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Beyond the Wall: Dissecting Mexican Interests to Account for the Lack of a Comprehensive US-Mexico Bilateral Cooperation Framework in Migration.

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Citation

Donna, A. (2024). *Beyond the Wall: Dissecting Mexican Interests to Account for the Lack of a Comprehensive US-Mexico Bilateral Cooperation Framework in Migration.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

MSc Political Science: International Organisation

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Leiden University

**Beyond the Wall: Dissecting Mexican Interests to Account for the Lack of a
Comprehensive US-Mexico Bilateral Cooperation Framework in Migration.**

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8 June 2024

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Word count: 10,000
(excluding tables, figures, and footnotes)

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Abstract

This thesis aims to address the absence of a comprehensive bilateral cooperation framework between the US and Mexico in the field of migration. Despite the enduring significance of human mobility between the two countries and the existence of converging interests, efforts to negotiate a migration agreement remain limited. Recognising the prevailing US-centric approach in the existing literature on the topic, this thesis shifts the focus to Mexican policy preferences, exploring their role in contributing to the absence of an all-encompassing cooperative migration framework. To do so, an “intermestic” approach is adopted to account for both domestic and international influences in shaping Mexico’s policy preferences. Through interviews with high-ranking Mexican diplomats, this study found that electoral and institutional dynamics, along with geopolitical considerations, contribute to the absence of a migration deal with the US. Indeed, the complex, multifaceted, and “intermestic” nature of Mexican policy preferences exacerbates difficulties in identifying a coordination point agreeable to both countries, resulting in a Coordination Dilemma, which prevents the establishment of a bilateral deal for migration management.

Keywords: Foreign policy, migration policy, immigration, bilateral cooperation, US-Mexico relations, policy preferences.

Introduction

As one of the interviewees in this study put it: “*Migrants go to work in the United States (US). They don’t go to watch baseball games, eat hamburgers, or visit the Statue of Liberty. They go to work.*” Despite its simplicity, this statement effectively captures the essence of migration dynamics in the region, driven by economic opportunity - due to substantially higher wages in the US - and the principle of supply and demand. The US economy heavily relies on low-skilled labour, which Mexico and Central America supply, creating a powerful economic incentive for migration. However, this is not merely a matter of economics: despite the clear incentives to facilitate legal and circular migration, political and security concerns have thus far impeded the establishment of a migration agreement between Mexico and the US. The limited availability of legal pathways for migration compels many to migrate irregularly, exposing them to numerous risks, including exploitation, dangerous border crossing, human trafficking, deportation, and precarious living conditions.

Recognising this reality, on 5 September 2001, Presidents Vicente Fox and George W. Bush met in Washington to sign off on a framework for bilateral cooperation on migration: a new chapter in the US-Mexico relationship was poised to unfold. Considering the unprecedented pace at which negotiations had progressed, coupled with a rare alignment of interests between the administrations, an immigration deal appeared imminent. This window of opportunity resulted from multiple factors: the leaders’ shared interest in migration-related issues since their respective campaigns, the ambition to enhance the US-Mexico partnership beyond commerce through a NAFTA-Plus¹ framework, combined with the countries’ robust economic performance in previous years and the considerable benefits brought by NAFTA (Délano, 2009).

However, optimism proved short-lived as, a few days after the presidential visit, the tragic events of 9/11 abruptly altered the course of US-Mexico relations. In the aftermath of the attacks, security became Washington’s utmost priority. Migration, previously considered primarily an economic matter, was redefined as a security concern (Leiken, 2002a). This shift led to a profound misalignment between Mexico and the US, stalling any progress toward establishing a deal. In the post-9/11 political climate, dominated by a sole focus on national security, all attempts to reform the American immigration system failed due to the lack of

¹ NAFTA-Plus refers to an expanded version of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

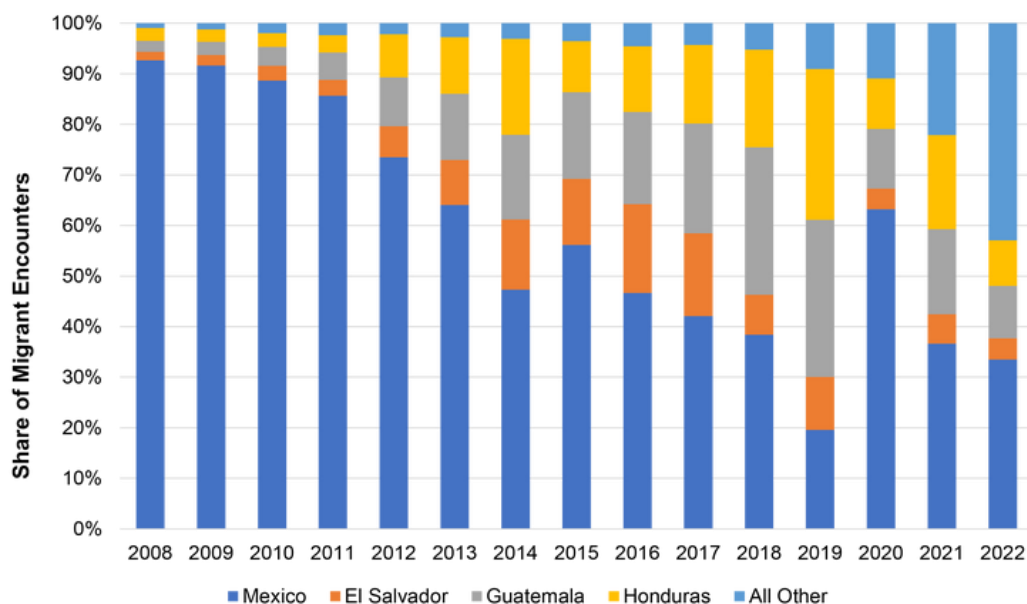
bipartisan support in Congress (Chishti & Bolter, 2021). Over two decades later, this paralysis - a legacy of 9/11 - endures. Policies have been limited to specific areas and the idea of a deal on migration management was never truly contemplated again (Délano, 2009). This reality - where the US immigration system has not been reformed comprehensively since the 1990s and no deal exists between Mexico and the US - appears increasingly problematic as it fails to reflect modern-day human mobility dynamics in the region.

Changing Migration Dynamics: Implications for Bilateral Cooperation

Over the course of two centuries of diplomatic relations, the US and Mexico have forged an intricate relationship, profoundly influenced by migration. Currently regarded as the world's largest migration corridor, the 3,145km US-Mexico border embodies the enduring relevance of human mobility in the region (MPI, *n.d.*). The nature of the phenomenon, however, has experienced a significant shift in recent years. While Mexico has historically been a country of emigration - with approximately 37.4 million people of Mexican origin living in the US (Pew Research Centre, 2023) - migration fluxes from Mexico to the US have steadily decreased since 2010 (Selee *et al.*, 2019). Contemporary trends indicate a transformation in the region's migration dynamics, with Mexico emerging as a transit state for migrants, predominantly from the Northern Triangle² (Figure 1), attempting to reach the US (Cornelius, 2018).

Figure 1

Migrant Encounters between Ports of Entry, by Nationality (2008-22) – (Ruiz-Soto, 2022).



² The Northern Triangle countries include Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Given this context and the enduring significance of human mobility in US-Mexico relations, the absence of a bilateral cooperation framework on migration is noteworthy. This is especially notable considering the countries' demonstrated ability to establish comprehensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation arrangements, primarily among them, the USMCA³. Additionally, the recent trends highlighted above further emphasise the need to establish a dedicated cooperation framework addressing migration. At present, Mexico and the US face a convergence of both challenges and opportunities in migration management, leaving much scope for renewed bilateral cooperation (Selee *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, efforts to establish a bilateral deal for migration and border management have remained limited since 2001. To develop effective cooperative solutions, countries must recognise the transnational nature of migration and engage with each other's interests in migration policy (Rosenblum, 2004).

