



INTERNATIONAL

30
ANIVERSARIO
FAES

Just South of the U.S. Southern Border: Democracy and Migration

Beth Erin Jones

Beth Erin Jones, political analyst. PhD in Political Science,
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Translation: **M^a Elena Ginés Castillo**

The author reviews the elements that have historically influenced and nowadays affect the process of migration to the United States from Mexico and other Central American countries, from the purely economic and in pursuit of a better life, to other fundamental ones, such as the situation of extreme violence suffered in many of these societies due to their lack of democratic consolidation.





As of late, U.S. Border Control has seen quite an increase in the monthly apprehension of illegals along its Southwest Border.* It has steadily augmented from January, at a modest 47,980 to 132,887 in May. Most notable is the consistent increase of family units and unaccompanied children as opposed to single adults. Family units now represent almost twice as much as that of single adults: 85,452 to 36,838 in May, respectively, when in January they were about the same at 24,189 to 18,684. The presence of unaccompanied children has more than doubled from 5,107 in January to 11,507 in May as well.¹ Overall, it is the increase in family units that has accounted for the majority of the total increase while the number of single adults has not risen nearly as much. With four months left for the fiscal year to end, the United States has already more than reached its relative average for apprehensions during the last decade or so, keeping in mind that apprehensions have gone down quite a bit since 2000, averaging at a slightly fluctuating 300-500,000 a year since 2009. In order to provide some perspective, on the Southwest Border, monthly apprehensions reached over 200,000 a month in the year 2000, 1,643,679 in total that same year and have been steadily decreasing since then—until the last six months.² At the same time, for obvious reasons the Trump administration has not been able to charge Mexico for the building of a wall along the entire southwest border, curiously promised electorally when illegal apprehensions were at an obvious low, and is essentially having a time of it funding it on the U.S. side of the border as well.

Even so, the current administration has announced a political win, insisting on Mexico's sending of troops to its southern border with Guatemala so as to prevent more Central American illegals from initially crossing *that* border first—under the threat of imposed tariffs if they do not comply—economic punishment that would essentially apply to both sides of the border. The thing is, Mexico had already agreed to increase its efforts along its southern border,³ and it has been controlling the influx of migration for years. Also, the 'deal' mainly involved the Migrant Protection Protocols that were set up officially in January in which refugee applicants could be sent back to Mexico to wait for their hearings.⁴ Regardless, in the eyes of Trump's political base, such proclaimed 'new' measures are another example of

* Based on the Fiscal year 2019: October 2018 through September 2019.

¹ US. Department of Homeland Security, *Southwest Border Migration FY 2019*, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>

² US. Department of Homeland Security, *U.S. Border Patrol Monthly Apprehensions (FY 2000-FY 2108)*, <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Mar/bp-total-monthly-apps-sector-area-fy2018.pdf>

³ **Shear, Michael Dear & Haberman, Maggie.** *Mexico Agreed to Take Border Actions Months Before Trump Announced Tariff Deal*, The New York Times, June 8, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/08/us/politics/trump-mexico-deal-tariffs.html?module=inline>

⁴ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Migrant Protection Protocols Guiding Principles*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.cbp.gov/document/guidance/migrant-protection-protocols>



► **The Trump administration has not been able to charge Mexico for the building of a wall along the entire southwest border and is essentially having a time of it funding it on the U.S. side of the border as well**

his powers of negotiation, a perceived zero-sum outcome, when in reality, the game never has and never will be zero-sum on either side of the border. For good or for bad, the United States and Mexico has been historically tied together for the good of two centuries. In the meantime, the root causes of illegal migration from both Mexico and Central America are not credibly addressed. Overall, there are many motives for those trekking north to do so, including economic hardship and the assurance of clandestine employment, but the escape from violence is definitely a factor to be considered as well.

