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Diplomatic Relations between Mexico and Canada: Eighty Years of Strengthening Economic and Trade Ties, 1944–2024

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In 2024, Mexico and Canada commemorated eighty years of official relations, characterized by a focus on investment and trade, within a framework of public diplomacy shaped initially by the interests of Great Britain and later by the interdependence imposed by U.S. hegemony. The strategic nature of the relationship has been fundamentally economic. The current context—marked by an imminent trade war and a reorganization of the geopolitical order driven by Donald Trump’s vision during his second administration—raises a series of questions for the future of the bilateral relationship.

The historical context

The first de facto bilateral contacts between Mexico and Canada began during the Porfiriato with the establishment of trade missions from the then Dominion of Canada in Mexico City and Yucatán. These missions targeted the electrical, railway, and banking sectors, thereby contributing to the development of Mexico’s industrial and financial infrastructure at the end of the 19th century. The growing economic relationship was interrupted by the Mexican Revolution but was gradually reactivated from 1920 onward. However, it faced a second pause due to the oil expropriation, which primarily affected British interests between 1936 and 1941.

During World War II, President Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–1946) took the initiative to establish a bilateral relationship between Mexico and Canada. This effort was supported by American diplomats from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration and was based on the authority over foreign policy granted to Commonwealth members under the Statute of Westminster of 1931.

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The official relationship

Mexico's political system is a Federal Representative Republic, with a government led by an elected President who serves a single six-year term. Canada's political system is a Constitutional Monarchy that recognizes the British Monarch as Head of State, represented domestically by the Governor General in Parliament. The Head of Government is the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the political party with the majority of elected representatives (Hristoulas *et al.*, 2005).

The Statute of Westminster enabled British approval for the establishment of official diplomatic relations between Mexico and Canada, which were formalized on January 29, 1944, during the government of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and President Ávila Camacho's administration (Government of Canada, 2024).

During the Cold War, the foreign policies of both countries were redefined through a lens of nationalism and active participation in the United Nations. While Mexico emphasized its Latin American identity and a commitment to denuclearization, Canada upheld the principles of multilateralism and strengthened ties with members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), thereby delaying for decades a shared regional identity within North America. During this period, the consolidation of the bilateral relationship remained absent.

The fundamental principles of Pearson's Doctrine are peacemaking as a diplomatic tool, the defense of international law—particularly regarding human rights—and the promotion of economic development in lower-income countries through financial assistance and cooperation.

In this regard, the establishment of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (PTAT) in 1974 had a positive impact on the hiring of Mexican agricultural workers, due to the expansion of the Canadian agricultural production market.

During Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's sixteen-year administration, fundamental changes were made to the Canadian political system, including the creation of the Official Languages Act (1969), the implementation of Wage and Price Controls (1975), and the enactment of the Constitution Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982).

This period was marked by a rising national debt and a shift in public opinion—from "Trudeaumania" to "Trudeaphobia." Relations with the government of José López Portillo remained relatively close until the 1980s, a decade characterized by a decline in bilateral trade with Canada due to Mexico's foreign debt crisis, which adversely affected foreign investment. One of the measures implemented to address this situation was

Mexico's accession to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This, in turn, paved the way for negotiations to establish a free trade agreement with the United States, which would later become trilateral.

Another important milestone was the elevation of Mexico's foreign policy principles to constitutional status in 1988, followed by their subsequent strengthening. These values have long characterized Mexican diplomacy, with the defense of national sovereignty, non-intervention, and equality among states being among the most important.

Vis-à-vis meetings within a multilateral and trade context, supported by NAFTA and the USMCA

The convergence in international forums and trade blocs has enabled extensive exchanges and collaboration between national leaders, particularly increasing between 1956 and 2024. The Mexican presidents who held the fewest meetings with their Canadian counterparts were Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and Miguel de la Madrid. In contrast, Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderón, and Enrique Peña Nieto held between 6 and 13 working sessions with Canadian Prime Ministers Jean Chrétien (1993–2003), Paul Martin (2003–2006), Stephen Harper (2006–2015), and Justin Trudeau (2015–2025). (Gobierno de México, 2018).

This is explained by the fact that, in addition to official visits, the broad institutional framework allowed Heads of State and Government to meet frequently through their participation in various international forums, such as the Summit of the Americas, the United Nations General Assembly, APEC, the OECD, the G20, the World Trade Organization (WTO), meetings related to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994–2018), and later the Mexico–United States–Canada Agreement (USMCA or T-MEC), as well as the North American Leaders' Summits.

It is worth noting that the North American Leaders' Summit was suspended during the first administration of U.S. President Donald Trump (2016–2020) and was resumed under President Joseph Biden (2020–2024) during the post-pandemic period of COVID-19.

The above reflects a form of multi-level diplomacy, as presidential contacts are complemented by growing ties among other governmental actors, including members of the respective executive cabinets, inter-parliamentary meetings, and state and provincial governors.

