighter Squadron and NAFTA—back to divergence—Trump—then to a mixed, harsh, complex relationship between the Biden and the Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) administrations. But no scenario lasts for long, and the future is always nebulous.

Significant domestic challenges to governability in the United States will influence the future of binational relations. Current trends portend continued tensions at the core of the fight between Republicans and Democrats that could erode US democracy. At the same time, Mexicans recognize their country's incredible interdependence with and presence in the United States. In other words, Mexico is not neutral in the internal struggles of the US Republican Party but rather a constant concern and part of its rhetoric. If the Republican Party retakes the White House in 2025 and the majority in Congress, backed by neo-mercantile, nationalist, xenophobic forces nestled within the party, a confrontation with Mexico and its citizens is likely. That disruptive scenario could mean a distancing from its southern neighbor and a hardened stance on the border. Meanwhile, Mexico, perhaps with the same historical limits as always, could react to protect its existence, turning its foreign and domestic policy mechanisms toward strengthening other alliances, including those with China and Russia, Latin America, and multilateral organizations. In this scenario, everyone in the region loses because the degree of interdependence between Mexico and the United States has existed for a long time and encompasses the sea, the airspace, and the geostrategic boundaries; endemic species; production chains; trade exchanges; mutual trust mechanisms; access to privileged intelligence; the protection of the shared border by air, sea, and land, and more. Even worse, Mexico does not have—in part because it has not been able to have—regional or global leadership.[3] It is a fact that under AMLO, the country moved away from an exclusive North American vision and built bridges with adversaries of the White House. This trend is likely to continue. The interesting point is that AMLO's anti-American project has not entirely borne fruit because the level of dependence on the United States is deep within Mexico; cutting ties with the United States would be self-mutilation.

Not that twenty-first-century mercantilism is not present in the US Democratic Party. Biden's industrial policy shows a new attempt to

reindustrialize the United States, and strategies and resources have been deployed to do so. But Democrats do not show the same level of hostility toward Mexico that other political factions do. Therefore, if the Democrats win the presidential election in 2024, it is likely that the most extreme scenarios developed in this book will be contained, and relations between the neighbors will be rethought with a series of minimal reforms. Still, if the National Regeneration Movement (Morena) candidate wins the presidency of Mexico in 2024, it is likely that the status quo will remain, and corruption and impunity will worsen as relations continue to cool. Either way, tensions between Mexico and Republicans or Democrats will continue until the next crisis emerges, for which the Mexican state will be unprepared to respond. Thus, the stage is set in domestic and international affairs for multiple serious conflicts with the United States.

Other structural issues in Mexico—dysfunction in the three levels of government and weak rule of law—stem from Mexico's domestic conditions and the 1917 Constitution. State and societal noncompliance with the law leads to high levels of corruption and impunity, which constantly threaten the democratic governability of the country. Corruption tarnishes the foundations of Mexico's domestic and foreign policies, which include economic and trade policies, public security and national defense, care for people's lives and assets, protection of natural resources and the environment, the right to health care, advances in science and technology, and so on. The state's inability to decrease corruption and impunity causes the United States to deeply distrust Mexico. This distrust is increasingly evident in the third decade of the twenty-first century, when Washington seems frustrated with Mexico's inability to participate as a liberal market democracy in the North American region, an eventuality that seems distant and uncertain.

Other dynamics in the binational relationship result from the global system. The relative decline of the United States as the only superpower in the international system was followed by the Trump and Biden administrations' intent to regain primacy on the world stage—especially in response to the emergence of Chinese and Russian aggressiveness. China and Russia now demand a new multipolar world order. China is already fighting with Washington in the bilateral relationship and in the Western Hemisphere—although its problematic domestic issues have thus far prevented it from fully engaging. Still, it is estimated that by 2050, China's will be the largest economy in the world, with a stronger labor force than that of the United States; China will have to solve its domestic issues to achieve this position.[4] Moreover, Russia has established military relations

in the Western Hemisphere with Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Bolivia and has broadened its presence in North America and the Arctic—although with the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has become more and more isolated and unable to catch up with the West technologically. This makes it more dangerous, but not necessarily more powerful.

