

# GEOPOLITICA

RIVISTA DI POLITICA INTERNAZIONALE

JOURNAL OF GEOPOLITICS AND RELATED MATTERS

## CONFINI E FRONTIERA

GEOPOLITICA, DIRITTO E RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI

**BORDER AND FRONTIER**  
**GEOPOLITICS, INTERNATIONAL LAW AND RELATIONS**

I concetti di confine e frontiera sono stati centrali nella teoria geopolitica, nel diritto internazionale e nello studio delle relazioni internazionali. Questo numero di GEOPOLITICA - curato da Federico Bordonaro e Tiberio Graziani - si propone di esplorare le molteplici dimensioni di tali concetti, tracciandone l'evoluzione storica ed esaminando la loro rilevanza e trasformazione nella ricerca accademica contemporanea e nelle applicazioni pratiche.

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*The concepts of border and frontier have been central to geopolitical theory, international law, and the study of international relations. This issue of GEOPOLITICA - edited by Federico Bordonaro and Tiberio Graziani - aims to explore the multiple dimensions of these concepts, tracing their historical evolution and examining their relevance and transformation in contemporary academic research and practical applications.*

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CONTRIBUTI SU INVITO / INVITED PAPERS

# Geopolitical Implications of the US-Mexico Border

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Vision & Global Trends. International Institute for Global Analyses  
(Progetto Società Italiana di Geopolitica)

## ABSTRACT

The US-Mexico border, beyond being a geographical line separating two nations, represents a crucial node in the intertwining of both countries' national identities. This article aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the definition and management of this border have influenced US domestic and foreign policies, shaping its national identity over time.

Starting from the premise that borders are not mere territorial delimitations, but rather social and political constructs reflecting diverse power relations, cultures, economies, and histories, the analysis will focus on the following questions: the historical evolution of the border, its impact on domestic policies, the construction of national identity, economic cooperation (NAFTA, USMCA, and future prospects), bilateral relations, and geopolitics. The geopolitical implications of border management will be examined, highlighting how tensions and cooperation between the two countries have influenced relations with other international actors and shaped US foreign policy. The analytical category of "area of influence" will be adopted.

The article seeks to provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the central role that the border with Mexico has played in the construction of the US national identity. It will be argued that the definition and management of this border are not merely technical or legal issues, but represent an ongoing challenge to reconcile the diverse identities that make up US society and to define the US role in the world and the dimension of its area of influence.

KEYWORDS: USA, Mexico, Border, Frontier, Area of influence

## 1. Introduction

The border between the United States and Mexico is much more than a geographical line dividing two nations. It is a dynamic and contested space where political power, cultural identities, and economic interdependence converge. Historically, this border has served as a symbol of both separation and connection, reflecting broader tensions within and





between the two countries. From the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo<sup>1</sup> to contemporary debates on immigration and border security, the U.S.-Mexico border has played a pivotal role in shaping the political and social landscapes of both nations.

This essay aims to analyze how the definition and management of the U.S.-Mexico border have influenced domestic and foreign policies in the United States, ultimately shaping its national identity. Drawing from the perspective that borders are not merely territorial delimitations but also social and political constructs, the analysis will delve into key areas such as the historical evolution of the border, its impact on domestic politics, its role in national identity formation, and the implications of economic cooperation and bilateral relations.

Particular attention will be given to the geopolitical significance of the border, exploring how the interplay between cooperation and tension has influenced the United States' relationships with other international actors and defined its area of influence in the Western Hemisphere. By examining these facets, the essay seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the central role the U.S.-Mexico border has played in shaping not only the identity of the United States but also its global positioning.