Dissecting Mexico's Policy Preferences

Literature on US-Mexico cooperation in migration has flourished over the last few decades. However, as already observed by Rosenblum (1998), scholars - including Escobar *et al.* (2003), Tuirán (2006), Velázquez-Flores and Schiavon (2006) - tend to focus predominantly on American perspectives, internal dynamics, and policy preferences to account for the lack of a comprehensive migration deal between the two nations, disregarding the role played by Mexico: a prevalent trend in Migration Studies (Kimball, 2017). Destination countries - typically located in the Global North - tend to receive disproportionate scholarly attention, while transit or migrant-sending states - often in the Global South - are regularly overlooked (Rosenblum, 2004). The framing of studies in this fashion often results from the overemphasised influence attributed to receiving countries and an implicit disregard of the agency and interests of sending/transit countries, effectively reducing them to "policy takers" (Betts, 2011, p. 22): passive recipients of policies developed by the more powerful counterpart (Adam *et al.*, 2020; Mouthaan, 2019; Van Crieking, 2010). It should be emphasised, however, that bilateral agreements can only be reached if *both* parties involved believe that their policy interests are being furthered and preferences addressed adequately.

³ The United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) was previously known as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Relevance and Research Question

Critical of this narrow, US-centric understanding, this thesis departs from prevailing narratives and delves deeper into the reasons underlying the absence of a comprehensive bilateral framework on migration between Mexico and the US, with a focus on the former. Specifically, it seeks to better understand Mexican policy preferences and address the often neglected agency of migrant-sending/transit states (Elgström, 2005; Van Crieking, 2010). As such, it contributes to the scant academic literature on source/transit states' policy preferences in migration policy, with an emphasis on Mexico. Insights are expected to extend beyond this case, broadening the understanding of international cooperation dynamics between sending and receiving countries, while aligning with Triandafyllidou's (2022) call to de-centre Western-centric approaches in migration governance. Furthermore, analysing the neglected role of Mexico's policy preferences in migration cooperation translates into a more comprehensive narrative - overcoming the long-prevalent US-centrism. Indeed, while the factors hindering the establishment of a deal in the US have been explored at large, the same cannot be argued for Mexico. To study this overlooked aspect, this thesis will address the following research question: "How do Mexican policy preferences contribute to the absence of a comprehensive bilateral framework on migration between Mexico and the US?". To answer the question, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with Mexican diplomats with relevant work experience in migration.

Providing an answer to this research question is also societally relevant. As migration continues to be driven by economic disparities in the region and a high labour demand in the US, the need for a migration agreement remains pressing. The near absence of legal pathways for low-skilled labour migrants forces many to migrate irregularly, subjecting them to numerous risks. Gaining a better understanding of the factors hindering the establishment of a US-Mexico migration deal, therefore, represents a first step towards overcoming the aforementioned long-standing impasse and developing policies aimed at creating legal avenues for safe, orderly, and regular migration.

Literature Review

A Quintessentially National Priority

International cooperation has flourished across a wide range of areas since the 1930s, with one prominent exception: migration (Sykes, 2013). While the past 50 years have witnessed increasing economic and regional integration, “institutionalisation of regimes at the regional and international levels have not extended to migration” (Delano, 2009, p. 52). According to Martin (2012), states have been reluctant to put migration - a quintessentially national prerogative - on the international agenda due to its deep links to sovereignty. Despite numerous obstacles to migration cooperation, particularly due to asymmetries in the distribution of benefits among countries, Sykes (2013) argues that the benefits of cooperation in this field remain considerable. This appears to hold in the case of US-Mexico bilateral cooperation (Bickerton, 2000; Rosenblum, 2006; Selee *et al.*, 2019). Given the transnational nature of human mobility, solutions to tackle challenges related to this phenomenon require international cooperation and bilateral agreements between the countries involved (Martínez & Rosen, 2016; Rosenblum, 2006).

Historical Context: US-Mexico Relations Before 2001

Before the ambitious attempt to reach a migration deal, the US and Mexico had previously engaged in bilateral cooperation on a more institutionalised scale with the Bracero Programme (1942-1964). The temporary guest worker programme was aimed at regulating the immigration of manual temporary workers of Mexican origin (*braceros*) to the US. Under this scheme, over 4.5 million *braceros* arrived in the US with temporary contracts (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020). After six weeks to six months, workers would return to Mexico and then reapply for the visa. While the context is not comparable to modern-day migration trends, the framework proved successful as it promoted a system of circular migration, reduced incentives for workers to remain in the US undocumented, and resulted in twenty years of bilateral cooperation in “security, law enforcement, and irregular migration control across the US-Mexico border” (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020, p. 117).

However, since the end of the programme, efforts to engage in bilateral cooperation have been limited and the countries employed a “double game” in migration management (Tuirán, 2006). On the one hand, the US adopted a “policy of tolerance” (p. 162) towards

unauthorised migrants, whereby the government tacitly allowed their presence due to their crucial role in key sectors of the US economy, despite adopting an anti-immigration rhetoric. On the other, Mexico adopted a “policy of omission” (p. 162), whereby the government’s official discourse superficially emphasised the importance of the rights of migrants. Yet, it practically did little to reduce emigration because of the lack of incentives to do so due to the high remittances Mexican citizens received from the US. Scholars also refer to Mexico’s approach from 1974 onwards as the “policy of no policy”, emphasising the country’s passive stance on the issue, characterised by the dual expectation that the US would maintain its policies and that migration flows would continue without significant political costs for Mexico (Fitzgerald & Alarcón, 2013; Rosenblum, 2004, 2006).

US-Mexico Relations Post-2001

The electoral victories of presidents Bush and Fox in 2000 resulted in an unprecedented convergence of political interests at the highest level of government as both leaders intended to reform migration policies between the US and Mexico. This alignment provided fertile ground for a review of the migration relationship, identified as a priority issue in the bilateral agenda (Carnegie, 2001). Endowed with first-hand experience as governors of Guanajuato and Texas - traditionally sending and receiving states, respectively - the two leaders understood the complexities of migration dynamics and the importance of shared migration governance (Carnegie, 2001; Délano, 2009; Velasco, 2008). This, in turn, fuelled the presidents’ commitment to establishing a migration deal to provide avenues for safe, legal, and ordered migration, reaping the benefits of human mobility, while reducing its negative effects (Corona, 2003). Although the actual content of the agreement being negotiated was not yet defined, a more concrete example of the proposed policy was Mexico’s “Whole Enchilada”. The proposal, advanced by the Mexican government in April 2001, included: a temporary workers programme, the regularisation of 3.5 undocumented Mexican migrants in the US, regional development programmes in Mexico, strengthened border security programmes - in respect of human rights -, and the revision of the visa programme under NAFTA (López de Lara Espinosa, 2016).

This promising alignment of priorities and ensuing optimism proved short-lived, as the dynamics of US-Mexico relations underwent a significant shift following 9/11, regarded as a critical juncture. The attacks resulted in a drastic recalibration of US priorities, leading to the securitisation of migration - since then conceived as a matter of national security (Leiken,

2002b; Tuirán, 2006; Velázquez-Flores & Schiavon, 2006). Castañeda (2003), Mexico's former Secretary of Foreign Affairs, argued that the "immediate casualty" (p. 68) of this emphasis on internal security was the ambitious agenda to carry out a comprehensive overhaul of immigration policy based on the principle of "shared responsibility" with Mexico. Indeed, soon thereafter, negotiations derailed and the US shifted its focus to more stringent border control measures (Rosenblum, 2006). Since then, policy-making in migration has been predominantly one-sided, with US unilateralism prevailing (Délano, 2009; Rosenblum, 2011).