In both Mexico and Central America there are extremely high levels of violence, effecting native populations as well as migrants crossing the expanse towards the U.S. Southern Border. One clear explanation for said violence is the absence of a consistent rule of law and process throughout both regions. Within fledgling democracies, this void of consistent policing, greatly influenced by the presence of gangs and drug cartels combined with an unreliable protection provided by the state, can in turn be directly traced back to their lack of democratic consolidation. Over the years both Mexico and Central America have had varying levels of democracy and dictatorial rule, and while inequalities abound, an escape from the violence is more often than not the main issue for many. It can be argued that it is this violence that is the root cause of migration throughout the region, not just a simple search for a better life north. Again, as of late, those traveling are increasingly families,⁵ not mainly single adults with the intention of working and sending money back home. Also, one must always keep in mind that the trip from Central America is a treacherous one, and it is only logical to conclude that those who risk it, increasing their chance of reaching safely in numbers—thus the caravans—do so of their own will for a reason. Yes, of course it is to have access to a higher standard of living, but again, also to escape the extreme violence within their countries of origin.⁶ In many a case these governments have not been able to consolidate democratically to the extent that the state is able to effectively guarantee one of their basic freedoms: the right to avoid bodily harm, and if it is infringed upon, the right to seek justice

⁵ US. Department of Homeland Security, *Southwest Border Migration FY 2019*, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>

⁶ 'Structural violence' in the region has replaced that of armed conflicts especially in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. For example, homicide in Honduras increased from 31.9 for every 100,000 inhabitants in 1994 to 75.5 in 2013. **Sandoval-García, Carlos**. *Exclusion and Forced Migration in Central America*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2017, p 23.



for said infringements. In order to further understand said lack of democratic consolidation, first it is more than prudent a brief encounter with their past political trajectories: in this case Mexico in more depth and a brief summary of Guatemala and Costa Rica as a Central American comparative. While this author is not attempting to explain here why there is such a lack of democratic consolidation, it is quite clear that such said void of a properly functioning consolidated democracy in and of itself remains as a ‘stick in the wheel’ of the democratic process and thus an impediment to further progress within a given democratic society—so that measuring the length of the stick and in which rung of the wheel it is lodged may go a long way to decreasing its impediment towards forward movement. Or, it might explain why it all might eventually come crashing down. Either way, there is always a past to any political development, democratic or otherwise, as well as a future—both uniquely tied to the present.

A Historical Perspective: Mexico and the United States

The United States and Mexico have always shared a tumultuous history due primarily to their proximity, having lived through two very different political trajectories. Cultural differences aside, the U.S. and Mexico have been intertwined for over two centuries of interaction politically and economically, the influence of the U.S. consistently looming over Mexico’s own particular political history. Tangible democratic transition in Mexico was not initiated until the turn of the millennium, although some say that its beginnings may have been rooted as early as 1968 when the Tlatelolco Massacre took place.⁷ Even so, the consolidation of Mexico’s democracy is still working through its process, one in which its extended period of time, or lack thereof, is of the essence. Like its Central American counterparts, in many ways revolution and civil war has led Mexico through a complicated reality, particularly from a democratic standpoint. Not only have these difficulties originated from lack of electoral reforms, but also in the extent of the varying strength of its democratic institutions, and especially the rule of law—a conundrum that has faced Mexico and especially Central America for decades. Most inopportunistly for the region, the U.S. has successfully cut off drug distribution through the Caribbean, forcing the Colombian drug cartels to reroute their distribution through Central America and Mexico,⁸ along the U.S.-Mexico’s 2,000-mile border. Consequently, organized crime combined with gang violence and local corruption has eroded democratic institutions that never really had the time to properly consolidate in the first place.

⁷ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 221.

⁸ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 232.