Nothing remains static. The winds of change blow constantly, and no one knows where they will take us. One trajectory could be a loss of inertia in the push for US-fostered regional integration (1994–2016). This seems likely with two potential presidential administrations—Trump in the United States and AMLO in Mexico—under which disruptive factors at the global level come into play, such as trade rivalries with China, pandemics, climate change, and so on. Challenges in world politics that demand Washinton's attention, that therefore pull attention away from relations with Mexico and Latin America, include disruptive events such as the invasion of Ukraine and the Israel–Hamas war.

Given that domestic and foreign forces are at play simultaneously, the argument this book makes is that US-Mexico relations must be reexamined in the framework of limited US power—which the Realist school calls a relative decline—relative to China and while the Russian Federation fights for global and regional hegemony. The United States will be prevented from achieving world hegemony and will have just enough power to make the world much more complex. Movements in the geopolitical sphere that leave North America with fewer viable options for global influence must be analyzed; the most viable option for the continent, including Canada, would be to act regionally. Likewise, in analysis of the US-Mexico bilateral relationship, black swan events must be included, such as pandemics and other gradual yet predictable issues such as climate change.

### Dissimilar Traditions in Futures Studies

Having provided context for the significant issues to consider in the evolution of US-Mexico relations, we now stress the importance of understanding the necessity for strategic foresight. The intellectual histories of futures studies in the United States and in Mexico are different, and this book includes testimonials that represent different cultures, interests, and degrees of power. As Peter Bishop notes in Appendix A, in the United States, futures studies boomed at the end of World War II. It was an intellectual process that moved forward from the Defense Department, along with the RAND Corporation, as the United States emerged as a superpower. At that time, the core issue centered on the

nation's ability to respond to a nuclear war with the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The United States sought to build an advantage in response to the technological takeoff that catapulted the Soviets to space ahead of the Americans.

Under these circumstances, the main ideas of strategic foresight were based on an extensive exploration of technological innovations for the next one hundred years. Peter Bishop reminds us in Appendix A that the study of the future was also centered on fiction, science, and universities that developed programs to imagine the future. Iconic figures such as Al Gore and Newt Gingrich, both in the House of Representatives in 1974, added institutional public policy mechanisms to the US Congress for the study of the future. From then until today, a dozen federal organizations have coordinated work on the future through the Federal Foresight Community of Interest and the Public Sector Foresight Network. Other world and national federations joined in the work on foresight studies, as did the many publications that receive this work.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, Guillermina Baena Paz criticized US predominance in strategic foresight. One of her ideas was to build diverse alternative futures that moved away from US hegemonic power. In Appendix B, Baena reminds us that the Mexican tradition is closer to the Latin American tradition and is permeated by a critical view of US interventionism. As such, the Mexican tradition has been somewhat introverted, turned toward the state level and domestic environment, and only as problems have progressed has strategic foresight been linked to regional and global aspects. Unlike in the United States, most of the collaborations are among independent foundations and projects linked to the National Autonomous University of Mexico or private institutions such as banks. Sporadic efforts have been made in federal public administration for the Mexican state to install permanent professional strategic foresight units.[5]

Managing the meeting of these disparate perspectives was a challenge, but the book uses a common methodology adapted to the analysis of bilateral relations that is enriched by the inclusion of both national perspectives. The chapters include both convergent and divergent readings of futures scenarios, making them rich and full of plurality. Projections of the future are based on the different national interests of the two countries. For example, whereas the foreign policy of the United States aspires to world supremacy, and a parameter of that supremacy is to maintain the highest investment in defense and nuclear capabilities, Mexico's foreign policy buys in to the vision of

Latin America as a place with no nuclear weapons. This shows that strategic foresight is not neutral but has normative commitments, depending on who carries it out and where.

## On the Book's Contributors

The contributors to this book come from diverse academic fields of study in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. In addition to their academic credentials, many of these scholars also bring the practitioner's perspective. They have implemented public policy in the areas of migration, economics, human rights, energy, defense, and national security in both the public and the private sectors in their respective countries. Below we have summarized each contributor's key points.