This intergovernmental collaboration has expanded to include issues such as security, the environment, temporary labor, and tourism. Over the past decades, a climate of trust and soft power has been consolidated, creating a favorable environment for non-governmental actors—such as the business sector (notably in mining, banking, and aviation), education and culture, NGOs, and civil society—to actively participate

in fostering mutual understanding. This dynamic reflects a diplomacy grounded in soft power and shared interests, given that both countries are important trading partners, each ranking just behind the United States in significance to one another. Canada is the world's fifth-largest energy producer, the third-largest natural gas producer, and the seventh-largest crude oil producer—particularly in the province of Alberta.

After nearly 25 years, the trilateral trade agreement was renegotiated in a context of rising U.S. protectionism, resulting in the Mexico–United States–Canada Agreement (T-MEC), also known as USMCA (United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement), signed on November 30, 2018, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The agreement includes a provision for periodic review, scheduled to begin in early 2026 (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

As part of the commemorations of the bilateral relationship, Mexico organized various events in 2019. These included selecting Canada as the guest country at that year's International Cervantino Festival, issuing a special-edition National Lottery ticket, hosting the Canada–Mexico Binational Forum titled “Science, Technology, and Development: The Nexus Between Academia and Business,” and presenting the “Tres Cuartos de Cien” concert at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. The events were led by Jesús Seade Kuri, then Undersecretary for North America at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Pierre Alaire, Canada's Ambassador to Mexico from 2014 to 2019.

The North American region accounted for 6.5% of the world's population (493 million people), represented the second-largest economy with 18.3% of global GDP (US\$26 trillion), and ranked as the second-largest exporter, with a 15.9% share of total global trade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to 2023 data from the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), Canada received 60,000 Mexican workers in that year alone, reflecting the growing interaction between the two countries (Government of Canada, 2025).

On the eve of the eightieth anniversary of diplomatic relations, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Primer Minister Justin Trudeau signed an Action Plan to strengthen bilateral ties in trade, foreign direct investment, inclusion, and the protection of Indigenous peoples' human rights, as outlined in the document *Towards a Shared Future Between Mexico and Canada*. Both governments also respectively promoted their Feminist Foreign Policy and the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), aimed at advancing empowerment, combating gender-based violence, fostering inclusive governance, and increasing women's political participation.

The year 2024 marked the celebration of several key milestones in the bilateral relationship, including the 80th anniversary of official diplomatic ties, the 50th anniversary of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, and the 20th anniversary of the Mexico–Canada Alliance.

Diplomatic Representations

Currently, the bilateral relationship has gradually become more complex, particularly in areas such as trade and migration, as reflected in the consular network, which now includes the following cities in addition to the embassies:

- Consulate of Mexico in Calgary
- General Consulate of Mexico in Montreal
- General Consulate of Mexico in Toronto
- General Consulate of Mexico in Vancouver
- Career Consulate of Mexico in Leamington (Ontario)
- General Consulate of Canada in Monterrey, Nuevo León
- Consulate of Canada in Guadalajara, Jalisco
- Consular Agency of Canada in Acapulco, Guerrero
- Consular Agency of Canada in Cabo San Lucas, Baja California
- Consular Agency of Canada in Cancún, Quintana Roo
- Consular Agency of Canada in Mazatlán, Sinaloa
- Consular Agency of Canada in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo
- Consular Agency of Canada in Puerto Vallarta, Nayarit
- Honorary Consulate of Canada in Tijuana, Baja California

The priority sectors in the bilateral relationship include aerospace, automotive, food, education, energy, mining, and clean technologies. Mexico's main exports to Canada are tomatoes, peppers, berries, avocados, and beer, while Canada exports wheat, pork, and beef products to Mexico.

Migration issues continue to pose challenges, particularly in cases involving tourists and temporary residents. In 2015, the bilateral relationship experienced a period of tension following Canada's decision to require visas for Mexican nationals, due to a high number of refugee applications. These cases often took years to process, and in most instances, the requested status was not granted. After months of negotiations, both countries agreed to replace the visa requirement with the Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA), applicable for stays of up to six months for purposes such as business, tourism, or transit.

The Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Department (IRCC) was established in 1994 to promote immigration growth and to monitor it through public policy. In November 2024, Canada released its Immigration Levels Plan 2024–2026, aimed at managing the admission of new immigrants from various countries. The plan focuses on

reducing the high number of international students and temporary workers who, after a few years, apply for permanent residency. This measure responds to the ongoing housing crisis and limited access to public services, which have affected thousands of people and contributed to rising prices and inflation (Pompa Dávalos, 2023).