While there is thus a generalised academic consensus that 9/11 resulted in the derailment of negotiations and shift to US-unilateralism, Délano (2009) and Velasco (2008) claim that attributing this failure solely to external factors is overly simplistic. The attacks undoubtedly influenced the trajectory of migration cooperation, yet their portrayal as sole determinants fails to adequately capture the contextual complexity. The authors call for a more holistic approach, exploring underlying domestic factors that influenced the governments' preferences, eventually resulting in a lack of cooperation. Obtaining a clear understanding of states' preferences and considerations is therefore pivotal for comprehending the motivations underlying policy-making across all fields (Frieden, 1999). In line with this, this thesis aims to fill this gap by providing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing Mexican policy preferences and how they contribute to the ongoing absence of a migration deal.

Policy Preferences in the Global South

The preferences of sending/transit states on migration are similarly understudied, resulting in a predominantly Western-centric understanding of international migration governance (Adam *et al.*, 2020; Mouthaan, 2019; Rosenblum, 2004). This approach, however, should not be simply regarded as the result of unconscious bias. Rather, in some instances, it can be attributed to the intentional conceptualisation of sending states as passive recipients of policy decisions, as illustrated by Betts' (2011) portrayal of migrant-receiving states as "policy-makers" and sending countries as "takers of migration governance" (p. 22). This notion appears to be rooted in the framing of the international system as divided into a "centre" and a "periphery", emphasising power asymmetries and neglecting the agency of states located in the latter category (Triandafyllidou, 2022). This perspective is believed to partially account for the limited academic attention devoted to the migration policy preferences of states in the Global South.

Numerous scholars challenge this perspective, arguing that sending/transit states' policy preferences *do* matter and that these countries should thus not be regarded as mere policy takers (Adam *et al.*, 2020; Mouthaan, 2019; Rosenblum 2004, 2006). While recognising the existence of power dynamics and asymmetrical power relations in international politics, these scholars claim that sending/transit states can still influence migration cooperation by adopting strategies that reflect their interests. Although limited scholarly attention has been paid to the policy preferences of these states, some notable exceptions exist, particularly in the context of multilateral migration cooperation between the EU and African states (Adam *et al.*, 2020; Mouthaan, 2019; Zanker, 2023).

Mexico's Policy Preferences and Complex Interdependence

Similarly to other countries in the Global South, the study of Mexico's policy preferences has often been eclipsed by the focus on the receiving country: the US. This trend is also reflected in the literature regarding the absence of a comprehensive US-Mexico migration framework, characterised by widespread disregard for Mexico's interests (Fitzgerald & Alarcón, 2013; Rosenblum, 1998; Velasco, 2008). However, while Mexico's policy preferences in bilateral cooperation have been overshadowed, literature focusing on migration governance in Mexico and from a Mexican perspective does exist (Alonso, 2024; Campos-Delgado, 2024; Castillo, 2022).

As highlighted by Rosenblum (2006), migration relations are characterised by "complex interdependence", a concept developed by Keohane and Nye (1977) to describe the nature of the current international system. As such, they differ drastically from other dimensions of the US-Mexico bilateral relationship, where asymmetrical considerations prevail (Rosenblum, 2006). Smith (2013) claims that, while following unipolar interpretations, Mexico - the weaker neighbour - would be expected to abide by the US' dictates, in reality, the US does not "always get what it wants" (p. 16) when cooperating with Mexico. In line with this, it is crucial to examine the policy preferences and interests of *both* the receiving and sending states as fundamental factors shaping bilateral cooperation in migration.

Moving Beyond a US-Centric Approach

The bulk of literature on international migration cooperation concentrates on the preferences of receiving states. This holds in the context of US-Mexico cooperation, as exemplified by the

predominant focus on the US (Martínez & Rosen, 2016; Velasco, 2008). This approach also applies to the literature addressing the absence of a comprehensive cooperative framework in migration between the two countries (Escobar et. al, 2003; Rosenblum, 2011; Tuirán, 2006; Velázquez-Flores & Schiavon, 2006). While US interests are relatively well-known, the preferences and objectives of Mexico have received limited academic attention. It is therefore crucial to explore such preferences - moving beyond the narrow US-centric perspective - and recognise the agency of sending/transit states, to account for the other side of the equation: Mexico and the way the country's preferences contribute to the absence of a comprehensive bilateral cooperation framework in migration.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of Migration Policy-Making

Research on the role of states' preferences in shaping immigration policy-making has flourished over the past thirty years, providing insights into the factors determining the nature of policies and reflecting the multitude of interests at play. Natter (2018; 2023) offers a classification of the five main approaches to the study of immigration policy-making, drawing on established theories and building on the work of various scholars (Table 1): Political Economy (Bale, 2008; Freeman, 1995), Institutionalism (Calavita, 1992; Thiollet, 2011), Historical-culturalist (Hansen, 2002; Klotz, 2012), International Relations (Mouthaan, 2019; Teitelbaum, 1984), and Globalisation Theory (Rosenblum & Salehyan, 2004; Sassen, 1996). While these theories represent a useful tool to comprehend states' preferences and policy-making decisions, they reflect a narrow perspective predominant in Migration Studies: the disproportionate focus on Western liberal democracies. Indeed, only receiving states in the Global North are encompassed within existing theories (Natter, 2018). Despite attempts to move beyond Western liberal democracies, literature about "global" migration continues to predominantly concern the Global North (Kimball, 2017).

Table 1

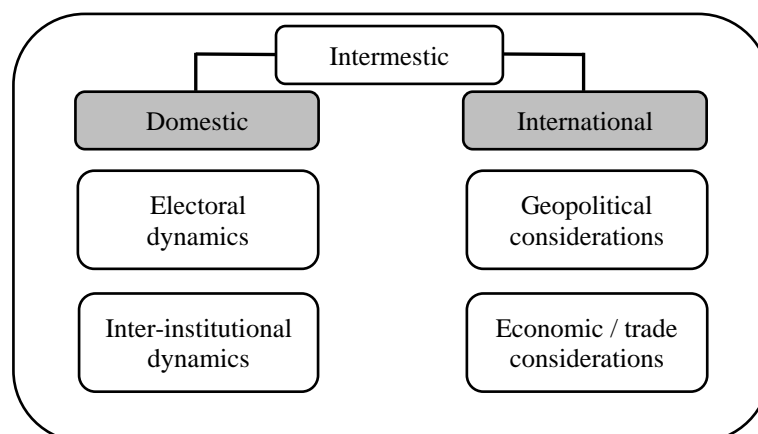
Overview of Immigration Policy-making Theories

Nature of approach	Level of Analysis	Focus
Political Economy	Domestic	Socio-economic interests on immigration (interest groups, political parties, public opinion)
Institutionalism	Domestic	State institutions' (potentially) conflicting interests in immigration
Historical-culturalist	Domestic	State formation histories and national identity conceptions
International Relations	International	Foreign policy and diplomatic interests in international cooperation on migration
Globalisation Theory	International	Importance of international norms and ideas

Much of the literature on migration policy-making employing the aforementioned theories relies on a single theoretical approach, often restricting the level of analysis to the international or domestic sphere (Delano, 2009; Velasco, 2008). Considering the limitations inherent to the adoption of said singular focus, approaches that contemplate multiple factors - from both the domestic and international dimensions - should be preferred.

An “Intermestic” Approach

Following the premise that theories considering both domestic and international factors in policy-making outperform those centred solely on one of the two dimensions, this thesis adopts an “intermestic” theoretical perspective. The concept, first advanced by Rosenblum (1998) to describe migration policy-making, was recently employed by Adam *et al.* (2020) to explore the formation of migration policy preferences - the result of domestically and internationally-driven factors - in West Africa. Because of its focus on the policy preference of migrant-sending states in the Global South, along with the novel use of the “intermestic” approach to understand the combination of domestic and international factors shaping such preferences, their study serves as a foundational framework for this thesis. Following the approach taken by Adam *et al.* (2020), this thesis conceptualises policy preferences - understood as the collective inclinations and priorities of the Mexican government in migration policy - as “intermestic”. The adoption of this perspective stems from the recognition that states’ policy preferences in migration management are shaped by a complex interplay of different factors, including domestic and international considerations and their interplay. In their study, Adam *et al.* (2020) outline a list of such considerations believed to translate into policy preferences in the countries of interest. Similarly, drawing upon this framework and through a review of existing literature, four specific considerations have been identified for this thesis, with two domestically and two internationally-driven factors (Figure 2).

