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# AFPI VISITS MEXICO IN THE AFTERMATH OF ITS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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## TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ We recently represented AFPI at the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Second Annual U.S.-Mexico Policy Summit and Carvalho Dialogue in Mexico City, Mexico.
- ★ The summit took place two days after the Mexican presidential elections, where participants discussed the implications of leftist MORENA party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum's victory and the future of the U.S.-Mexico relationship.
- ★ The conference explored how an America First administration must consider engaging with Mexico on migration, national security, and transnational cartel crime.

The June 2, 2024, presidential election results in Mexico captured headlines across the world, as leftist MORENA party candidate Claudia Sheinbaum won a decisive victory over the opposition coalition candidate, Xóchitl Gálvez. The handpicked successor of outgoing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), Sheinbaum's policies are likely to be a continuation of his six-year term. Sheinbaum was expected to win, but the surprise of the night was that MORENA and its coalition partners from other political parties also won a supermajority in the Chamber of Deputies and a majority in the Senate. This complete victory by MORENA will have varying implications for the U.S. on key issues of migration, national security, and trade.



Conservatives in Mexico are understandably very concerned and distraught by the election outcomes. Looking ahead, AMLO and Sheinbaum have signaled their intention to enact reforms that would further consolidate power in the executive branch. These policies, which include an overhaul of the judiciary system and the elimination of independent energy regulators, are key considerations for the U.S. and other regional partners. Sheinbaum will be sworn in as president on October 1.

While representing AFPI in Mexico City for the Texas Public Policy Foundation's U.S.-Mexico Policy Summit, our team engaged with members of the Mexican conservative foundation, Patria Unida, as well as other stakeholders to understand the implications of the election results and their impact on the U.S.-Mexico relationship. We also attended a private briefing on the state of security in Mexico and the political agendas that shape the nation. Here are our takeaways:

**With a Sheinbaum administration, U.S.-Mexico cooperation on preventing illegal immigration may be tough but not impossible.**

If the U.S. does not enforce its own border laws at home, Mexico has no incentive to do the same at its southern border. The Biden Administration's open border policies have invited the Mexican government to allow millions of unlawful migrants to transit north toward the U.S. The result has been the worst border crisis in our nation's history, the cartels enriched and emboldened to new heights, and the proliferation of human trafficking and smuggling.

An America First administration must prioritize securing the southern border while also working with Mexico to reduce its role as a transit path for illegal immigrants. The Trump Administration did this successfully with outgoing President AMLO, using negotiation and leverage to compel him to agree to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), send the Mexican national guard to secure its southern border, and implement other deterrence policies. AMLO also acted domestically to halt migration, shutting down La Bestia ("the beast"), a train that was transporting migrants in Mexico from its southern to the northern border, and offered asylum protections to some who qualified. A similar transactional relationship should be expected with President Sheinbaum. She has reportedly told supporters she will not accept a revival of MPP, so the next America First administration may have to be prepared for prolonged negotiations. A potential upside to the change in Mexican administrations is that experts do not believe



that Sheinbaum is currently corrupted by the cartels, and she made noticeable progress addressing crime in Mexico City as its former mayor. The cartels are public enemy number one to the American people and control the pipeline of human and drug trafficking across the U.S.-Mexico border. Defeating the cartels is intertwined with securing the border, and a more receptive Mexican counterpart to this mission would be a welcomed shift away from the failed “hugs not bullets” strategy of AMLO.

**An America First administration should pursue a path where the trade relationship is leveraged for security and migration goals.**

Historically, most people view the U.S.-Mexico relationship through the lens of trade, and this issue is expected to be a top priority for the incoming Sheinbaum administration. In 2023, Mexico became the U.S.’s top trade partner, just one year after the two countries celebrated 200 years of a bilateral relationship. The importance of the trade relationship cannot be overstated, but the conservative U.S.-Mexico coalition argues that it can no longer be addressed in a silo without considerations for migration controls and national security.

The next America First administration has a unique opportunity to revise the approach to trade with Mexico during the 2026 scheduled review of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which was negotiated by the Trump Administration in June 2020 as a replacement for the North American Free Trade Agreement. Viewing the trade relationship through the lens of how it has improved (or perhaps worsened) national security and migration will be essential in revising it for America First priorities. For instance, if the Sheinbaum administration starts cracking down on cartel violence within Mexico, the U.S. can start to introduce more incentives for businesses to open facilities in Mexico. The U.S. should also consider how the USMCA has affected global strategic interests—for instance, combating the phenomenon of Chinese companies relocating to Mexico to use trade benefits as a backdoor into the U.S. market.

**The Mexican drug cartels are public enemy number one, and Mexico must work with the U.S. to defeat them.**

A recurring question at the conference was whether Sheinbaum would be her own policymaker or whether she would be a puppet president with outgoing President AMLO (who is highly compromised by the cartels) pulling the strings. AMLO is



reportedly planning to remain in Mexico after leaving office, which is a departure from previous presidents who relocated abroad after their terms. The U.S. will be more successful in defeating the cartels if Sheinbaum is independent of their influence. If necessary, U.S. policymakers may have to drive a wedge between her and AMLO. A new America First administration will recognize the need to defeat the cartels, taking an ‘all options on the table’ approach to disrupt them. This strategy could include establishing stricter penalties for drug traffickers and human smugglers on U.S. soil and stopping the illegal trafficking of guns from the U.S. to Mexico. It should also involve going after the cartels’ profits by imposing fees on wire transfers, which would cut down on their ability to extort migrants and conduct human trafficking and smuggling operations. These efforts would be more effective if the U.S. could negotiate with the Mexican government and cooperate with them on defeating the cartels.

Ultimately, the conference reinforced the importance of U.S.-Mexico cooperation, as both nations face a multitude of challenges. Partnering with like-minded conservative allies in Mexico is essential to understanding the new Mexican president and holding her administration accountable.