► **In both Mexico and Central America there are extremely high levels of violence, effecting native populations as well as migrants crossing the expanse towards the U.S. Southern Border**

In April of 1830, while continuing to allow European migrants to enter, *Mexico* banned all immigration from the *United States*. On September 15, 1829, slavery had been abolished throughout the Mexican territory, including Texas. As an exception, colonists in Texas were allowed to keep existing slaves, but their descendants were to be free and of course no new slaves should be brought in. In order to work around this policy, U.S. colonists then brought in slaves by means of phony work contracts resulting in the Mexican government's ban on all U.S. immigration. Eventually this impasse then led to Texans' successful fight for independence that capitulated in Santa Anna's signing of a treaty allowing the independence of Texas. In December of 1845, the U.S. Congress annexed Texas as the twenty-eighth state of the Union. What Mexicans refer to as the "War of the North American Invasion" and in the U.S. the "Mexican War" followed shortly thereafter.

The then U.S. president, James Polk had sent a special envoy, John Slidell, to offer the purchase of what is currently western Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California for the price of 30 million dollars, but the new government in Mexico refused to see him while claiming that all of Texas was indeed Mexican territory. In reaction to the rejection of the purchase, Polk sent troops under General Zachary Taylor to the border on the Rio Grande. On April 25, 1846, the Mexican cavalry crossed the river on April 25, 1846, killing eleven U.S. soldiers as six were wounded and sixty-three taken prisoner. General Taylor declared, "hostilities may now be considered as commenced," and the U.S. cavalry along with volunteer regiments slowly began to move south. On September 14, 1847, Mexico City was captured, and the war came to an end; but only after a bloody battle: the historic defense of Chapultepec Castle where *los niños héroes*, forty-seven teenage cadets, became heroes (four of which were wounded, thirty-seven taken prisoner and six dead). The next year, on February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed and then ratified by both countries in which Mexico lost more than half of its territory (abandoned its claim to Texas and ceded New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California and parts of Colorado) and received 15 million dollars in return as well as relief from any outstanding U.S. citizen claims. Even in 1853, adding hurt to injury, during his eleventh presidential term and in need of cash Santa Anna sold 30,000 square miles (now southern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona) in the Gadsden Purchase. Consequently, the Mexican people rose up against him and forced him into his last exile.⁹

⁹ **Smith, Clint E.** *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000, pp 18-23.



► **In December of 1845, the U.S. Congress annexed Texas as the twenty-eighth state of the Union. What Mexicans refer to as the “War of the North American Invasion” and in the U.S. the “Mexican War” followed shortly thereafter**

Initially, after a brief era of liberal reforms, the full-blooded Zapotec Indian Benito Juárez suspended payments on foreign debt after an economically debilitating War of Reform (1858-1860). Consequently, European powers demanded payment, and while England and Spain simply had in mind the seizure of custom payments when they sent troops jointly with France to capture Mexican ports, Emperor Napoleon III had other plans. Once England and Spain withdrew, France established Ferdinand Maximilian of Hapsburg as emperor of Mexico after the fall of Mexico City on June 10, 1863. In the meantime, the U.S. was fighting its Civil War (1861-1864) and Lincoln found it difficult to support any Republican uprisings in fear that the emperor would take up arms in favor of the Confederate States. Once the American Civil War was over though, the U.S. administration openly supported Juárez, and along with the sale of surplus war material, around three thousand well-paid Union veterans fought alongside Juárez’s army against the emperor’s forces. About two thousand American Confederate Veterans also fought on the side of the emperor as well. On May 15, 1867, Maximilian turned over his sword and was executed on June 19, 1867. Juárez was easily re-elected as president and served on until July of 1872 when he died of a sudden heart attack.

Shortly thereafter came the Porfiriato Era (1876-1910) named after the war hero, General Porfirio Díaz who managed a revolt against Juárez’s successor, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. Díaz was able to rule over Mexico directly and indirectly for the next thirty-four years in which the modernization of Mexico took place in a “highly asymmetrical” manner since the beneficiaries were the middle and upper classes in urban area while the agricultural areas did not benefit from the progress.¹⁰ Unrest began to brew within circles of intellectuals, workers and peasants under Díaz, and Francisco I. Madero, a wealthy landowner from the north with liberal ideals saw a chance to contest Díaz’s hold on power when the dictator somewhat mistakenly told a reporter he would not run for another ‘term’. In September of 1910, Madero supposedly only received 196 votes against Díaz sparking the Mexican Revolution as Madero called his people to arms. Madero’s hold on power, wrought with conflict especially with Emiliano Zapata, post Díaz’s departure, was short. As a liberal landowner, Madero had no intention of redistributing lands to peasants, as was Zapata’s intention. In general, revolutionary factionalism would