Ultimately, the border is not just a legal or technical issue but a complex and evolving challenge, reflecting the need to reconcile diverse identities within U.S. society while defining its role on the global stage. Through this analysis, the essay will argue that the U.S.-Mexico border is a key factor in understanding the United States' internal dynamics and external ambitions<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-guadalupe-hidalgo>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-mexico/> "Mexico remains one of the United States' closest and most valued partners, with a 2,000-mile shared border containing 47 active land ports of entry, and a shared history that has established deep cultural and people-to-people ties over 200 years of diplomatic relations. This bilateral relationship directly impacts the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans on issues as varied as trade and economic development, education exchange, citizen security, drug control, migration, human trafficking, entrepreneurship, innovation, environmental protection, climate change, and public health. The broad scope of relations between the United States and Mexico extends beyond official government to government relations to encompass extensive daily commercial, cultural, and educational exchange. Each day, hundreds of thousands of people cross both sides of the border legally to work, live, or visit close



## GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE US-MEXICO BORDER

### 2. Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

The U.S.-Mexico border is not merely a territorial boundary<sup>3</sup>; it is a dynamic construct that embodies political, social, and cultural dimensions. To fully understand its implications, it is essential to explore the theoretical frameworks and concepts that inform the analysis of borders and their role in shaping national identity and geopolitical strategies.

#### *Borders as Social and Political Constructs*

Borders are often perceived as fixed geographical lines; however, they are better understood as socially and politically constructed spaces<sup>4</sup> that reflect and reinforce power dynamics, cultural identities, and historical legacies<sup>5</sup>. The U.S.-Mexico border exemplifies this complexity, acting simultaneously as a site of division and connection. Its definition and management are shaped by policies, societal perceptions, and historical events that underscore the interplay of inclusion and exclusion within and between nations.

#### *Area of Influence*

The concept of an “area of influence”<sup>6</sup> is particularly relevant in analyzing the geopolitical significance of the U.S.-Mexico border. This framework considers how powerful nations, like the United States, project authority and control within their immediate regions and beyond. The

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relatives and friends. In addition, an estimated 1.6 million U.S. citizens live in Mexico and Mexico is the top foreign destination for U.S. travelers.

<sup>3</sup> Claudio Cerretti, Matteo Marconi, Paolo Sellari, *Spazii e poteri. Geografia politica, geografia economica, geopolitica*. Editore Laterza, Bari, 2024, p.15-28

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13562576.2024.2363972?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/c05/borders-geo-historical-analysis-human-construct> “Un confine è – per usare il termine di Michel Foucault – un *dispositivo* spaziale che regola e ordina il rapporto tra interno ed esterno, inclusione ed esclusione.” Dario Gentili, “Hic sunt leones. Confine/Frontiera. Genealogia politica di una disposizione spaziale”, in Wolfgang Müller-Funk (a cura di), *Confini d'Europa*, Roma, Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici, 2021, p. III.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sphere-of-influence>; <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/new-spheres-influence>



border serves as a critical point where the U.S. asserts its influence over migration, trade, and security while negotiating its relationship with Mexico and the broader Latin American region.

### *National Identity Formation*

Borders play a crucial role in shaping national identities, acting as markers of sovereignty and cultural distinction. In the U.S. context, the border with Mexico has become a focal point for debates about what it means to be “American,” often tied to issues of immigration, diversity, and security. These debates reveal deeper tensions within U.S. society about its multicultural identity and the competing narratives of inclusion and exclusion.

By grounding the analysis in these frameworks, the essay will examine the U.S.-Mexico border not as a static entity but as a dynamic and contested space. This perspective will allow for a more comprehensive exploration of its historical evolution, its influence on U.S. policies, and its broader geopolitical and cultural implications.

### 3. Historical Evolution of the Border

The U.S.-Mexico border has undergone significant transformations since its establishment, reflecting shifting power dynamics, political agreements<sup>7</sup>, and evolving societal needs. Understanding its historical development is essential to grasp the contemporary implications of this boundary for both nations.

#### *Establishment of the Border*

The U.S.-Mexico border was formally defined through the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848*<sup>8</sup>, which concluded the Mexican-American War. This treaty resulted in Mexico ceding vast territories, including present-day California, Arizona, and New Mexico, to the United States. The subsequent Gadsden Purchase in 1854 further refined the border, highlighting its strategic importance for transportation and commerce.

<sup>7</sup> <https://bipr.jhu.edu/documents/JMazza-ArticleSRIA-20180507.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Guadalupe-Hidalgo>



## GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE US-MEXICO BORDER

These agreements marked the beginning of a border that symbolized both division and opportunity<sup>9</sup>.