### Part 1: Trade Agreements and Economic Policy

One of the most significant aspects of US-Mexico relations has been the impact of the regionalization of trade through the enactment of NAFTA in 1994. Yet, as Arturo Santa Cruz (Chapter 2) notes, this important agreement came about at a time when Washington was at the height of world power—and trade was an instrument of its hegemony. A quarter century later, geopolitics has moved in another direction. The renegotiation of the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) is not the result of the commercial expansion of a hegemonic power but is a neomercantilist policy hostile to free trade, a sentiment that prevails today at the domestic level in the United States based on the logic of economic competition with China. Therefore, Santa Cruz notes that North American integration is actually incomplete, and one cannot rule out the possibility that it will be reversed; the trend, indeed, points to uncertainty.

Heidi Jane M. Smith (Chapter 3) reminds readers that economic disparity is the pathway to tensions and trade disputes. Today the United States views trade deficits as a show of weakness and not simply as a matter of trade numbers. NAFTA and the USMCA grew trade relations by 482 percent from 1993 to 2000, a sign of continued trade integration that is now accompanied by mutual doubts. This situation has not kept Mexico from becoming the second-largest export market for the United States—above China and Canada—or the United States from becoming Mexico's top source of foreign direct investment (FDI). This situation places Mexico in a state of dependency that limits its options in international relations.

José Iván Rodríguez-Sánchez (Chapter 4) highlights both change and continuity in Mexico's economic policies with the United States. Through the use of empirical data reflecting Mexico's economic development (and lack of it) vis-à-vis the United States, he examines the external drivers of Mexico's economic policy, such as FDI, remittances, exports, trade, and tourism, and the internal drivers, such as fiscal and monetary policies, corruption, rule of law, impunity, and insecurity. Thus, Rodríguez-Sánchez notes that, despite its potential, Mexico still has much to do to become a more comprehensive trading partner of the United States, as China is.

## Part 2: Regional Migration

Mexico has become a transit country for millions of migrants seeking to reach the United States. Pamela Lizette Cruz (Chapter 5) notes that this has created serious problems in binational relations and has gravely deteriorated the idea of a strategic partnership. The point was evident under President Trump, who made the issue a main argument of his 2016 campaign. According to Cruz, legal and undocumented immigration underwent an extreme disruptive "regulation" with Donald Trump's arrival in the White House, even though immigration plays a leading role in building the US workforce and economy and reducing it could affect US global competition.

Perhaps for this reason, Karla Valenzuela Moreno, Valeria Marina Valle, and Michelle Ruiz Valdés (Chapter 6) propose that Mexico could become a regional mediator of migration between Central America and the United States. They go even further in advocating for immigrants to be integrated into the Mexican labor force. Their chapter considers demographic changes, international refugee norms, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on migration. They emphasize the human rights of migrants, sustainable development, and intersectional strategies for socioeconomic integration of migrants over security and border protection.

## Part 3: Climate Change and Energy

In Mathilde Beauplat-Saada's (Chapter 7) study of the environment, she notes that the United States focuses on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in three sectors: energy, transportation, and agriculture. Since Joe Biden took office in 2021, there now exists a climate change discourse and a return to regulations repealed under Trump. Biden has implemented the widest-reaching climate agenda of any US president. Still, it

cannot be taken for granted that these policies will continue after the US presidential election in 2024.

In her chapter on climate change from the Mexican perspective, Ivonne Cruz (Chapter 8) states that AMLO's administration has no strategy for mitigating the climate threat, which the United States considers important. On the contrary, the Mexican government's public energy policy has contributed to the nation's vulnerability and shows carelessness about the protection of the environment, with alarming consequences. While the United States and much of the Western world have moved toward energy decarbonization, Mexico has embraced carbonization as an option for energy sovereignty.