¹⁰ Smith, Clint E. *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000, pp 27-33.



tear the country apart. In turn, General Victoriano Huerta took power, arresting Madero and having him “shot when trying to escape”.¹¹ Huerta’s control over power would not last either as he assassinated political opponents and continued to battle factionalized revolutionary groups—the now civil war raged on.

From the north, the idealistic American president Woodrow Wilson, in support of Republican forces, sent military equipment to the northern Mexican insurgents and in April 1914 found a reason to directly intervene when the crew of the USS Dolphin was arrested temporarily in the port of Tampico, Mexico, seeking refueling. When it was heard that a German ship was coming to Veracruz bearing arms for Huerta’s regime, Wilson ordered Veracruz’s occupation by U.S. Marines and a possible march on Mexico City was not publicly denied. As Huerta had to redirect its troops in order to defend the possible onslaught of the capital (a move never actually considered by Wilson in the first place) Zapata was subsequently encouraged in the south while Villa captured Zapatecas in the north. Combined with dwindling popularity and internal opposition as well as U.S. posturing, Huerta was exiled to Spain on July 8, 1914.¹² In October of 1915, Wilson formerly recognized Venustiano Carranza, a rival in Villa’s eyes, which resulted in conflict between the previously pro-American Villa and the United States, eventually resulting in the intervention by the U.S. cavalry into Mexican territory. Carranza had Zapata assassinated and Alvaro Obregón had Carranza assassinated, all the while from 1910 to 1920 about 1 million of the 15 million Mexican citizens perished. Under the Obregón presidency beginning in 1920, the last violent attempt at gaining political power was by Adolfo de la Huerta, of Sonora, in a northern uprising. Obregón was actually able to peacefully pass power to his successor and in 1929 and the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario) was formed by said predecessor, Plutarco Elías Calles, now known as the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional).¹³ Subsequently, the foundations of the PRI were forged as an the institutionalization of the revolution into a national party and eventually a one-party system that lasted into the new millennium.

While political reform began in as early as 1978 when the Communist Party and other left-wing political parties were legalized,¹⁴ further opening towards democratization would be a gradual, two-decade long transformation. Really, the ‘authori-

¹¹ Smith, Clint E. *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000, pp 37-41.

¹² Smith, Clint E. *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000, pp 41-43

¹³ Smith, Clint E. *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000, pp 46-50.

¹⁴ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Pres: New Haven, 2017, p 223.



► **Its consolidation is yet to be hopefully accomplished during the next few decades or more with even further judicial, legislative and electoral reforms, particularly on the local level, and an increase in the enforcement of law and order**

tarian old-order' system in Mexico did not start to open up until President Miguel de Madrid entered in along with liberal economic reforms from 1982-1988 and Madrid's named successor, Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) opened up to the global economy even more, allowing for even further political pluralism. Finally, there came President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) with his focus upon positive judicial reform, electoral fairness and political plurality.¹⁵

Under Salinas, political modernization lagged behind economic liberalization although the PRI did give up its monopoly on state governorships; but after his choice for the next president candidate was shot, Luis Donaldo Coloso, Salinas's hold on rule started to loosen. NAFTA came into effect on January 1, 1994 and Ernesto Zedillo also came into power in December of that same year. Three weeks later, the new government was forced to let their currency float, loans from the US treasury as well as the IMF allowing them to stabilize and recover economically.¹⁶ Zedillo also refused to choose his successor and the PRI finally lost the presidency in 2000 to Vicente Fox of the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) party followed then by Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) also from PAN. The PRI regained control under Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) only to lose it recently to Andrés Manuel Lopez Obregón of the PRD (Partido Revolucionario Democrático) who finally gained the presidency after unsuccessful runs in 2006 and 2012. Overall, it is this continuous peaceful transition from one administration to the next, within a truly multiparty system, which signifies democratic transition since the year 2000. Still, its consolidation is yet to be hopefully accomplished during the next few decades or more with even further judicial, legislative and electoral reforms, particularly on the local level, and an increase in the enforcement of law and order, again hopefully focusing on the local level.