### *Early Border Management*

In its early years, the border was loosely regulated, with minimal infrastructure or enforcement. Communities on both sides engaged in cross-border trade and social exchange, fostering a sense of shared regional identity despite national boundaries. However, as economic and political interests grew, so did the need for more defined control over the border.

### *Transformations in the 20th Century*

The 20th century brought significant changes to the U.S.-Mexico border. The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the U.S. Prohibition era (1920-1933) saw increased border activity, including migration, smuggling, and law enforcement. The establishment of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924<sup>10</sup> marked a turning point in border management, reflecting growing concerns over immigration and national security.

World War II further shaped the border through programs like the Bracero Program (1942-1964), which allowed Mexican laborers to work temporarily in the United States. This period underscored the economic interdependence of the two nations while also highlighting inequalities and tensions.

### *The Modern Border*

The latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century saw the U.S.-Mexico border become a focal point for debates over immigration, drug trafficking, and national security. The North American Free Trade

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kaplan, *The revenge of Geography*, Random house, New York, 2013 p.337 “Mexican immigration is leading toward the demographic reconquista of area of Americans took from Mexico by force in the 1830s and 1840s, Mexicanizing them in a manner comparable to, although different from, the Cubanization that has occurred in southern Florida. It is also blurring the border between Mexico and America, introducing a very different culture”.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/about/history/1924-border-patrol-established#:~:text=On%20May%2028%2C%201924%2C%20Congress,Labor%20Appropriation%20Act%20of%201924.>



Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 transformed the border into a critical hub for trade, increasing economic integration while exacerbating disparities between the two nations.

Post-9/11 security concerns led to the militarization<sup>11</sup> of the border, with increased surveillance, fencing, and personnel. The construction of the border wall became a contentious symbol of division, reflecting broader debates about immigration policy and national identity.

### *Symbolism and Legacy*

The historical evolution of the U.S.-Mexico border reveals its dual role as a site of connection and separation. It has been shaped by treaties, wars, and economic agreements, reflecting the broader relationship between the United States and Mexico. This legacy continues to influence how the border is perceived and managed today, serving as a key factor in domestic and international politics.

By examining this historical context, we can better understand the complexities of the U.S.-Mexico border and its central role in shaping the identities and policies of both nations.

## 4. Impact on U.S. Domestic Policies

The U.S.-Mexico border has had profound and lasting effects on domestic policies in the United States, particularly in areas such as immigration, security, and identity politics. The management of this border has become a central political issue, influencing debates at local, state, and federal levels.

### *Immigration and Border Security*

Immigration policy<sup>12</sup> is one of the most contentious aspects of U.S. domestic politics, and the U.S.-Mexico border is at the heart of this de-

<sup>11</sup> <https://nacla.org/nearshoring-and-militarization-us-mexico-border#:~:text=Early%20forms%20of%20what%20we,for%20immigration%20enforcement%20and%20surveillance> “As corporate boosters push to shift supply chains from China to northern Mexico, military expansion in the borderlands secures manufacturing zones for transnational capital.”

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/background/how-us-patrols-its-borders>



## GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE US-MEXICO BORDER

bate. Over the years, the border has become a focal point for addressing concerns over unauthorized migration, leading to the implementation of strict enforcement measures.

- **Legislation and Policy:** Policies such as the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, and more recent executive orders have shaped how the U.S. approaches border security and immigration.
- **Militarization of the Border:** Since the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in border militarization, with initiatives such as Operation Gatekeeper and the Secure Fence Act of 2006 focusing on building physical barriers and deploying advanced surveillance technologies.

### *Political Polarization*

The U.S.-Mexico border has become a polarizing issue, with political parties adopting starkly different approaches.

- **Republican Policies:** Often emphasize stricter border controls, increased deportations, and physical barriers, symbolized by the Trump administration's push for a border wall.
- **Democratic Policies:** Typically advocate for comprehensive immigration reform, focusing on pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and humane treatment of migrants.

These debates reflect broader societal divisions over identity, national security, and economic opportunity.

### *Impact on Border States*

Border states like Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico play a unique role in shaping domestic policies.

- **Economic Interdependence:** These states benefit from trade and cross-border commerce, particularly in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism.
- **Local Challenges:** Border communities often face unique challenges, including strain on public services due to migration and heightened security concerns.