Figure 2*Domestically and Internationally-induced Considerations***Domestic Dimension***Electoral Dynamics*

The first domestically-induced consideration identified pertains to electoral politics. Electoral dynamics encompass the perceived impact of electoral cycles - which bring about changes in the presidency and government composition every six years - on Mexico's policy preferences in migration cooperation with the US. These dynamics are expected to shape the government's priorities and decision-making in migration policy. However, they can also translate into inconsistencies in the approach to migration cooperation across different electoral cycles and carry other practical implications. For instance, candidates and incumbents seeking reelection often prioritise short-term concerns over long-term ones, opting to address pressing issues that resonate with voters, rather than engaging in slow, costly, and complex negotiations, with little guarantee of success. Furthermore, electoral dynamics are believed to introduce additional challenges to negotiations, as described by Putnam (1988) in the Two-Level Games. At the international level, concessions will be necessary to reach a deal, it is therefore unlikely that all Mexican policy goals will be met. However, leaders negotiating agreements internationally are often accountable to domestic audiences (Melnick & Smith, 2023)., They therefore realise that making significant concessions could result in electoral backlash. Additionally, electoral cycles lead to regular organisational changes which can result in the re-prioritisation of policy interests and distancing from previous priorities, leading to inconsistencies (Mouthaan, 2019). These factors are expected to collectively hinder the establishment of a migration deal with the US.

Inter-institutional Dynamics

The second consideration concerns inter-institutional dynamics within the Mexican government. Given the inherent complexity and breadth of migration policy, its governance relies upon the involvement of numerous governmental agencies. In Mexico, migration is primarily handled by the *Secretaría de Gobernación*⁴ (*SEGOB*), through the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (*INM*), in charge of implementing Mexico's migration policy (Ornelas-Cruz & Mora, 2021). The *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*⁵ (*SRE*) complements the work of the *SEGOB* by handling diplomatic relations concerning migration matters, engaging in negotiations, and providing consular services. More often than not, different agencies within a state's administrative apparatus display diverging priorities and interests in migration-related matters (Mouthaan, 2019; Natter, 2023). Furthermore, inter-institutional dynamics are often characterised by the pursuit of objectives along individual ministerial lines, sporadic inter-ministerial interactions, and inter-institutional competition for influence (Mouthaan, 2019). It is therefore expected that inter-institutional misalignments and competition among governmental entities may result in fragmented policy preferences, hindering cohesive policy formulation and, consequently, Mexico's ability to negotiate a migration agreement with the US effectively.

International Dimension

Geopolitical Considerations

The first internationally-induced consideration pertains to geopolitics. Negotiations to establish a deal with the US are expected to involve concessions (Rosenblum, 2006). While it is currently impossible to speculate on their nature, should concessions be deemed to disproportionately favour American interests or undermine Mexican sovereignty, this could weaken Mexico's international standing. The country might indeed be perceived as subservient to American interests, hindering its credibility and influence internationally. Furthermore, a US-Mexico migration deal might weaken Mexico's relations with other Latin American countries, as it might be perceived as abandoning regional solidarity in the face of migration-related challenges (Cruz, 2021). Additionally, Mexico has long been a champion of a human rights-based approach to migration (Campos-Delgado, 2024). However, a deal with the US might challenge this perception, potentially undermining Mexico's soft power projection on the

⁴ Mexico's Ministry of the Interior.

⁵ Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

global stage. Concretely, these geopolitical considerations may lead Mexican policy-makers to adopt an overly cautious approach when negotiating migration cooperation with the US, potentially hindering the establishment of a deal.

Economic Considerations

The second internationally-induced consideration concerns trade and economics. The importance and magnitude of economic and trade relations between the US and Mexico cannot be overstated. Drawing on insights by Hills (1994), it can be expected that Mexico's dependence on the US market and desire to maintain favourable trade conditions might weaken its negotiating position across contentious policy areas, such as migration. Policy preferences shaped by the need for economic stability and US market access might translate into prioritisation of economic concerns over migration cooperation. The fear of repercussions - trade sanctions or disruptions in economic relations - may further hinder Mexico's willingness to engage in cooperation with the US on migration. Lastly, Mexican policymakers may anticipate that freer mobility could result in a brain drain to the US and potential labour shortages of highly-skilled individuals domestically. Such loss of human capital is also expected to hinder Mexico's willingness to establish a migration deal with the US.

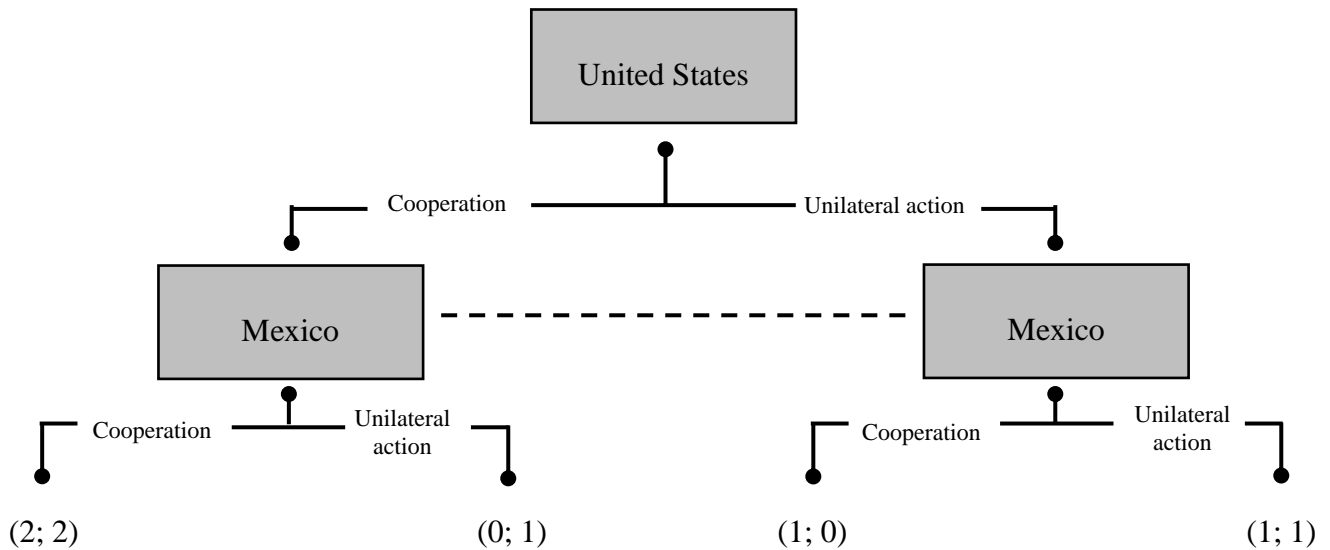
A Coordination Dilemma

The four considerations identified above - while not exhaustive - already predict a complex interplay of factors shaping Mexico's preferences in migration cooperation with the US. Naturally, the US also has its interests, shaped by a similarly complex set of factors. To achieve effective and coordinated migration management, the two countries' preferences need to align. However, the intricate nature of policy preferences makes coordination challenging. Against this backdrop, the Coordination Dilemma (CD) appears as a suitable conceptual lens to account for the absence of a migration deal. A CD arises when the parties involved would benefit from making consistent and compatible choices (*e.g.*, cooperating), but struggle to do so due to the inability to identify a coordination point, resulting in suboptimal outcomes.

