

Executive Summary

- Despite obvious differences between Canada and Mexico, there are clear reasons for a comparison of their bilateral relations with Cuba.
- Mexico's long (over 100 years) relationship with Cuba has traditionally been complex and ambivalent.
- U.S. influence on Mexican foreign policy is particularly strong. In recent years (since the Helms-Burton legislation) this has also had a negative influence on trade.
- Paradoxically (largely for domestic political purposes), Mexico has often played the "Cuba card" effectively to illustrate its independence from Washington.
- Bilateral relations have plummeted to an all-time low since 2000, during the Fox presidency.
- Popular reaction in Mexico to the Fox handling of the Cuba file has been extremely critical. Strong "people to people" relations, and a deeply-rooted respect for Cuban independence, remain in Mexico, despite the official policy.
- There are numerous reasons for both countries to promote a cordial bilateral relationship, and despite the official ambivalence shown by Mexico, pragmatism has generally been found.
- In the debate over isolation vs. engagement, the latter is more successful. Pressure tactics on Cuba (to effect change of policy) have proven remarkably unsuccessful.
- There are several lessons for Canada to learn from the Mexican experience with Cuba (and in particular the failures of the Fox approach are instructive). Canada should also recognize that it is a major player in Cuba, with tremendous potential for influence.