### *Identity Politics and Social Divisions*

The border is central to discussions about national identity and multiculturalism in the United States.

- ***Immigration and Identity:*** The influx of immigrants has enriched U.S. culture but has also sparked debates about assimilation, cultural preservation, and the definition of “American” identity.
- ***Racial and Ethnic Tensions:*** Anti-immigrant sentiment and policies have often been tied to racial and ethnic divisions, with the border serving as a symbol of exclusion for some groups.

### *Public Perception and Media Influence*

Public opinion on border policies is shaped significantly by media representations of the border. Narratives of crisis and insecurity often dominate, influencing political discourse and voter priorities. These perceptions, whether accurate or exaggerated, have a direct impact on policy decisions and election outcomes.

### *A Defining Domestic Issue*

The U.S.-Mexico border is not only a physical boundary but also a powerful symbol within U.S. domestic policy. Its management reflects broader societal challenges, from balancing security and humanitarianism to addressing economic and cultural integration. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for developing policies that reconcile national security with the values of inclusivity and opportunity.

## 5. Construction of U.S. National Identity

The U.S.-Mexico border is not only a geographic division but also a cultural and symbolic space that has deeply influenced the construction of national identity in the United States<sup>13</sup>. It serves as a site where ideas

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Who are we? The challenges to America's National Identity*, Simon&Schuster, New York, 2004; The single most imposing challenge to America, in Huntington's view, is the problem of Mexican immigration and the resulting “Hispanization” of those regions of the United States adjacent to and acquired from Mexico. He fears that the result of Mexican immigration could be a “bifurcated” America. Huntington argues that Mexican immigration differs from previous waves of immigration in several fundamental ways. America is the only First World country in the world sharing a long,



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of inclusion, exclusion, and “Americanness” are continuously negotiated, revealing the complex and often conflicting narratives that shape the nation.

### *The Border as a Cultural and Political Symbol*

The U.S.-Mexico border holds powerful symbolic meaning in the American consciousness.

- ***Symbol of Sovereignty and Security:*** For many, the border represents the United States’ right to control its territory, regulate immigration, and protect its citizens from perceived external threats.
- ***Gateway of Opportunity:*** Conversely, for migrants and border communities, it symbolizes hope, economic opportunity, and the blending of cultures.

This duality highlights the tension between seeing the border as a line of division versus a space of connection and integration.

### *Debates on Immigration and Identity*

Immigration from Mexico and other parts of Latin America has played a central role in shaping U.S. identity.

- ***Narratives of Inclusion and Exclusion:*** The United States has historically portrayed itself as a “nation of immigrants,” yet policies and

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undefended border with a Third World country, making the crossing both easy and appealing to Mexicans. Mexican immigration accounts for 25% of all legal immigration, much larger than the influx of Irish or German immigrants earlier in American history. It is estimated that nearly half a million Mexicans will immigrate to the United States each year until 2030, culminating in nearly a half century of high immigration from a single country. [No other immigrant group in American history has asserted or has been able to assert a historical claim to American territory. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans can and do make that claim. Roughly 8–10 million illegal immigrants were in the United States, 58% of which were Mexican. Not only does Mexican immigration differ from previous immigration in these ways, but Huntington argues that Mexicans lag other immigrants in their assimilation into American society for several reasons. Different from other immigrants, Hispanic immigrants emphasize the need for their children to be fluent in Spanish. Mexican immigrants and their children generally refer to themselves as Mexican first and American second. However, approximately one quarter of Hispanics convert to Protestantism, a fact that Huntington attributes to assimilation of American culture, as many Hispanics come from a Catholic tradition.]





rhetoric surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border often challenge this ideal by emphasizing exclusion and control.

- ***The Immigrant Experience:*** Immigrants from Mexico have enriched U.S. culture and society<sup>14</sup>, contributing to cuisine, music, language, and labor. However, their experiences have also been marked by discrimination and challenges to assimilation.

### *Multiculturalism and National Unity*

The U.S.-Mexico border has brought questions of multiculturalism to the forefront.