Briefly: Guatemala and Costa Rica

When one is to look a bit beyond the U.S./Mexican border, to Mexico's own southern border more specifically, the lack of democratic consolidation is just as dramatic, except for maybe the case of Costa Rica, which has managed to maintain a healthy democracy since the 1950s. In contrast, Guatemala has had an elected government

¹⁵ Smith, Clint E. *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000, p 103-104.

¹⁶ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 225-227.



since 1986, but the guerilla war that lasted over three decades, finally coming to an end in 1996, cost the country an estimated 200,000 lives, 50,000 disappearances, and 1 million migrations to Mexico, mostly indigenous.¹⁷ In 1954, Eisenhower organized a coup against the democratic and reformist government of Jacobo Árbenz, a president that had previously vowed to convert Guatemala into a modern capitalist state.¹⁸ Mainly as a result of the Guatemalan administration land redistribution policy and the U.S. government's subsequent protection of the United Fruit company, Guatemala was declared a 'communist outpost' and a possible national reformer was ousted instead as a proclaimed communist, the democratic process disregarded. Consequently, a corrupt dictator was installed, Carlos Castillo Armas and the 1904 'Roosevelt corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine was demonstrated in its most pure, while ultimately misled form: "...the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power."¹⁹ Regardless of however such intervention was misguided in hindsight, and even at the time disputed, U.S. intervention in Guatemala during such a delicate period of democratic transition did have devastating effects long-term. More specifically, U.S. support of the coup created a forced inability to have access to the democratic process as a means to reinforce institutions, organize its bureaucratic system and ultimately demand a greater standard of living for its densely populated country, the majority of it indigenous. While a successful democratic transition and then consolidation would not have been guaranteed, at least there would have been a much earlier intent to work through the democratic process of negotiation, instead of a violent and constant battle for power between political factions.

On the other hand, Costa Rica has had quite a different trajectory, one in which compromise led not only to a stable democracy and a definite lack of violence, but also its steady growth economically; and its consequently improved levels of economic equality resulted from a social policy developed within that same democratic context over time. After its short Civil War in 1948, Costa Rica was able to compromise even as the left and right faced off in a stalemate and a revised version of the 1871 constitution was ratified. An important point was the ban on a standing army, allowing funds to be dedicated towards human development as opposed to overthrowing governments.²⁰ Fabrice Lehouco insists that democratic success in Costa Rica was not really a result of more equality, but instead a direct result of the very

¹⁷ Between 1981 and 1982 an estimated 26 massacres took place, all but one indigenous populations: 3199 people were murdered (twenty-five committed by the army and one by guerillas). Sandoval-García, Carlos. *Exclusion and Forced Migration in Central America*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2017, p 15.

¹⁸ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 81-83.

¹⁹ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 88.

²⁰ **Lehouco, Fabrice.** *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment*, Cambridge: 2012, pp 91-92.



dedication to democratic process—increased equality followed. Simultaneously in other Central American countries it was the struggle for power within its factionalized and tenuous regimes that caused continued violence and civil war. In other words, it was a political crisis of immense proportions, dictators with a tenuous hold on power that found themselves ousted by the military or the need to unsuccessfully use repression as a means to maintain power—unstable autocracy. In contrast, in Costa Rica social policy that was enacted through the democratic bargaining process was able to decrease inequalities.²¹ Lehouco holds that throughout Central America, the most inequitable countries were not the most violent. For example, Guatemala was less inequitable than its more peaceful neighbors through the 1970s and 1980s and the inequalities represented through working wages throughout the region actually demonstrate that the violence preceded economic downturns, not the other way around.²² Again, it could be said that in Central America a lack of political stability and extended or repeated periods of civil war may not have stemmed directly from inequality. While inequalities may have certainly exacerbated violence, the root cause of instability was derived from a political crisis in the form of tenuous dictatorial rule. Ideally, the obvious alternative should have been a rule-based democratic transition and further consolidation, like that of Costa Rica, throughout Central America over time—but that unfortunately was not the case.