Cockerham and Colnic (2014) applied this concept to account for the lack of institutionalised cooperation between the US and Mexico in security issues, where - despite converging security interest and the relative absence of incentives to defect - the parties fail to pinpoint a coordination point to effectively tackle shared security concerns. The absence of

formal institutions to constrain negative behaviour and promote coordination led to a relationship prominently driven by US unilateralism, leading to suboptimal outcomes. Although coordinated policy is regarded as “optimal to respond to security concerns” (p. 17), the absence of formalisation makes it harder to identify a coordination point. The thesis advanced by Cockerham and Colnic (2014) resonates well with the complexities observed in migration cooperation. Indeed, the CD also helps explain the predominance of US unilateralism since the derailment of negotiations in 2001 (Délano, 2009; Rosenblum, 2011).

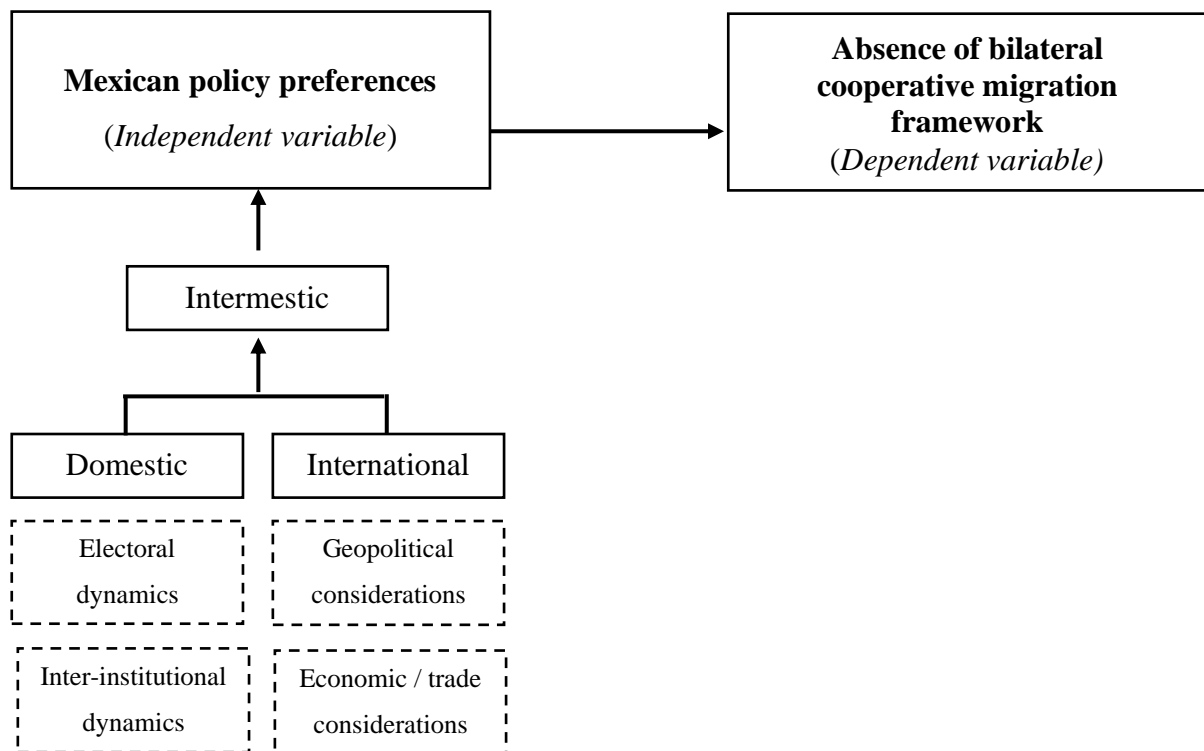
Following the theoretical payoffs expected from this game, the potential for achieving mutually beneficial outcomes through collaboration is apparent (Figure 3): the players are expected to get the highest payoff (2; 2) through mutual cooperation. Despite differences in policy preferences, there are numerous areas where the interests of both countries converge. However, the challenge lies in identifying a coordination point that satisfies both: a mutually acceptable set of policies addressing shared concerns. The identification of this elusive coordination point is hindered by numerous factors, including asymmetries (Smith & Selee, 2013), internal political dynamics, geopolitical considerations, historical tensions and - notably - diverging policy preferences. The difficulty in finding a coordination point is apparent when analysing alternative outcomes: if the US chooses cooperation and Mexico unilateral action, the US would have a theoretical payoff of 0, as its cooperative efforts would be unreciprocated, and Mexico 1: a suboptimal payoff. The same would apply if the roles were reversed (1; 0). These scenarios would occur if the inability to find a coordination point leads the countries to prioritise domestic policies over cooperation. Lastly, if both countries decide to act independently, they are expected to get a payoff of 1 due to conflicting policies, resulting in a suboptimal outcome. Therefore, following the CD, the inability to find a coordination point translates into suboptimal outcomes, missed opportunities for effective cooperation, and US unilateralism. Given the above, the absence of a comprehensive cooperative bilateral framework in migration is understood as stemming from a CD.

Figure 3*Decision Tree: Coordination Dilemma*

Note: the dotted line indicates that the player - Mexico - does not know where it stands in the game tree.

Hypotheses

The expectation inferred by the selected theoretical approach is that the intrinsically complex, multifaceted, and “intermestic” nature of Mexican policy preferences exacerbates the CD highlighted above, making the identification of a coordination point all the more complicated. Ultimately, this is expected to account for the absence of a comprehensive cooperative framework between the US and Mexico in migration. The hypothesised relationship between the variables is visually represented in Figure 4.

Figure 4*Hypothesised Causal Link between Variables*

Based on the above, the following four hypotheses can be put forward:

H1: Mexican policy preferences shaped by electoral dynamics contribute to the absence of a cooperative framework on migration with the US.

H2: Mexican policy preferences shaped by inter-institutional dynamics contribute to the absence of a cooperative framework on migration with the US.

H3: Mexican policy preferences shaped by geopolitical considerations contribute to the absence of a cooperative framework on migration with the US.

H4: Mexican policy preferences shaped by economic and trade-related considerations contribute to the absence of a cooperative framework on migration with the US.

Methodology

In this section, the data collection strategy, operationalisation, and method of analysis will be outlined. As it can be evinced from the research question, the nature of this thesis is explanatory, as it seeks to understand the mechanism through which Mexican policy preferences contribute to the absence of a US-Mexico deal on migration.

Method of Data Collection

The data collection strategy envisioned for this study consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews: a choice motivated by the widespread use of this method to disentangle countries' preferences in migration policy (Delano, 2009; Mouthaan, 2019; Rosenblum, 2004). This thesis employs the method and interviewing techniques proposed by Leech (2002). This entails the preparation of an interview protocol with a set of consistent, predetermined questions (Annex A), to be combined - during the interview - with a mix of planned, unscripted, and floating prompts to explore topics more in-depth, adapting to each interviewee's responses. Additionally, the questions' order was designed to progress from general to more specific/sensitive topics to put respondents at ease. To encourage detailed answers, a journalistic style was adopted, wherein the interviewer shows familiarity with the topic but appears less knowledgeable than respondents (Leech, 2002). To facilitate the conversation flow and minimise information loss, interviews were recorded (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002)

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions are deemed most suitable as they align with this thesis's methodological priorities. First, the inherent flexibility of this approach allows both interlocutors to raise additional points or follow-up questions on the subject matter, enabling a more in-depth exploration of the topics discussed (Knott *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, the open-ended nature of the questions provides respondents with more freedom to articulate their answers, maximising response validity (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). The comparability of responses - necessary to gauge support for this study's hypothesis - was ensured by maintaining consistency in the core questions (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). Overall, semi-structured interviews not only ensure detailed responses, but also provide rich, nuanced, and comprehensive insights, reflecting the insiders' perspectives (Leech, 2002).