- ***Cultural Exchange:*** Border regions are rich with cultural fusion, where traditions, languages, and economies from both sides intersect. Cities like San Diego-Tijuana and El Paso-Ciudad Juárez exemplify this interconnectedness.
- ***Challenges to Unity:*** The growing Latino population in the U.S., driven in part by immigration, has fueled debates over the balance between preserving cultural diversity and fostering a cohesive national identity.

### *The Role of Media and Public Discourse*

The media plays a significant role in framing the border within the national imagination.

- ***Depictions of Crisis:*** News coverage often portrays the border as a site of chaos, emphasizing issues like illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and security threats.
- ***Positive Narratives:*** Conversely, stories highlighting the economic and cultural contributions of border communities offer a more inclusive perspective.

These competing narratives shape public perceptions of the border and, by extension, U.S. national identity.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert D.Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, Random House, New York, 2013, p.338 "Mexicans arrive in the USA, settle in the areas of the country that were once part of the their homeland, and so enjoy a sense of being on their own turf that other immigrants do not share".

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### *Identity Conflicts in Policy and Politics*

The border underscores tensions in how the United States defines itself as a nation.

- ***Exclusionary Identity:*** Policies such as the construction of a border wall and strict immigration enforcement reflect a vision of the U.S. as a nation that prioritizes security and sovereignty over openness.
- ***Inclusive Identity:*** Advocates for immigration reform and cultural integration argue for a more inclusive and multicultural vision of American identity.

### *The Border's Legacy in Shaping Identity*

The U.S.-Mexico border remains a defining feature of national identity in the United States. It is both a boundary and a bridge, encapsulating the complexities of sovereignty, diversity, and inclusion. As the United States continues to grapple with its identity in an increasingly interconnected world, the border serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges and opportunities facing the nation.

By examining the cultural and symbolic significance of the border, we gain insight into the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be American in the 21st century.

## 6. Economic Cooperation and Challenges

The U.S.-Mexico border is a vital economic nexus, linking two nations with deeply interconnected economies. Trade, labor, and investment flow across the border, driving growth and development on both sides. However, economic cooperation also brings challenges, particularly regarding disparities in wealth, labor practices, and regional development. This section explores the economic dimensions of the U.S.-Mexico border, focusing on trade agreements, cross-border economies, and the complexities of economic interdependence.

### *Trade Agreements: From NAFTA to USMCA*

Economic integration between the United States and Mexico has been formalized through major trade agreements.



- **NAFTA (1994-2020):** The North American Free Trade Agreement reduced trade barriers between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, creating one of the world's largest free trade zones. The border became a key hub for the exchange of goods, services, and investments<sup>15</sup>.
- **USMCA (2020-Present):** The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement replaced NAFTA, updating provisions on labor rights, environmental protections, and digital trade. It aims to create a more balanced trade relationship while addressing some of NAFTA's shortcomings<sup>16</sup>.

These agreements have fostered economic growth<sup>17</sup>, but they have also intensified economic disparities, particularly in Mexican border regions.

### *Cross-Border Economies*

The border economy is marked by a high degree of interdependence, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and retail.

- **Maquiladoras:** The rise of maquiladora factories along the Mexican side of the border, where goods are assembled for export to the United States, has fueled economic activity but also raised concerns about labor exploitation and environmental degradation<sup>18</sup>.
- **Agricultural Trade:** The border facilitates the exchange of agricultural products, with Mexico serving as a major supplier of fruits and vegetables to the U.S. while importing machinery and other goods.
- **Tourism and Retail:** Border cities such as Tijuana and El Paso benefit from tourism and cross-border shopping, which boost local economies.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/North-American-Free-Trade-Agreement>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/strengthening-usmca-and-north-americas-economic-cooperation/>

<sup>17</sup> The Uncertain Future of Two U.S. Border Towns That Thrived Off Trade - WSJ

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/technology/maquiladora>; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264117793\\_The\\_maquiladora\\_industry\\_impact\\_on\\_the\\_social\\_and\\_economic\\_situation\\_in\\_Mexico\\_in\\_the\\_era\\_of\\_globalization?enrichId=rgreq-71afata33765afa8a3761255dabdd8cf-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzI2NDExNzc5MzI0ZmZlMjE3MzcoNzE0OTg0OTJAMTQwNjAzNTg4MzMzOQ%3D%3D&el=r\\_x\\_2&esc=publicationCoverPdf](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264117793_The_maquiladora_industry_impact_on_the_social_and_economic_situation_in_Mexico_in_the_era_of_globalization?enrichId=rgreq-71afata33765afa8a3761255dabdd8cf-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzI2NDExNzc5MzI0ZmZlMjE3MzcoNzE0OTg0OTJAMTQwNjAzNTg4MzMzOQ%3D%3D&el=r_x_2&esc=publicationCoverPdf)



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### *Economic Disparities*

Despite the economic benefits of cooperation, significant disparities persist.

