

**“A Presidential Look at Latin America and Mexico’s Perspectives on
Hemispheric and Bilateral Relations”**

**By
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April 10, 2018

President Calderon set out to demonstrate that Latin America and Mexico are very important to the United States’ wellbeing; and to combat the misperception that benefits flow in a lopsided manner to Mexico. He substantiated these points in a number of issue areas.

First, is economics and trade. One of every three dollars worth of American exports flows to Latin America, and Mexico itself is the United States’ second largest export destination. Moreover, U.S. exports to Latin America grew faster over the last decade (76%) than did U.S. imports from Latin America (29%).

- And President Calderon emphasized repeatedly that trade and economic engagement with Mexico produces American **jobs**.
 - Six million American jobs are tied to trade with Mexico, and 1.1 million jobs result directly from such trade.

Immigration from Mexico also props up a number of strategic industries in the United States. Mexican immigrants often labor in difficult jobs as workers in construction and agriculture, cooks, maids, and housekeepers.

- Healthy food and agriculture sectors alone account for 15 million jobs.

President Calderon posited that the structures of the Mexican and U.S. economies are complementary, not competitive. For automobiles, there is no such thing as an American car versus a Mexican car. Both sides produce intermediate assemblies and parts for new cars.

- By one calculation, cars en route to final assembly cross the U.S.-Mexican border 7 times.

Like economics broadly, **tourism** tells a similar story. Nineteen million Mexican tourists – 1 in 4 of the total tourists visiting the U.S.– vacation in the U.S. annually, spending some 20 billion dollars, and again, supporting jobs in the American hospitality industry.

Other areas in which bilateral cooperation is touted as producing mutual benefit include national security (terrorism and organized crime), border management, and energy production/distribution.

Unfortunately, the warmth and depth of these interactions have diminished, as favorable views of the US have fallen in Latin America since 2016. To illustrate the shift, between 1995 and 2000 large numbers of Mexicans came into the U.S. Today, more Mexicans return home than arrive here.

Standing to gain from unfavorable views of the U.S. and Washington’s antipathy toward multilateral trade agreements is China. Beijing wants to lead the global economy, and would win if NAFTA dies.

- Additionally, derogatory rhetoric out of Washington also gives fodder to Latin American populists (e.g. in Cuba, Venezuela, Peru, Brazil, and even Mexico); making for further fertile ground for China.

President Calderon left the audience with a hypothetical question – what kind of Mexico works best for the United States? Is it a Mexico struggling to be an effective ally; or one whose economy is trading, growing, and providing employment at home, and cooperating on security challenges?

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