Naturally, interviews also present limitations, particularly because of the inherently subjective nature of individual perspectives and the risk of bias and/or inaccuracies in response

due to poor recall (Diefenbach, 2009). Concerns have also been raised regarding ethics and reflexivity, emphasising the importance of considering how the interviewer's identity may influence responses (Knott *et al.*, 2022). However, while limitations should not be disregarded, they can be mitigated by acknowledging the subjective nature of answers, conducting within and across-interview triangulation, obtaining informed consent, and understanding how the interviewer's identity shapes knowledge and assumptions. In line with this, the strengths of the selected methodology outweigh the limitations. Additionally, the extensive adoption of interviews in data elicitation in the social sciences further justifies their selection as method of data collection. Despite the widespread adoption of this method, this study remains novel due to its distinct focus, theoretical approach, and interviewees' sample.

Interviewees' Selection

Interviews were carried out with high-ranking Mexican government officials, currently members of the Mexican Foreign Service as diplomats. Positioned at the intersection between domestic and international affairs, diplomats are uniquely poised to provide valuable insights, bridging the gap between these two dimensions. This perspective aligns with the “intermestic” approach utilised in this study. Respondents were chosen for their extensive experience in migration issues, particularly in the US, where all interviewees have been posted over the last two decades. Having served in prominent positions in major Mexican consulates - Atlanta, Kansas City, Miami, and San Diego - all respondents are familiar with the practical challenges inherent to human mobility and have collaborated extensively with US authorities at all levels of governance. These consulates - part of Mexico's extensive consular network⁶ - are located in four major urban centres with large Mexican populations and cover extensive jurisdictions. As such, the consulates serve a diverse range of migrants and engage with different migration-related dynamics and associated challenges. Specifically, the consulates in Atlanta and Kansas City primarily address the needs of the jurisdictions' large population of undocumented agricultural workers. In contrast, due to its proximity to the border, the Consulate in San Diego focuses on providing more immediate assistance to migrants at the border. To increase the richness of the sample and provide a distinct vantage point, two of the interviewees were

⁶ Mexico has over 50 consulates in the US, making this the largest consular network maintained by a country in another nation. The consulates are strategically located in areas with significant Mexican populations, rather than one per state.

selected based on their experience working at the Embassy of Mexico in Washington D.C., where both held prominent positions, directly engaging in bilateral negotiations.

Table 2

Overview of Interviewees' Professional Background

Interviewee	Diplomatic rank	Experience in the United States
I-1	Ambassador	Consulate of Mexico in the United States Embassy of Mexico in the United States
I-2	Counsellor	Consulate of Mexico in the United States Embassy of Mexico in the United States
I-3	First Secretary	Consulate of Mexico in the United States
I-4	First Secretary	Consulate of Mexico in the United States
I-5	Second Secretary	Consulate of Mexico in the United States

Operationalisation

The interview questions developed for this study are aimed at exploring Mexico's intermestic preferences on migration policy to understand how and whether they have contributed to the absence of a comprehensive framework for bilateral migration cooperation with the US. Questions and probes were based on the four factors outlined in the theoretical framework. With regard to the domestic dimension, respondents were asked questions concerning electoral and inter-institutional dynamics. As for the international component, questions are centred around geopolitical, economic, and trade-related considerations. These four main sets of questions (Appendix A), serve to gauge the extent to which - if any - the factors identified do indeed contribute to the absence of a cooperative bilateral framework on migration with the US. Additional questions were asked to get insights into the respondents' professional background, personal involvement with migration-related matters - particularly in the US -, and to explore whether any other considerations have hindered the establishment of a migration deal. While probes changed across different respondents to delve deeper into specific topics brought up, uniformity was ensured by posing virtually identical questions to all participants.

Questions were designed to elicit direct responses as to the presumed impact of the aforementioned considerations in shaping Mexico's migration policy preferences. A more comprehensive operationalisation is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Operationalisation

Dimensions	Considerations	Operationalisation
Domestic	Electoral dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Electoral dynamics - Electoral cycles - Changes in presidents - Changes in government make-up - Shifts in priorities on migration cooperation with the US - Inconsistencies in the government's approach to migration cooperation
	Inter-institutional dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differing/competing priorities of governmental agencies involved in migration management - Lack of inter-institutional coordination - Irregular inter-institutional interaction
International	Geopolitical considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weakened international standing due to concessions during negotiations - Regional tensions - Absence of a humanitarian approach in a deal
	Economic and trade-related considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deep US-Mexico economic ties weaken Mexico's negotiating position - Importance of trade relations - Brain drain concern - Shortage of highly skilled workers

Analysis

In this section, the results of the conducted interviews will be presented and discussed.

Domestic Dimension

Electoral Dynamics

To probe whether electoral dynamics shape Mexico's migration policy preferences and whether these hinder the establishment of a migration deal with the US, respondents were asked three core questions. The first question concerned the impact of electoral dynamics on decision-making processes concerning bilateral cooperation on migration. Then, respondents were asked whether they have observed shifts in Mexico's policy priorities based on electoral cycles or inconsistencies in the country's approach to migration cooperation with the US across different administrations.

Respondents largely agree that Mexico's approach to migration cooperation with the US has undergone significant shifts under different administrations. One respondent emphasised the drastic shift that occurred under the current administration: *“Until 2018, Mexico understood that its migration policy needed to act as a filter, limiting arrivals. However, when the current president took office, he said: “I am left-wing and welcome all migrants”. This led to an influx of migrant caravans, prompting the US to tell Mexico to go back to acting as a filter. The current government has done so, but the political cost of resuming this is now much higher than if they had never stopped”*. While perspectives vary, *“the lack of long-term sustained effort”, “inconsistencies”, and “changing priorities”* are acknowledged. Respondents repeatedly attributed these shifts to the reactive nature of Mexico's approach towards migration cooperation, whereby inconsistencies are displayed due to changing circumstances, rather than being determined by a long-term strategy. A concrete example of this approach is provided by one respondent: *“Mexico has become a place of transit and reception [...] and this forces the government to rethink its strategies. However, its approach has been more reactive [...], responding to particular circumstances only when faced with a problem.”*

Notwithstanding, interviewees emphasise that bilateral cooperation has never ceased and - despite differences in cooperative approach - Mexico has remained consistent in advocating for the non-criminalisation of migrants and for *“legal and ordered migration, in the*

protection of human rights.” Most respondents agree that electoral cycles determine changes in policy priorities, however, “*shifts are not solely linked to electoral cycles in Mexico, but also to the American ones*”, as a diplomat explained. Moreover, while electoral dynamics inherently impact decision-making processes on migration cooperation given the changes to the executive, there appears to be a consensus that “*in Mexico, migration is not an issue of concern to the electorate*”, due to its non-politicised nature and the existence of other - more pressing - concerns. Some diplomats, however, highlight the importance of the Mexican electorate residing in the US in this context, particularly in the wake of the recently introduced electronic voting options.

Based on these insights, it appears that electoral dynamics do exert considerable influence in shaping Mexico’s policy preferences in migration. Nevertheless, opinions vary as to the extent of this influence. However, the existence of inconsistencies and/or diverging priorities under different administrations, the reactive nature of Mexico’s approach, and shifting priorities determined by electoral cycles appear to lend some support to H1, that Mexico’s policy preferences are shaped by electoral dynamics - among other factors - and that these hinder the establishment of a deal.

Inter-Institutional Dynamics

To gauge the impact of inter-institutional dynamics in shaping Mexico’s policy preferences and understand whether these hinder the establishment of a migration deal, questions were centred around two themes: the existence of differing/conflicting priorities among Mexican governmental agencies involved in migration governance and the potential for a weakened negotiating positions with the US in case of inter-institutional differences.