- ***Wage Gaps:*** Workers in Mexican border cities often earn significantly less than their counterparts in U.S. border cities, perpetuating economic inequality.
- ***Infrastructure Imbalances:*** U.S. border infrastructure is generally more developed than its Mexican counterpart, creating challenges for equitable trade and investment.
- ***Regional Inequality:*** While some border regions prosper, others face poverty, limited access to resources, and uneven development.

### *Challenges of Economic Interdependence*

Economic integration has also created vulnerabilities and tensions.

- ***Labor Rights:*** The reliance on low-cost labor in Mexican factories has led to criticisms of exploitative practices and calls for stronger labor protections.
- ***Environmental Concerns:*** Industrial activity along the border has contributed to pollution and environmental degradation, raising questions about sustainable development.
- ***Supply Chain Disruptions:*** Cross-border trade is vulnerable to disruptions caused by policy changes, border security measures, and global economic shifts.

### *Future Perspectives*

Looking ahead, economic cooperation between the United States and Mexico will likely continue to evolve.

- ***Regional Integration:*** Efforts to deepen economic ties, such as through regional supply chains, could strengthen competitiveness in the global market.
- ***Sustainable Development:*** Addressing environmental and labor challenges will be essential for creating a more equitable and sustainable border economy.
- ***Innovation and Technology:*** Investment in digital infrastructure and technology could drive new opportunities for cross-border collabora-



tion, particularly in industries like renewable energy and advanced manufacturing.

### *A Complex Economic Relationship*

The U.S.-Mexico border exemplifies the complexities of economic interdependence. While it serves as a gateway for trade and growth, it also highlights challenges related to inequality and sustainability. By addressing these challenges, the United States and Mexico can foster a more balanced and mutually beneficial economic partnership, ensuring that the border remains a source of opportunity for both nations.

## 7. Bilateral Relations and Geopolitical Implications

The U.S.-Mexico border serves as a microcosm of the broader relationship between the two nations, influencing and reflecting their geopolitical dynamics. Cooperation and conflict at the border have shaped how the United States and Mexico interact on issues ranging from migration and security to trade and international diplomacy. This section examines the bilateral relationship through the lens of border management and explores its wider geopolitical implications<sup>19</sup>.

### *Cooperation in Border Management*

The United States and Mexico have historically collaborated on managing the shared border, balancing economic integration and security concerns.

- ***Joint Security Efforts:*** Initiatives like the Mérida Initiative (2008)<sup>20</sup> have fostered cooperation in combating organized crime, drug trafficking, and human smuggling. These efforts underscore the shared interest in ensuring border security.

<sup>19</sup> <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/12/the-us-mexico-relationship-is-about-more-than-migration?lang=en>; <https://news.rice.edu/news/2024/mexicos-relationship-us-and-incoming-trump-administration-examined-baker-institute>; [https://usmex.ucsd.edu/\\_files/Whitepaper\\_Security\\_Taskforce\\_March\\_26\\_Covers.pdf](https://usmex.ucsd.edu/_files/Whitepaper_Security_Taskforce_March_26_Covers.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Security/citizenssecurity/mexico/programas/meridawilsoncenter.pdf>



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- **Migration Agreements:** Bilateral agreements, such as the Migrant Protection Protocols <sup>21</sup>(MPP), have sought to manage migration flows, though they remain highly controversial due to humanitarian concerns.
- **Trade and Infrastructure:** Collaboration on infrastructure projects, including border crossings and transportation networks, facilitates the efficient flow of goods and people while strengthening economic ties.

### *Tensions and Challenges*

Despite areas of cooperation, the U.S.-Mexico relationship has faced significant tensions, often rooted in differing priorities and domestic pressures.