Democratic Transition and Consolidation

Regardless of the region, peaceful or less than peaceful transitions leave their mark and the end result can either leave the country in a position to compromise based upon the set rules of the democratic system, or not. The question is: How do we define a democratic transition and consolidation and to what end? Basically, by rounding up a set of intertwining characteristics for both processes, their successes and failures can be reasonably measured and applied—and not just to developing democracies, but also to the general state of established democracies as well. Stepan and Linz have quite an extensive definition not only of democratic transition, but also of its consolidation, while offering examples from Southern Europe, South America and Post-communist Europe as well. Said definitions are more than applicable to that of Mexico and Central America. Fundamentally, democratic transition and consolidation comes down to the fact that a democracy is an interacting system, one in which certain characteristics must be present so as to multilaterally support one another. Firstly, a *democratic transition* may be considered completed when the electoral process has been agreed upon (procedures) and a government has come to power after a free and pop-

²¹ Lehouco, Fabrice. *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment*, Cambridge: 2012, pp 19-28.

²² Lehouco, Fabrice. *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment*, Cambridge: 2012, pp 34.



► **In 1954, Eisenhower organized a coup against the democratic and reformist government of Jacobo Árbenz, a president that had previously vowed to convert Guatemala into a modern capitalist state**

ular vote allowing this government to have the authority to enact new policies, while at the same time that the executive, legislative and judicial powers “generated by the new democracy do[es] not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*.”²³ These two concepts are not at all new, but what brings them into even further clarity is how the authors insist upon the distinction that said *democratization* should never be confused with *liberalization* since while democratization entails liberalization, liberal policies can easily take place without democratization. Secondly, *democratic consolidation* is defined by three points: first as *behaviorally* where behavior of the elected government is not dominated by its intent on avoiding ‘democratic breakdown’; second as *attitudinal* where political change comes from within the government during political or economic crisis; and third *constitutionally* where political conflict is resolved by ‘established norms’ so that their violation of said norms are ‘ineffective and costly’.²⁴

Both authors are also adamant in insisting that said democracy must exist within a functioning state in which five basic interacting arenas play their part in effective consolidation and of course the prolongation of said democracy, while it is admitted that a consolidated democracy does by no means have to stay that way. The five arenas are: a civil society that is “free and lively,” a political society which is “autonomous and valued”, a rule of law that “guarantees citizen’s freedoms and independent associational life,” a state bureaucracy which is “usable by new democratic government” and finally, an institutionalized economic society in which there exists a “set of socio-politically crafted and socio-politically accepted norms, institutions and regulations.”²⁵

Conclusively, these five arenas interact in the following manner:

“For example, civil society in a democracy needs the support of a rule of law that guarantees the right of association and needs the support of a state apparatus that will effectively impose legal sanctions on those who attempt to use illegal means to stop groups from exercising their democratic right to organize.”²⁶

²³ Linz, Juan J. & Stepan, Alfred, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, John Hopkins University Press: 1996, p 3.

²⁴ Linz, Juan J. & Stepan, Alfred, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, John Hopkins University Press: 1996, p 5-6.

²⁵ Linz, Juan J. & Stepan, Alfred, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, John Hopkins University Press: 1996, p 7-11.

²⁶ Linz, Juan J. & Stepan, Alfred, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, John Hopkins University Press: 1996, p 15.



