

Book Guide

Two Nations Indivisible

In this book, CFR Senior Fellow Shannon K. O’Neil explains that beyond the narrative of violence that dominates the headlines is a more hopeful Mexico with a globally competitive economy, a rising middle class, and increasingly influential pro-democracy voters—a country the United States should see as a partner, not a problem. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

Tragic stories of gun violence, kidnappings, and immigrants dying in the desert dominate the media, infiltrate movies and TV shows, and ultimately shape Americans' perception of Mexico as a dangerous country, overrun by brutal drug lords. Hidden behind the headlines, however, is a more hopeful Mexico, one undergoing rapid and widespread social, political, and economic transformations. It is one of a globally competitive economy, a rising middle class, and increasingly influential pro-democracy voters. It is also a Mexico whose people, communities, companies, and commerce are ever more closely tied to the United States. Given Mexico's potentially bright future and the many interests it shares with the United States, including in energy, manufacturing, and security, Shannon O'Neil contends in *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead* that Washington needs to start seeing its southern neighbor as a partner instead of a problem.

This book is ideal for undergraduate and graduate courses on international affairs, comparative politics, Latin American studies, Mexican studies, U.S. foreign policy, democratization and democratic governance, economic development, immigration and labor markets, and transnational criminal networks and public security.

Discussion Questions

Courses on International Affairs, Comparative Politics, Latin American Studies, Mexican Studies, and U.S. Foreign Policy

1. What have been the major shifts in U.S. foreign policy towards Mexico, and in the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship, since the mid-1800s? What caused these shifts?
2. What are the most promising areas and the major obstacles for bilateral cooperation between the United States and Mexico?
3. How do you think U.S.-Mexico relations will change over the next decade?

Courses on Democratization and Democratic Governance

1. What were the main events in the 1980s that began to crack the Partido Revolucionario Institucional's (PRI) political and economic control? Why were these events so significant?
2. Which institutional changes and social pressures during the 1990s were precursors to the Partido Acción Nacional's (PAN) victory in the 2000 presidential elections?
3. How did state and local events in Mexico influence democratization? Did events at the federal level influence democratization differently and if so, how?
4. What were the legacies, both good and bad, of Mexico's democratization process?
5. Why does Mexico's democratic development matter to the United States? What are the best ways for the United States to support Mexico's democratic deepening?

Courses on Economic Development

1. How has Mexico's economy changed over the past thirty years?

2. What were NAFTA's effects on growth, trade, and development in Mexico?
3. How have economic ties shaped the U.S.-Mexico relationship?
4. What factors have influenced poverty, inequality, and the growth of Mexico's middle class?

Courses on Immigration and Labor Markets

1. How have immigration flows from Mexico to the United States changed historically?
2. How have Mexican immigrants been perceived in the United States over time? How and why have attitudes towards Mexican immigrants shifted?
3. What factors have "pushed and pulled" Mexican immigrants to the United States? How have these factors changed over time?
4. How has Mexican immigration to the United States helped and/or hurt Mexico's development?
5. How has Mexican immigration, past and current, affected U.S. workers and the U.S. labor market?

Courses on Transnational Criminal Networks and Public Security

1. How have changes in Mexico's internal politics played a role in the recent wave of drug violence?
2. What types (if any) of spillover violence have occurred along the U.S.-Mexico border? What should the United States do to address this violence?
3. What was the significance of the Merida Initiative in light of historical U.S.-Mexico security cooperation?
4. What, if any, lessons can Mexico draw from the decline in drug-related crime in the United States over the past forty years?
5. How might an increasingly destabilized security situation in Mexico affect the United States?

Essay Questions

Courses on International Affairs, Comparative Politics, Latin American Studies, Mexican Studies, and U.S. Foreign Policy

1. Comment on sovereignty's central role in U.S.-Mexico relations, and how it has or has not evolved over time. Provide concrete examples of sovereignty issues that have affected this bilateral relationship, and suggest ways to improve the relationship in light of these issues.
2. Describe any significant changes in Americans' and Mexicans' attitudes toward one another over the past thirty years. What factors matter in shaping these perceptions? Consider the influence of the media, politicians, and immigration flows.

Courses on Democratization and Democratic Governance

1. Has Mexico established a solid and stable democracy? What are potential successes or challenges ahead for Mexico's democracy? What is the best course of action for Mexico to take to promote the successes and to address the challenges?
2. What pressures drove Mexico's democratic transition? Consider economic, political, institutional, and social factors.

Courses on Economic Development

1. Was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) a success or a failure? Include in your response an analysis of how NAFTA's benefits were distributed and NAFTA's effects for North American trade.
2. Identify and discuss the factors that impede Mexico's economic growth. What would you recommend the country do to change the stable but slow status quo?

Courses on Immigration and Labor Markets

1. Consider Samuel P. Huntington's claim that Hispanic immigrants "threaten to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
2. What have been the results of the "hardening" of the U.S.-Mexico border? Consider whether the current policies have been effective in achieving goals such as facilitating legal trade while keeping out illicit goods.

Courses on Transnational Criminal Networks and Public Security

1. Why have we seen such a deterioration of Mexico's security situation? What should Mexico do to make its people safer? What role could or should the United States play?
2. Would the legalization of drugs fix Mexico's security problems? Why or why not?

Supplementary Materials

Alden, Edward. *The Closing of the American Border*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

Astorga, Luis, and David A. Shirk. "Drug Trafficking Organizations and Counter-Drug Strategies in the U.S.-Mexican Context." Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, San Diego; Woodrow Wilson Mexico Institute, Washington, DC; El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Tijuana; El Colegio de México, Mexico City, 2010. <http://usmex.ucsd.edu/assets/024/11632.pdf>.

Audley, John J., Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Sandra Polaski, and Scott Vaughan. "NAFTA's Promise and Reality: Lessons From Mexico for the Hemisphere." Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004.

Azevedo, João Pedro, Louise Cord, and Carolina Díaz-Bonilla. "On the Edge of Uncertainty: Poverty Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean during the Great Recession and Beyond." Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011.

Cárdenas, Mauricio, Homi Kharas, and Camila Henao. "Latin America's Global Middle Class." Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2011.

Cohen, Debra. *Bracero*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Domínguez, Jorge I., and Rafael Fernández de Castro. *The United States and Mexico: Between Partnership and Conflict*. Second edition. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Esquivel, Gerardo, Nora Lustig, and John Scott. "A Decade of Falling Inequality in Mexico: Market Forces or State Actions." New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2010.

Ganster, Paul, and David E. Lorey. *The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-First Century*. Second Edition. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

Human Rights Watch. "Neither Rights nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico's 'War on Drugs.'" 2011.

Krauze, Enrique. *Mexico: Biography of Power*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Mauer, Noel. "The Empire Struck Back: The Mexican Oil Expropriation of 1938 Reconsidered." Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School, 2010.

Pastor, Robert. *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Preston, Julia, and Samuel Dillon. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

Selee, Andrew, and Peschard, Jacqueline, eds. *Mexico's Democratic Challenges*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010.

St. John, Rachel. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Villarreal, M. Angeles. "NAFTA and the Mexican Economy." Congressional Research Service, 2010.

Wilson, Christopher. "Working Together: Economic Ties Between the United States and Mexico." Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, Mexico Institute, 2011.

[Visit Book Page](#)