The bad news on the environment was exacerbated in the energy realm when AMLO came to power, according to Isidro Morales (Chapter 9). Morales explains that since the end of World War II, Mexico and the United States have had a certain level of compatibility in the development of their energy policies despite the strength of the US economy relative to the Mexican economy. Morales places binational energy relations in a complex global context. Today, the local energy scene in North America is affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which had negative repercussions on US-Mexico relations. Mexico's energy policy comes into direct conflict with Washington's interests and could lead to difficult moments in binational relations in the near future.

## Part 4: National Security and Foreign Policy

Craig A. Deare (Chapter 10) argues that strategic foresight for US-Mexico relations requires considering the profound distrust that resulted from the war between the two countries in 1846–1847, when Mexico lost more than half of its territory. The emergence of Trump in 2016 fanned Mexico's long-standing fears and resurfaced a memory that will surely continue to define the future of relations. For example, the handling of drug-trafficking charges against former Mexican secretary of defense General Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda and his brief detention by US Department of Justice officials in 2020 only increased levels of distrust between the two countries because it highlighted the Mexican military's increased power and influence over public safety.

Taking the US perspective, Jorge Schiavon and Rafael Velázquez Flores (Chapter 11) affirm that Mexican foreign policy is essentially a strategy to preserve and project Mexico's interests in the region and in the world, a projection that is still limited by interdependence with the United States cinched by trade relations. Under these circumstances,

most of Mexico's efforts to address an international strategy involve diplomatic representation in fifty-two consulates in the United States. Moreover, Mexico's diversification in other regional and international organizations is also meant to counterbalance the country's role in world and regional politics.

Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyon (Chapter 12) maintain that a US feminist foreign policy meant to influence justice and social equity in US-Mexico relations is lacking. The development of a feminist foreign policy depends on which political party is in power after the 2024 elections. The authors argue that no issue is purely international or purely domestic in the bilateral relationship. Both levels together have an influence, so it is important to talk about foreign policy in an intermestic context.

On human rights and gender in bilateral relations, Eduardo L. Tadeo Hernández and Elena Ayala Galí (Chapter 13) question the Mexican state's human rights policies, including those for vulnerable migrants crossing the country and victimized by different criminal actors, some even linked to the Mexican state. Even though the system of human rights has expanded institutionally and normatively, implementation of these norms is still lacking at different levels, and this affects US-Mexico relations. The authors argue that, to address these concerns, Mexico requires a political will that, right now, appears to be absent from the Mexican government.

This trend is related to the work of Tomás Martínez Sánchez (Chapter 14) on the structural crisis in the rule of law that is worsening as the political criminal networks that have prospered over the last four years, along with Morena and the party system in Mexico, continue to grow. These networks are versatile enough to emerge and survive through various electoral cycles and actors in power. Organized crime can penetrate this framework of political and social elasticity, reproduce, and rise as a permanent player in the power structure. In fact, business social networks finance political networks. In similar fashion, they also become networks of organized crime; one seeks contracts for works and services, and the other seeks protection to carry out criminal activity. This scenario erodes Mexican society and increases insecurity in US-Mexico relations.

### Part 5: The Regional and Global Context

Todd Hataley (Chapter 15) reminds readers that the United States also shares a border with Canada, and the bilateral relationship that has formed between the two northern countries can help shape a larger

North American identity that includes Mexico in a community of nations. The institutional processes that have facilitated US-Canada cooperation on the northern border in terms of security, migration, and transit of people and goods can also help reduce the potential for conflict by addressing concerns such as domestic terrorism and shared water and energy management. However, Hataley notes that the roots of disruption are already in place, and even countries with long-standing relations and democratic traditions are susceptible to change.

This point is reinforced by Richard J. Kilroy Jr. (Chapter 16), who examines both the US and Mexican roles in international organizations in the Americas, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). AMLO wished to lead a "separatist" agenda from the OAS, which has existed since 1948, and to eventually replace the OAS with CELAC as the region's primary international organization. For the OAS to remain relevant in the Americas in light of Mexico's challenges, Kilroy argues that the United States must reimagine a new OAS structure and even push to move it from Washington to Panama. Such efforts to rebalance inter-American relations and recognize Mexico and other states in the Americas as important regional actors will help maintain the OAS's viability.

