

## **Americans, Mexicans Reject Border Fence**

March 28, 2006

**By Angela Stephens**

President Bush meets this week with Mexican President Vicente Fox and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Cancun, Mexico, at a time when emotions surrounding immigration reform in the United States have reached fever pitch. A new Zogby poll conducted Feb. 3-16 jointly with the Centro de Investigacion para el Desarrollo, AC (CIDAC) explored a variety of issues in the US-Mexican relationship.

Half a million protesters marched through the streets of Los Angeles on Saturday in one of the largest demonstrations in recent US history, and smaller crowds gathered in other cities across the country, protesting a House bill passed in December that would make being or assisting an illegal immigrant a felony, and includes erecting a 700-mile wall along the 2,000-mile US-Mexico border.

The new poll finds that neither Mexicans nor Americans want a wall on their border. An overwhelming majority of Mexicans—90 percent—disagree with the idea of building a wall between the United States and Mexico. A large majority of Americans, 69 percent, also reject the idea, while 28 percent agree with it.

Large majorities of Americans as well as Mexicans believe the US economy benefits from Mexican immigrant labor, and believe Mexicans are discriminated against in the United States. Two-thirds of Americans, 67 percent, agreed that the US economy benefits from Mexican migrant workers, while 27 percent disagreed. Among Mexicans an overwhelming 80 percent agreed.

But although Americans believe that such migrant workers help the economy, 61 percent of Americans said they want their member of Congress to support immigration regulations that are more restrictive. Only 30 percent wanted more open regulations. The option of keeping restrictions unchanged was not offered.

Mexicans are divided on whether it would improve their lives if they crossed the border illegally to work in the United States. Forty-five percent of the Mexican respondents said it would improve their lives if they worked illegally in the United States, while 47 percent said it would not.

An overwhelming majority of Mexicans, 79 percent, believe Mexicans are discriminated against in the United States (18% disagreed), and nearly as many Americans—73 percent—agree (23% disagreed).

**How They View Their Neighbor**

Americans have a favorable view of Mexicans, but Mexicans have a much lower opinion of Americans, while the two people share a negative attitude toward each other's government.

A majority of Mexicans (52%) have an unfavorable view of Americans, while only a third (36%) have a favorable view. In contrast, 84 percent of Americans view Mexicans favorably, while only 10 percent view them unfavorably.

Only a quarter (26%) of both Mexicans and Americans view the other's government favorably, while two-thirds of Mexicans (65%) view the US government unfavorably and half (49%) of Americans view the Mexican government unfavorably. A quarter of Americans (25%) were uncertain of their feeling toward the Mexican government.

Americans and Mexicans have similar views on why Mexico has greater poverty, but disagree about why the US has greater wealth. Thirty-five percent of Americans blame the Mexican government for the country's poverty, and 35 percent blame corruption. Mexicans give similar responses—36 percent blame the government, and 38 percent cite corruption.

Seventy percent of Americans said US wealth is due to work opportunities. Mexicans, by contrast, see US wealth as a result of the country exploiting others' wealth—62 percent of Mexicans polled feel this way. Only 22 percent feel the United States' wealth is due to it being a free country with plenty of work opportunities.

Despite these negative views, majorities of both populations see their countries' relationship as important. Sixty-two percent of Americans and 52 percent of Mexicans said the US-Mexico relationship is important. Only 11 percent of Americans and 15 percent of Mexicans said it is not important.

Generally Americans have more positive views of Mexicans than Mexicans have of Americans. Both Americans (78%) and Mexicans (76%) see Mexicans as hardworking, but only a quarter (25%) of Mexicans see Americans as hardworking. Just 22 percent of Mexicans see Americans as honest, while 42 percent of Americans see Mexicans as honest. Three-fourths (72%) of Mexicans see Americans as racist and only 17 percent see Americans as tolerant.

### **Identity and Allegiances**

Mexicans are divided on whether they see their country as belonging more to North America or Latin America, while Americans firmly see Mexico as part of Latin America. Yet significantly more Americans see Mexico as a "Western nation" than Mexicans do. Both peoples tend to view the other as a "distant neighbor" more than a friend or partner, though few see the other as a threat. Each people see their country's impact on the other's culture as favorable to some extent, but Mexicans see the US impact on Mexican culture as more negative than positive. Americans were more positive about Mexico's cultural impact on the United States.

When asked if Mexico is more part of North America or Latin America, 43 percent of Mexicans said North America, while 41 percent said Latin America. Americans were more definitive on the question—66 percent said Mexico is more part of Latin America, while 28 percent said it is more part of North America.

Americans are much more likely to see Mexico as a “Western nation, like Spain, Canada or the US” than Mexicans do. Two-thirds of Americans (67%) see Mexico as a Western nation, while only a quarter (26%) of Mexicans do.

A plurality of Americans (49%) and Mexicans (36%) believe their country sees the other as a “distant neighbor.” Approximately a third of Americans (30%) believe the United States sees Mexico as a “friend,” while only 12 percent of Mexicans feel that way. One-fifth of Mexicans (20%) said their country views the United States as a “partner,” while 12 percent of Americans felt that way. Few believe their country sees the other as a threat (Americans 6%, Mexicans 18%).

In an annual poll conducted by Harris Interactive in August 2005 that asked Americans how they feel about various countries, a plurality—47 percent—said that Mexico is “friendly but not a close ally,” while 27 percent said it is a “close ally.” That compares to 48 percent who rated Canada a close ally and 37 percent who said Canada is friendly but not a close ally. In a BBC poll conducted by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) in November 2005, Mexicans also expressed negative views of the United States. Only 10 percent of Mexicans said the US influence in the world is mainly positive while 55 percent said it was mainly negative.

Yet Mexicans by a wide margin believe it is in the best interest of their country’s future to adopt a “look North” attitude rather than a “look South” attitude, according to the Zogby/CIDAC poll. A majority, 55 percent, said that Mexico should look North for its future, while 24 percent said it should look South.

Regarding cultural impact, 48 percent of Americans and 40 percent of Mexicans believe their country’s impact on the other nation has been favorable. A sizeable minority of Americans also say Mexico’s impact on the United States has been favorable (43%), but a plurality of Mexicans (44%) say the cultural impact of the United States on Mexico has been unfavorable.

### **Free trade**

Both Mexicans and Americans believe the idea of free trade between their countries can benefit both peoples, although the Americans are much more convinced. Three-fourths of Americans (75%) agree that both peoples can benefit, compared to half (50%) of Mexicans (36% of Mexicans, 19% of Americans disagree).

A larger minority of Mexicans than Americans feel they have personally been hurt by US-Mexico free trade, while an equally small number feel they have benefited—a third of Mexicans (32%) say they have been hurt, compared to 19 percent of Americans. A

fifth of each say they have been personally helped by free trade between their countries (21% Mexicans, 19% Americans). A majority of Americans (61%) and nearly half of Mexicans (47%) say they have been neither hurt nor helped personally by free trade between their nations.