According to most respondents, the involvement of multiple governmental agencies in migration governance has sometimes resulted in their display of conflicting priorities. Specifically, they pointed to the lack of inter-institutional coordination between the *SRE* and the *INM*, due to differing interests. According to one interviewee, the two agencies have always displayed “*contradictory approaches*”. Another interviewee similarly stated that “*On the one hand, the SRE seeks to defend the interests of Mexicans abroad. On the other, the INM often does not respect the parameters you would expect it to adhere to.*” In spite of these differences, it appears that when engaging in high-level negotiations with the US, Mexico’s position is generally cohesive: “*There may be coordination issues in Mexico, but when presenting our*

position to the US, it is always in a unified voice". This cohesion is attributed, by one of the interviewees, to the increased centralisation of decision-making and coordination under the President's authority: *"In Mexico, the issue has become so important that coordination is now handled by the President."*

While Mexico presents a mostly unified front in high-level bilateral negotiations, inter-institutional differences are believed to result in a weakened negotiating position in specific instances. This is particularly noticeable in case of negotiations concerning Mexico's role as a transit state, in the management of migration flows from third countries, as well as during unforeseen circumstances. Indeed, some respondents claimed that, in case of emergencies, the absence of a clear strategy and well-defined responsibilities is evident, as illustrated in the following example: *"We have cases, like the fire at the immigration station⁷, where we were in a limbo about who was responsible for what. [...] Normally, guidelines are clear, but in the crisis, roles changed and it wasn't clear who was responsible for what."* These challenges appear to be attributable to the country's relatively limited experience as a transit state - where priorities are not as clearly defined -, the volatile nature of regional human mobility patterns and disagreements between governmental agencies, which impede rapid decision-making processes in case of emergency. Adding an extra layer of complexity, a respondent noted: *"We should also consider that these topics are increasingly discussed in regional forums. Mexico, especially under President López Obrador, has pushed for a regional perspective, bringing Central America, Mexico, and the US to the table. This could complicate things if different actors see inconsistencies."*

Overall, the insights from the interviews seem to lend some support to H2, that Mexican policy preferences, shaped by inter-institutional dynamics, hinder the establishment of a migration deal with the US. This appears to occur as the coherence and effectiveness of Mexico's approach to migration governance is undermined due to inter-institutional differences/conflicts, particularly in emergency situations. While a united front is displayed at high-level negotiations, the underlying differences domestically point to fragile foundations, characterised by fragmented interests.

⁷ Respondents mentioned the fire occurred at a migrant detention facility in Ciudad Juárez on 27 March 2023 and the subsequent response of the Mexican Government as an example.

International Dimension

Geopolitical Considerations

The interview questions probing whether geopolitical consideration played a role in shaping Mexico's policy preferences in migration and whether these hindered the establishment of a cooperation framework in migration with the US were centred around three main themes: the delicate balance between making concessions in negotiations and safeguarding sovereignty, the implications of a potential deal on Mexico's regional relations, and Mexico's soft-power projection in its role as advocate for a human rights-based approach to migration management.

All respondents convened that making concessions is an inherent part of negotiations. However, opinions differed as to their potential impact on Mexico's international standing, stressing that this is dependent on the nature of the concessions - currently impossible to foresee - and content of the deal. To illustrate this, a respondent declared: *"It depends on the concessions. Years ago, the idea of a binational airport in Tijuana with US immigration agents seemed unthinkable. Today, it's a reality. You can see it as a loss of sovereignty or integration, but the result is the same. [...] If you say we'll let the US charge us for the wall, then yes, we would be totally lost."* Another interviewee added: *"If something is imposed, you lose. But if you agree to allow, for example, US immigration agents to conduct inspections at airports, you may be yielding some sovereignty, but it doesn't affect you"*. Some respondents - hinting at the existence of power asymmetries - expressed concerns about the risk of conceding too much, potentially weakening Mexico's sovereignty. Others emphasised Mexico's significant bargaining power and, while they believe that concessions are inevitable, they argued risks can be avoided by engaging in strategic negotiations and leveraging Mexico's unique position in the region. Despite these differences, the interviewees share the belief that Mexico should adopt a cautious approach when engaging in negotiations. As a respondent put it: *"You need to be careful because of our particular position as a privileged interlocutor and regional leader. Ultimately, this position has more benefits than obstacles. We must be careful, and remember the phrase: Great power comes with great responsibility."*

In the context of regional relations, respondents acknowledged the country's unique role in the region due to its privileged relationship with the US. However, opinions vary on the potential impact of a US-Mexico deal. While some expressed concerns about possible tensions due to the perceptions of preferential treatment for Mexico, others claimed that the very nature

of Mexico's relations with the US would mitigate this. One respondent even argued a deal would be beneficial: *"When your relationship with the US is good, Latin Americans see you as more valuable. When you're fighting with the US, nobody wants to be identified with you. It's contradictory, but that's how it is."* In this context too, diplomats convene that Mexico should be cautious and mindful of its role in the region. Furthermore, in terms of soft-power projection, interviewees emphasise Mexico's role as advocate for the concept of *migración humana*: the respect for migrants' human rights, underpinned by the non-criminalisation of human mobility. There is a consensus on the importance of maintaining this approach in a potential US-Mexico deal, with some believing its inclusion should be non-negotiable. However, others expressed concerns about the potential erosion of Mexico's soft power depending on the content of the agreement, with one respondent claiming: *"It depends on the content of the agreement. For example, the agreement for the Third Safe Country, allowing migrants to stay there, certainly weakened it. The operational aspects and the conditions for migrants were heavily criticised. If you achieved an agreement like the one with Canada for temporary worker visas, it wouldn't be problematic."*

The interviews demonstrate that geopolitical considerations play an important role in shaping Mexico's policy preferences in migration. Despite differences in perspectives, respondents expressed concerns due to the potential risks involved in negotiating a deal with the US given the aforementioned geopolitical considerations. While some diplomats appeared relatively confident in Mexico's ability to navigate these complexities, these risks and the need to adopt a cautious approach in negotiations are believed to pose obstacles, hindering the establishment of a deal. Therefore, there is some support for H3.

Economic Considerations

This set of questions was aimed at understanding the extent to which - if any - economic considerations shape Mexico's migration policy preferences and negotiations with the US. First, respondents were asked if they believed that Mexico's deep economic ties with the US would influence negotiations. Then, questions were asked concerning the existence of fears regarding the potential emigration of highly-skilled individuals to the US in the event of a migration deal.

As outlined by one respondent, migration flows from Mexico to the US are - to the core - a matter of economics: *"It is an international labour market, where the demand in the US is*

for unskilled labour. [...] Then, you have a supply of Latin Americans, Mexicans, and Central Americans. Why do they leave? Because of the wage difference. [...] In Mexico, one day's pay is equivalent to an hour's pay in the US. Despite higher living costs in the US, you still end up with savings to send back home. It makes economic sense from both demand and supply perspectives." The two countries share one of the world's most significant bilateral trading relationships, therefore, economic and trade-related considerations are expected to influence negotiations of a migration deal. However, interviews tell a different story. All respondents convened that, traditionally, there has been a mutual understanding that matters concerning economics and those regarding migration matters would be negotiated separately. One interviewee explained: "*When NAFTA was signed, there was an opportunity to include that element, but they decided to separate it because they wanted the economic benefits, and it wasn't possible to address everything together.*" Furthermore, respondents largely agreed that, given the long tradition of migration flows from Mexico to the US, and the existence of visas for highly-skilled workers, concerns over a potential brain drain to the US are not prominent. Currently, more pressing matters overshadow this issue, which does not feature highly on the government agenda. Only one respondent hinted subtly at the possibility of workers' shortages in specific industries (*i.e.*, automobile and aerospace), stressing the need for Mexico to carefully consider the macroeconomic framework underpinning any deal.

Given the above, there is not enough support to accept H4. Indeed, while economic and trade-related concerns are a constant, overarching factor in the US-Mexico relationship, the compartmentalised nature of the current approach in bilateral policy-making does not appear to shape Mexico's policy preferences in a way that they contribute to the absence of a cooperative framework on migration with the US.