- **Immigration Policies:** U.S. immigration enforcement measures, such as family separations and deportations, have strained relations, particularly when they disproportionately affect Mexican citizens.
- **Sovereignty Concerns:** Mexican leaders have occasionally criticized U.S. policies that they perceive as infringing on Mexico's sovereignty, particularly regarding migration and border enforcement.
- **Asymmetrical Power Dynamics:** The economic and political imbalance between the two nations often complicates negotiations, with Mexico frequently adapting to U.S. demands to maintain trade and diplomatic relations.

### *Geopolitical Significance of the Border*

The U.S.-Mexico border is a focal point for broader geopolitical strategies, extending beyond the bilateral relationship.

- **Regional Influence:** The United States uses the border to project influence throughout Latin America, leveraging its economic and political power to shape regional migration and trade policies.
- **Global Security Concerns:** The border is central to U.S. efforts to combat transnational threats, including drug trafficking and human smuggling, which often involve international criminal networks.
- **Relations with Other Nations:** U.S. border policies also impact relationships with countries beyond Mexico, particularly those in Central

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols>



America whose citizens migrate through Mexico to reach the United States.

### *The Role of International Organizations*

The U.S.-Mexico border is increasingly intertwined with global governance structures.

- ***United Nations and Migration:*** International bodies like the United Nations have advocated for humane treatment of migrants and refugees, influencing bilateral policies.
- ***Trade Organizations:*** As members of organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO), both countries must navigate global trade norms that affect border commerce.

### *Looking Ahead: Balancing Cooperation and Sovereignty*

The future of U.S.-Mexico relations will hinge on the ability of both nations to navigate their shared challenges while respecting each other's sovereignty.

- ***Enhanced Cooperation:*** Strengthening joint efforts in areas like climate change, renewable energy, and technological innovation could deepen the partnership.
- ***Addressing Humanitarian Concerns:*** Adopting more humane approaches to migration and border enforcement could improve bilateral relations and enhance the global reputation of both nations.
- ***Global Context:*** The border's geopolitical importance will grow as issues like climate migration, trade disputes, and international crime networks become increasingly globalized.

### *A Dynamic Relationship*

The U.S.-Mexico border is a defining element of the bilateral relationship, reflecting both cooperation and conflict. Its management has far-reaching implications, not only for the two nations but also for the broader geopolitical landscape. By fostering collaboration and addressing shared challenges, the United States and Mexico can build a stronger partnership that benefits both countries while contributing to regional and global stability.

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### 8. Geopolitical Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

The U.S.-Mexico border plays a critical role in shaping U.S. foreign policy, with implications extending beyond the immediate bilateral relationship. The management of the border, particularly in the context of security, immigration, and trade, influences how the United States engages with other nations in the Americas and beyond. This section explores the broader geopolitical implications of the U.S.-Mexico border for American foreign policy, including its strategic priorities, regional influence, and international partnerships.

#### *Influence in the Western Hemisphere*

The United States has long viewed Mexico as a key partner in maintaining stability in the Western Hemisphere, and the border is a central point of this relationship.

- ***Regional Security Concerns:*** U.S. foreign policy towards Mexico is deeply influenced by concerns over organized crime, drug trafficking, and border security. These issues not only affect Mexico but have broader implications for regional security in Central America and the Caribbean. The U.S. has worked with Mexico and other regional partners to counter transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and reduce the flow of illicit drugs and weapons.
- ***Migration and Refugee Crises:*** The management of migration flows from Central America and Mexico has become a significant element of U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. is involved in addressing the root causes of migration, including violence, poverty, and political instability in countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Through diplomatic initiatives, humanitarian aid, and development programs, the U.S. seeks to reduce migration pressure at the border.

#### *Influence over Global Trade*

The U.S.-Mexico border is a strategic point for global trade, especially given the economic integration fostered by trade agreements like NAFTA and the USMCA.

- ***Trade and Supply Chains:*** The U.S. relies on the efficient flow of goods across the border, and disruptions can have far-reaching effects on supply chains and global markets. As a result, U.S. foreign policy





prioritizes maintaining smooth cross-border commerce, while also protecting U.S. industries from unfair trade practices or imbalances.

