

By contrast, his popularity has increased when he has spurned an invitation to visit President Bush on his Texas ranch, or criticized the death penalty imposed on Mexican citizens in the United States. Mexico's decision not to support the United States in the war in Iraq was clearly a high point in this series of events.

Mexico has traditionally played well the "Cuba card" in its relationship with the United States, seeking rewards from Washington for good behaviour. Usually it has worked well for both countries. But in recent years there has been a major roadblock, largely the result of the turfing out of the PRI after 71 years in power. Vicente Fox came into power with a distinctly new style, and a radically different agenda. In the case of Cuba-Mexico relations, as Georgina Sánchez has shown, the objective of the Fox administration was to "modernize" the relationship, stripping it of political symbolism and injecting economic realism. In this way it converted Cuba into any regular partner—and as a result one that was subject to the vagaries of international politics, including questions of the free market, democracy and human rights."¹² The dousing of the exceptional approach towards Cuba occurred during the Fox presidency, but was well advanced under Zedillo and even before. At the same time, the embers of that exceptional policy occasionally threatened to ignite, again largely as a result of strains in Mexico-U.S. relations.

President Fox's principal goal was to obtain a new migration agreement from the United States for undocumented Mexican workers living in the United States. This affects both national pride and the Mexican economy. In all, just under one million Mexicans were apprehended by INS officials in 2002, down from the 1.2 million a year earlier, but still a very substantial number.¹³ This, in addition to the estimated 4.8 million undocumented Mexican workers in the United States, who send home an estimated \$US10 million annually in remittances, gives some idea of the importance of the issue in Mexico.¹⁴

Following the terrorist attacks in the United States of September 11, 2001, however, Washington has done all it can to tighten up the border—much to the chagrin of Mexico, which sought desperately to loosen immigration law. In essence a sea change in the relationship has occurred, and after being allegedly the most important partner of the United States in mid-2001 (significantly Mexico was the first country visited by Bush after his inauguration), most analysts agree that the country is no longer of critical interest to Washington. The end result of this diplomatic rebuff in Mexico was to dig deep and show displeasure with the U.S. position.

The Fox government did this in several small gestures. In August 2002 the president cancelled a planned trip to visit his U.S. counterpart because of the execution of a Mexican citizen (Javier Suárez Medina) accused of killing a policeman. The Mexican government also demanded fresh trials for several Mexicans on death row in U.S. prisons. In September 2002, Mexico dropped out of the Rio Pact on inter-American security, although it pushed more than ever for more bilateral defence cooperation with the United States. In late 2002 and again in early 2003, when it held a revolving seat on the U.N. Security Council, Mexico refused to participate in the "coalition of the willing" and send troops to support the U.S. War on Iraq. Having seen that Washington was ignoring Mexico's agenda,¹⁵ the Fox government started to