► **Democratic success in Costa Rica was not really a result of more equality, but instead a direct result of the very dedication to democratic process—increased equality followed**

By adhering to said definitions, one is then able to plausibly measure the extent of democratic consolidation around the world while always keeping in mind that a ‘non-consolidated democracy’ is not to be confused with that of simple liberalizing policies enacted by an authoritarian state. Regarding Mexico and Guatemala, while this author does not intend to make a full classification of their level of democratic transition and consolidation here in this short paper, one clear observation is the lack of the rule of law throughout the two regions that is simply not up to par. In fact, many a time a violation of a citizen’s freedom is simply not even reported for fear of escalation, or the simple realization that nothing will be done.²⁷ For example, in Mexico in 2007 seven out of ten crimes were not even reported. Between 2007 and 2016 more than 100,000 Mexicans had died, 30,000 reported as disappeared and 35,000 displaced from their homes when the government sent in the military to take down gang leaders. Even as Mexican civil society has become ever more empowered, the intertwining rule of law that underlyingly supports its vocal power still has a far way to go. Overall, the relevance of an ineffective state has dire consequences even if it is as simple as its inability to collect taxes so as to pay the policing efforts that guarantee the rule of law—mix in a corrupted local state apparatus as well as small-time delinquency, gang violence and drug cartels and the steps towards further democratic consolidation become smaller and smaller day by day.

Conclusion

In every sense of the word, the relationship that the United States has had with both Mexico and Central America has been a complicated one, from the Iran-Contra scandal to the invasion of Panama and right up until present-day, not to mention all that has been offered in more detail above. American interests in the region have always been a central catalyst towards cooperation and intervention, misled or not. Recently, the populist tendencies of the current administration have seemed to override that of common interests and dilemmas along the Mexican/U.S. border (the fight against drug-trafficking *and* consumption, terrorism, trade *and* migration), or even one-sided interests for that matter, particularly when one ponders the possible negative effects of tariffs for American consumers. Overall, one must always keep in mind Mexico’s already dual role, not just as an origin of migration

²⁷ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 234.



to the United States, but as buffer and intermediary between the United States and Central America regarding migration policies and action. The Trump administration's insistence that Mexico police its southern border with Guatemala is nothing new regardless of recent—or not so recent—deals.

In 1998, the so-called 'Operation Sealer' came into effect as a monitoring function in order to impede the entry of undocumented immigrants, arms and drug trafficking from Central America.²⁸ On average, an estimated 300,000 migrants leave Central America each year in an intent to reach the United States: 50 percent are stopped in Mexico, 25 percent in the United States and 25 percent are generally able to cross. In Mexico, native as well as migrant kidnappings are a definite problem. For example, just during Calderon's term 24,091 missing persons were reported, both migrants and Mexicans.²⁹ Still, in a country where the police and courts are not a guarantee for protection or due process, seeking justice is often not even an option. Clearly, Mexico is a crucial partner in dealing with U.S. migration policy, but its lack of democratic consolidation, and that of other countries of migrant origin with the same lack of consolidation, may be more so the root of the problem, a matter that will not be necessarily solved by an increased military presence on the Mexico-Guatemala border. Sending thousands of more troops to the border may simply exacerbate the true dilemma which is the violence in and of itself. If one is to defer to the Mexican government's past military interventions, gang leaders were removed only to be simply replaced. Consequently, there was an escalation of gang violence while simultaneously abuse from the very security forces sent in to keep order was common and rarely punished.³⁰

Initially, an increased military force will probably decrease the numbers of immigrants reaching the U.S. border, even more so than it has been since the late nineties, but the root cause of migration will still not be properly addressed. The vagueness of the structural violence as opposed to outright war may give the impression of stability, but the end result is quite the same. With increased policing, dangers to those migrating may readily increase as well, along with their desperation and willingness to find alternate routes—and in come the gang leaders and corrupt security forces to fill the void. In the end, the 'zero-sum' attitude that the current American administration commonly endorses hides a long-standing dilemma within a temporary solution. Truly, zero-sum or not, concerning immigra-

²⁸ Sandoval-García, Carlos. *Exclusion and Forced Migration in Central America*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2017, p 54.

²⁹ Sandoval-García, Carlos. *Exclusion and Forced Migration in Central America*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2017, p 42-46.