To cover the global perspective of US-Mexico relations, Priscila Magaña-Huerta (Chapter 17) focuses on China's role in international relations. There is a global struggle between Washington and Beijing. The context of China's regional influence is mostly defined by two factors: the goal of the United States to contain the rise of China on the international scene; and Beijing's interest in consolidating its economic and security interests in North America, Latin America, and, of course, Mexico. Mexico's ability to truly distance itself from the United States is in question precisely because of the extensive economic network the two countries have built in recent decades, despite China's attempts to undermine US influence.

Meanwhile, the anti-Mexican wave in the United States opens the possibility of closer relations between Mexico and Russia, although an extreme rapprochement would be catastrophic to Mexico's relations with Washington, writes María Cristina Rosas (Chapter 18). Rapprochement between Mexico and Russia has occurred at other times in history, including during the Mexican Revolution and when Trump took office. Still, Rosas argues that Mexico should reinforce its intelligence services to anticipate the rise of transnational organized crime on its borders and the presence of the Russian mob. In the worst-case scenario, a possible

Russian intervention in Mexican cybersecurity could harm the nation's shared interests with the United States. For Washington, Mexico playing with Moscow means playing with fire. Still, it is not by chance that Mexico did not condemn Russia after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

## *Part 6: Challenges and Opportunities*

The authors provide insights on a number of issues that present challenges and opportunities in future US-Mexico relations. Writing about the future of democracy in Mexico, Enrique Gutiérrez Márquez (Chapter 19) examines a very real challenge, arguing that the country's democratic transition is incomplete. Although "procedural democracy" has led to a rise in institutions and judicial processes, which contribute to the appearance of a kind of democratic governance in the country, it has largely benefited certain political elites and not the majority of Mexicans, who have not participated in citizenship building, particularly in gaining increased civil, political, and social rights. Gutiérrez reminds readers that the democratic reforms that have improved Mexico's governance are not guaranteed going forward, given the socioeconomic inequalities that pose a challenge to democracy.

Carlos Iván Moreno and Miguel Sigala (Chapter 20) address the distance between the United States and Mexico in terms of science and technology and academic exchanges in general. They argue that the current low level of cooperation in science and technology is incompatible with the multidimensionality of the bilateral relationship and with US interests because these links are part of the American grand strategy, and their development fuels the United States' status as a superpower. Yet, it is obvious that Mexico has never been a member of the scientific club, in large part because of historical mutual mistrust between the nations. Mexico is even going backward by overshadowing and attacking the scientific community and reducing investment in research. The authors argue that Mexico is faced with the tasks of adapting to the shift in competition among Washington, Moscow, and Beijing in the science and technology arena and devising a national strategy that would allow it to join in collaboration on science and technology in North America or in the rest of the word.

In the final chapter (Chapter 21), the book editors provide a way forward in US-Mexico relations, emphasizing the ties that bind rather than the wounds that separate. Reflecting a more optimistic tone and recognizing the need for a better future for both countries, they provide a number of policy recommendations that would lead to a greater understanding between the nations and their peoples.

### Discrepancies in Handling Bilateral Relations

In the framework presented in this book, readers will find discrepancies and vulnerabilities in most areas of the bilateral relationship. First, complete compatibility of interests and viewpoints is impossible because the relationship is asymmetric. Whereas the United States is a constant presence in Mexico's national life, there is only a sporadic and at times negative presence of Mexico in life in the United States. The United States has global interests, whereas Mexico is still looking inward at its need for development in an increasingly complex environment and with fewer available resources. Second, interdependence with the United States limits Mexico's ability to broaden its group of alliances. Therefore, Mexico must carefully rethink the drive behind its international relations, where, of course, there is great potential. However, the gravitational pull of interdependency with the United States is huge, and geographic location limits the diversification of national interests in the region, although it does not nullify them. This does not mean that Mexico does not have the capital to force certain issues onto the binational agenda. It can do so, but the type of political and diplomatic capital required to steer the relationship toward fulfilling Mexico's national interests comes about only occasionally in the Mexican government's total capacity.