- **Trade Diplomacy:** The U.S. uses the border to strengthen trade relationships not only with Mexico but also with other countries in the Americas, including Canada, through the framework of regional agreements. Policies related to the border are often a key component of broader diplomatic strategies aimed at promoting economic growth and stability in the Western Hemisphere.

### *Engagement with Global Security Alliances*

The U.S.-Mexico border is intertwined with U.S. involvement in global security alliances and international partnerships.

- **Counterterrorism and Security Cooperation:** The U.S. uses its border with Mexico as a key component of its broader counterterrorism and security strategy. Cooperation with Mexico on counter-narcotics efforts, anti-terrorism measures, and information sharing is critical to safeguarding U.S. national security interests. The border also intersects with U.S. commitments to international organizations like the United Nations, where the U.S. plays a central role in promoting peace and security in Latin America.
- **Regional Military Engagement:** The U.S. maintains a strong military presence in the Western Hemisphere, and the management of the U.S.-Mexico border is a crucial part of the region's security landscape. This includes joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and other forms of defense cooperation with Mexico.

### *U.S. Relations with Other Global Powers*

The U.S.-Mexico border also plays a role in U.S. relations with other global powers, particularly China and Russia<sup>22</sup>.

- **China's Growing Influence in Latin America:** China's increasing investments in Latin America, including infrastructure projects and trade agreements, has shifted the geopolitical landscape. The U.S. views China's growing presence in the region with concern, as it could

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/preserving-and-strengthening-the-u-s-mexico-relationship/>



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challenge U.S. influence and alter the strategic balance in the Americas. The U.S.-Mexico border serves as a critical point in countering China's influence by strengthening economic ties with Mexico and ensuring that the region remains aligned with U.S. interests.

- ***Russian Influence in the Americas:*** While less direct, Russia's engagement in the Western Hemisphere, including its relations with countries like Venezuela and Cuba, is a concern for U.S. foreign policy. The U.S.-Mexico border remains an important consideration in broader strategies to limit Russian influence in Latin America and maintain U.S. dominance in the region.

### *Environmental and Climate Diplomacy*

Environmental issues at the U.S.-Mexico border have significant implications for U.S. foreign policy.

- ***Environmental Cooperation:*** The border region is vulnerable to environmental degradation, with issues such as water scarcity, air pollution, and habitat destruction impacting both sides. The U.S. and Mexico have worked together through environmental agreements to address these challenges. Initiatives like the Border 2020 Program aim to reduce pollution, manage natural resources, and protect ecosystems along the border, aligning U.S. foreign policy with broader global environmental goals.
- ***Climate Change and Migration:*** Climate change is expected to increase migration pressure at the U.S.-Mexico border as extreme weather events and droughts force people to move in search of better living conditions. U.S. foreign policy increasingly focuses on climate adaptation and resilience, working with Mexico and other Latin American countries to address climate-induced migration and reduce the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations.

### *The Border's Role in U.S. Global Positioning*

The U.S.-Mexico border represents a key point in U.S. global positioning, reflecting the nation's priorities in terms of security, trade, and diplomacy.



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- **Power Projection:** The United States uses its relationship with Mexico, and by extension the border, as a way to project power in the Western Hemisphere<sup>23</sup>. This projection involves military, diplomatic, and economic engagement designed to maintain stability and foster democratic values in Latin America.
- **Global Influence through Soft Power:** Beyond military and economic considerations, the U.S. also uses soft power – cultural exchange, education, and humanitarian assistance – to maintain its influence in the region. The U.S.-Mexico border, as a site of cultural exchange and cooperation, plays a vital role in enhancing this aspect of American foreign policy.

### Conclusion

The U.S.-Mexico border is more than just a line of separation between two countries; it is a critical site of geopolitical importance for U.S. foreign policy. Its influence extends into global trade, security, environmental cooperation, and regional diplomacy. By carefully managing the border and its related issues, the United States can maintain its strategic interests in the Americas and beyond while addressing the complex challenges of migration, trade, and international relations. The border's role in U.S. foreign policy underscores the interconnectedness of national and global

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/376822c/protecting-the-hemisphere-safeguarding-us-interests-and-prioritizing-partnershi/>



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