³⁰ Reid, Michael. *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017, p 234-235.



► **Democratic transition and consolidation comes down to the fact that a democracy is an interacting system, one in which certain characteristics must be present so as to multilaterally support one another**

tion, or any other variety of foreign policy issues, the question is: What is in the *long-term* interest of the United States in regard to its southern neighbors, idealistically, realistically or otherwise? The proper response is left to the policymakers to develop a clear and hopefully supportive response, intertwined within a realistic foreign policy that upholds the ideals of the democratic system—a tall order from an administration that frequently seems unable to adhere to said ideals itself. What is clear is that an increase in troops, a wall, or any other temporary remedy to quell the symptoms of a larger issue will not bring about conclusive, lasting results.

A Final Note

Frequently, the path towards a consolidated democracy, or even maintaining an already consolidated democracy, can move backwards instead of forwards. This holds true for every democracy, in developed countries as well as in those lagging behind. Nevertheless, the hope is that the initial transition towards a cyclical and peaceful transfer of power continues and no one is more aware of this than those within Mexican and Central American civil societies. If political democratic procedures are not maintained, as history demonstrates, most or all of democracy's accomplishments can be easily misplaced, while hopefully not forever lost, unconsolidated democracy or not. In the end, it is the consistent strength yet inevitable fragility of the democratic system, based upon sometimes seemingly impossible negotiations and consensus, that leads its governments towards success or failure. Still, when all is said and done, if the system remains standing, that can be a success in and of itself solely because it allows for the possibility of collective improvement, within a realistic ideal. Simply put, along with the assurance of an autonomous legislature, judicial and executive branches, the successful continuity of democracy *is* democracy. Even so, its consolidated permanence can mean so much more.

“The fact remains that political democracy is the *requisite condition*, the requisite instrument, for whatever democracy or democratic goal we may cherish. If the master system, the overall political system, is not a democratic system, then social democracy has little worth, industrial democracy little authenticity, and economic equality may not differ from an equality among slaves.”

Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, p 11.



► **American interests in the region have always been a central catalyst towards cooperation and intervention, misled or not. Recently, the populist tendencies of the current administration have seemed to override that of common interests and dilemmas along the Mexican/U.S. border**

Bibliography

- Lehouco, Fabrice.** *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment*, Cambridge: 2012.
- Linz, Juan J. & Stepan, Alfred,** *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, John Hopkins University Press: 1996, p. 3.
- Reid, Michael.** *Forgotten Continent: A History of the New Latin America*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2017.
- Sandoval-García, Carlos.** *Exclusion and Forced Migration in Central America*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2017.
- Sartori, Giovanni.** *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham House: New Jersey, 1987.
- Shear, Michael Dear & Haberman, Maggie.** *Mexico Agreed to Take Border Actions Months Before Trump Announced Tariff Deal*, The New York Times, June 8, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/08/us/politics/trump-mexico-deal-tariffs.html?module=inline>
- Smith, Clint E.** *Inevitable Partnership: Understanding Mexico-U.S. Relations*, Lynne Reiner Publications: Colorado, 2000.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection,** *Migrant Protection Protocols Guiding Principles*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.cbp.gov/document/guidance/migrant-protection-protocols>
- US. Department of Homeland Security,** *Southwest Border Migration FY 2019*, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>
- US. Department of Homeland Security,** *U.S. Border Patrol Monthly Apprehensions (FY 2000-FY2018)*, <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2019-Mar/bp-total-monthly-apps-sector-area-fy2018.pdf>

faes
FUNDACIÓN

Suscripción a Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político:
www.fundacionfaes.org/pay/confirmBuy?id=6362
Suscripción a la newsletter:
www.fundacionfaes.org/es/newsletter

C/ Ruiz de Alarcón, 13. 2ª planta
28014 Madrid
Tlf 915 766 857
info@fundacionfaes.org
fundacionfaes@fundacionfaes.org

DONATIONS

Multimedia