Aggregate Results

The interviews conducted reveal support for three of the four hypotheses proposed in this study. As expected, electoral dynamics influence Mexico's approach to migration governance and cooperation, often resulting in shifting priorities across different administrations. This aligns with Mouthaan's (2019) claim that electoral cycles can lead to changing interests and inconsistencies. The lack of long-term strategies and inconsistent approaches contribute to hindering the establishment of a deal. As claimed by Natter (2023), governmental agencies often display diverging priorities. This holds true in Mexico, where inter-institutional dynamics (*i.e.*, differences, competition, lack of coordination) pose further obstacles to reaching a deal

due to the absence of a coherent approach, weakening Mexico's negotiating position. Geopolitical considerations also play a role in shaping Mexico's preferences and hindering the establishment of a deal, as the country is forced to adopt a cautious approach, balancing sovereignty concerns, soft power projection, and regional relations. Contrary to expectations and insights by Hill (1994), economic considerations do not appear to have much influence in shaping Mexico's migration preferences or pose obstacles to the establishment of a deal as economic and migration issues are traditionally negotiated separately. These findings underscore the difficulties inherent to achieving a comprehensive US-Mexico cooperative framework in migration given the complex, multifaceted, and "intermestic" nature of Mexican policy preferences.

Conclusion

Diverging from prevailing US-centric approaches to account for the lack of a cooperation framework in migration between the US and Mexico, this thesis set out to comprehend how Mexico's policy preferences contribute to the ongoing absence of a deal. Drawing upon Adam *et al.* (2020), an "intermestic" approach was adopted to explore both domestically and internationally-driven factors believed to shape Mexico's policy preferences in migration governance and cooperation. Four considerations were identified: electoral and inter-institutional dynamics, geopolitical and economic considerations. These factors were hypothesised to shape Mexico's preferences, contributing to the absence of a migration deal.

To test the hypotheses and answer the research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Mexican diplomats with extensive work experience in migration, particularly in the US. The analysis revealed support for three out of the four proposed hypotheses. Contrary to expectations, economic considerations did not appear to hinder the establishment of a deal. However, interviews provided enough support to claim that electoral and inter-institutional dynamics, along with geopolitical considerations shape Mexico's policy preferences, contributing to the absence of a deal. The mechanism underlying this dynamic lies in the framing of this scenario as a CD. The intrinsically complex nature of Mexico's policy preferences - shaped by the interplay of numerous domestically and internationally-determined factors - further exacerbates the existing CD between the two countries, making the identification of a coordination point agreeable to both all the more complicated, resulting in the ongoing absence of a comprehensive bilateral cooperative framework in migration.

This study demonstrated how Mexico's policy preferences contribute to the absence of a US-Mexico migration deal. This aligns with findings from research on the role played by other migrant-sending/transit states, reinforcing the notion that they should not be regarded as mere "policy takers" (Adam *et al.*, 2020; Mouthaan, 2019). Furthermore, this thesis stands out for its sole focus on Mexico when compared to the bulk of the literature regarding the absence of a deal, characterised by a general disregard for Mexico's interests (Fitzgerald & Alarcón, 2013; Velasco, 2008). This research similarly stands out in the literature on migration governance in Mexico, as studies mostly fail to address the absence of the deal from a Mexican perspective (Alonso, 2024; Campos-Delgado, 2024; Castillo, 2022).

This thesis holds both academic and societal relevance. By providing a better understanding of Mexico's policy preferences in migration, it contributes to a more comprehensive narrative to account for the absence of a deal, as opposed to predominant US-centric explanations. Additionally, by acknowledging the agency of Mexico - both a source and transit state - this study moves beyond the prevailing Western-centric approach in Migration Studies literature, which focuses disproportionately on destination countries in the Global North (Rosenblum, 2004). Furthermore, the "intermestic" approach adopted in this thesis proved particularly promising and can thus be utilised to better comprehend countries' preferences both in migration and in other policy areas. In terms of real-world relevance, by gaining a clearer understanding of the factors hindering the deal's establishment, this study laid the groundwork for developing policies aimed at creating legal avenues for migration. Furthermore, findings have the potential to inform policy-makers involved in negotiations, contributing to addressing the longstanding impasse.

Despite this thesis's intentional sole focus on Mexico, it should be emphasised that any study attempting to comprehend the absence of a US-Mexico migration deal must necessarily take into account both sides of the coin. Notably, while all interviewees appeared pleasantly surprised about the focus on Mexico's policy preferences given the predominant US-centric narrative, they all repeatedly referred to the US in their responses. Specifically, respondents pointed to American electoral dynamics and public perceptions as some of the main reasons for the inability to establish a deal. This tendency made it hard to disentangle Mexican preferences from the broader context of US politics, signalling the inextricable link between the two countries when discussing the matter at hand.

In line with the above, a limitation of this study lies in the unilateral focus on Mexico's policy preferences. Future research should strive to include both perspectives, fostering a dialogue between the two countries' preferences for a more comprehensive narrative. An additional methodological weakness lies in the interview sample: having conducted interviews only with members of the *SRE*, results - especially concerning inter-institutional dynamics - might be biased. To provide a more balanced account, studies should adopt a more varied sample of government officials, including representatives of the *INM*. Lastly, due to the limited scope of this project, only four considerations believed to shape Mexico's policy preferences were identified. Building on the proposed framework, a natural progression of this work would be to analyse additional factors that may influence Mexico's migration policy preferences.

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Appendix A

Table 4

Interview Guide

Structure	Themes	Questions	Additional probes
Introduction	Background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Briefly tell me about your trajectory within the Mexican Foreign Service. - What was your position when you were posted in the US? - Have you personally worked on topics related to migration? - How do you interpret migration cooperation with the US? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When were you posted in the US? - Have you personally cooperated/negotiated with the US government on migration? - Can you mention a few reasons why there exists no bilateral cooperation framework between the US and Mexico?
Domestic dimension	Electoral dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do electoral dynamics impact decision-making processes regarding migration cooperation initiatives? If so, how? - Have you observed any shifts in Mexico's migration policy priorities based on electoral cycles? - Have you observed inconsistencies in Mexico's approach to migration cooperation with the US across different administrations? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you believe that electoral dynamics in Mexico influence Mexico's approach to migration cooperation with the US? - In your opinion, are Mexican politicians reluctant to establish a deal with the US on migration due to anti-American sentiment in Mexico?
	Inter-institutional dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your opinion, do different ministries and agencies involved in migration governance display conflicting priorities? - If so, do you believe that inter-institutional conflicts or different priorities hinder Mexico's negotiating position with the US? 	<p>Do you believe ministries/agencies involved in migration governance pursue goals along individual ministerial lines?</p>

International dimension	Geopolitical dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In negotiations, Mexico would likely have to make concessions. Do you believe this weakens Mexico's sovereignty and international standing? - Do you believe that a deal might weaken regional solidarity in migration management? - Given Mexico's role as a champion of a humanitarian approach in migration, would a deal with the US weaken its soft power projection? 	Do you believe that a deal might worsen relations with Latin American countries?
	Economic and trade-related considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you believe Mexico's economic ties with the US influence negotiations of a migration deal? - In your experience, have Mexican policy-makers expressed concern over potential brain drain to the US? 	Do you believe Mexico's negotiating position is weakened by the fear of US repercussions (e.g., tariffs, limited market access)?
Alternative consideration	General preferences	Do you believe that any other considerations hinder or have hindered the establishment of a migration deal with the US?	
Conclusion	Concluding remarks and cool-off	Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude?	Have any relevant points not been covered during this interview?

Appendix B

Table 5

Interview Methods

N	Date	Format	Interview type	Duration	Recording	Transcript
I-1	10/05/2024	Remote	Semi-structured	00:33:25	Tape and notes	<i>Ad verbatim</i>
I-2	08/05/2024	In-person	Semi-structured	00:31:19	Tape and notes	<i>Ad verbatim</i>
I-3	06/05/2024	In-person	Semi-structured	00:30:20	Tape and notes	<i>Ad verbatim</i>
I-4	06/05/2024	In-person	Semi-structured	00:22:07	Tape and notes	<i>Ad verbatim</i>
I-5	07/05/2024	In-person	Semi-structured	00:31:24	Tape and notes	<i>Ad verbatim</i>