Canada could be a model for Mexico. But imitating Canada's relationship with the United States would mean modifying certain cooperation schemes and allowing US intervention or at least a US presence that many Mexicans cannot accept because of historical suspicion. The relationship would depend greatly on leadership, of course, but also on the interests leaders bring to the table. At times, such interests preclude the construction of a mutually beneficial relationship. On the other hand, one nation often becomes for the other a motive for election propaganda—as Mexico was for Trump, and the United States was for AMLO. These types of two-level games, as Robert Putnam calls them, make convergence difficult.[6]

The differences between the two countries are not merely geopolitical. They are also economic, although trade relations show that a mutually beneficial agreement can be reached. Clearly, the reshoring of industry and the security of value chains, strategic goals of the United States, present opportunity for Mexico, which can secure access to the largest consumer market in the world—the United States. Yet, to take advantage of this opportunity, Mexico would have to determine it is part of North America—something the AMLO administration did not want to accept fully.[7]

It is in both nations' interests to develop a mutual cooperation framework and maintain these topics in the portfolio of public security

rather than relegate them to the national security agenda. The issues of immigration and drug trafficking, which are significant sticking points, go hand in hand with other issues, such as differing energy strategies, which affect Mexico's trade commitments in the USMCA, and environmental policies, of which Mexico has not wanted to be a part. Such divergences will continue, although it is unlikely they will lead to a rupture, which would be catastrophic for both nations. Even so, US investment in the field of science and technology and Mexican underinvestment in these areas will widen the gap between the two countries and increase incompatibility. Topics such as vulnerable minorities, women, LGBTQIA+ persons, migrants, Indigenous persons, and peasant workers will continue to be on the agenda but are not prioritized enough to influence important trends in binational relations. US-Mexico relations will continue to be determined by the big topics: trade and economic integration, security, and US geostrategic interests and the role Mexico has in them.

## Calibrating the Future in the Present

The scenarios developed by the authors in this book using the strategic foresight methodology seek not only to diagnose the present but also to identify desirable scenarios and recommend clear actions that can realize a better tomorrow for our societies. For this reason, the authors focus on identifying the key drivers of the future and assigning them values so trends can be generated—of continuity or good, bad, and even catastrophic outcomes. The values enable the generation of each alternative future scenario and allow the authors to identify which future could be considered desirable.

The chapters discuss the alternative futures the authors see as possible. Readers can consider whether each future is probable and to what degree. The authors seek likelihoods within a cone of plausibility of what is feasible. We leave it to readers to determine how likely each potential future is, and to public policymakers to seek the values that can alter the future in the desired direction. The authors offer public policy recommendations in each chapter. The idea is to get ahead of the future—to avoid worst-case scenarios and preferably achieve the optimistic or best-case scenarios. Of course, that means agreeing on which scenario is the best—a difficult thing to do. At least the normative commitment is clear: peoples of Mexico and the United States want a better future.

## Notes

1. Hines and Bishop, "Framework Foresight."

2. Baena Paz, *El tenedor en el camino*, 79–82.

3. In spite of this, in multilateral politics Mexico enjoys a prestige regarding its leadership in the Treaty of Tlatelolco that establishes Latin America as a nuclear weapons-free zone and is a model for the region and other zones in the world.

4. David Dollar, Yiping Huang, and Yang Yao, "Global Clout, Domestic Fragility," IMF Finance and Development, Summer 2021, https://www.imf.org /external/pubs/ft/fandd/2021/06/the-future-of-china-dollar-huang-yao.htm.

5. Guillermina Baena Paz, conversation with Rodríguez Sumano, October 11, 2023, Mexico City.

6. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics."

7. Mexico is geographically part of North America, but culturally part of Latin America. NAFTA sought to change Mexico's identity to be a North American nation, which AMLO has pushed back against. NAFTA's replacement is USMCA which is no longer referred to as the North American Free Trade Agreement.