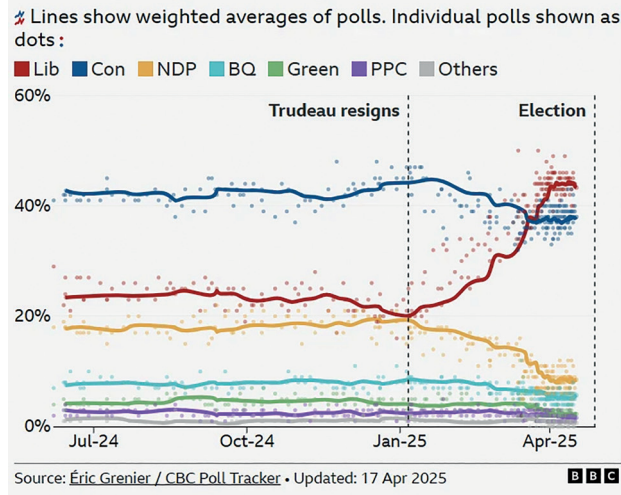
The bilateral relationship also faces challenges stemming from tariff measures imposed by President Donald Trump on both Canada and Mexico, despite the ongoing validity of the USMCA (T-MEC). Additionally, increased border security measures implemented since March 2025 have added further strain. One of the most controversial actions has been the recent designation of seven Mexican criminal organizations—focused on the production and distribution of fentanyl—as terrorist groups. This designation aims to reinforce Canadian law enforcement and implement stricter migration policies on national security grounds (Gobierno de la República, 2025).

Canada experienced a significant political transition with the resignation of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in January 2025, after ten years in office. He was succeeded by Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of Canada, who assumed the role of Head of Government and Leader of the Liberal Party. This change paved the way for snap general elections, held on April 28, 2025, ahead of the originally scheduled date in October, as set by the electoral calendar. In Canada, voting is indirect; the leader of the party with the majority of Members of Parliament is appointed as Prime Minister.

The Canadian electoral process, coupled with pressures from the United States, has contributed to the rise of anti-Mexican sentiment among certain political sectors. One example is the stance of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, which has adopted nativist rhetoric within the broader North American context. Local actors, such as Governor Doug Ford—recently re-elected for a second term in Ontario—have openly opposed the continuation of trade relations with Mexico. These dynamics are expected to pose significant challenges in the coming years, particularly within the broader context of the ongoing readjustment of the international order.

What can be described as “the emergence of the ‘Trump factor’” played a predominant role in the surprising shift in citizens’ electoral preferences. Repeated statements suggesting the possibility of incorporating Canada as the 51st state of the American Union fueled a sense of shared identity and belonging. Thus, with less than a month remaining before the election—and despite a strong opposition campaign criticizing the liberal government’s public policies, which contributed to a high cost of living and rising prices—a rebound was achieved, resulting in a narrow electoral victory. This outcome ultimately undermined the Conservative Party’s chances of gaining power, as reflected in the following poll tracker graphic.

Figure 1

Canada voting intention poll tracker

In a historic election marked by a significant political shift, Mark Carney ran against Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre and Jagmeet Singh of the New Democratic Party. Poilievre, who had led in the polls since the pre-campaign period launched several months earlier, ultimately saw his political affinity with Donald Trump work against him.

Chronological of the Most Relevant Events

Below are the earliest contacts and most significant official events in the bilateral relationship, presented in chronological order (De la Vega et al., 2011; Swanson, 1976):

- 19th century: Mexico's foreign policy was centered on territorial defense and national security, following the creation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Interior in 1821. The various foreign interventions and conflicts Mexico faced during this period reinforced a strong sense of nationalism and shaped the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention that later defined the Juárez Doctrine. This framework contributed to the diversification of Mexico's international relations, particularly with European countries.
- 1867: The Dominion of Canada was established under British control through the union of the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Over time, additional territories were incorporated, including Prince Edward Island, Yukon, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and the Province of Labrador. Canada's national and external security was governed by the Constitutional Act of 1867, under which the Department of External Affairs (now Global Affairs Canada) was created in 1909 as an agency subordinate to the British Crown (Global Affairs Canada 2025).
- 1902 to 1909: Canada participated in public service investments in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Yucatán, particularly in the mining, electricity, railway, water, and public sewerage sectors.

- 1905: A Permanent Trade Mission was established in Mexico.
- 1910: The Bank of Montreal and the Canadian Bank of Commerce opened branches in Mexico, operating until 1934.
- 1920: Migration of Mennonite communities from Canada to Mexico began.
- 1926: The Imperial Conference declared that the British Dominions were autonomous communities within the Empire, equal in status and not subordinate to one another.
- 1931: The Statute of Westminster was signed, redefining the relationship between the British Crown and the members of the Commonwealth. In Canada's case, full autonomy was granted.
- 1940: Canada established diplomatic relations with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile during the context of World War II. The formalization of relations with Mexico was delayed due to tensions with Great Britain following the oil expropriation of 1938.
- 1944: Official diplomatic relations were established between Mexico and Canada.
- 1947: Canada gained formal recognition of Canadian nationality as distinct from British nationality.
- 1948: The Organization of American States (OAS) was created. Mexico joined as a founding member, while Canada became an observer in 1972 and requested full membership in 1990. Both governments supported the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco) and chose not to sever diplomatic relations with Cuba.
- 1956: The first face-to-face meeting between President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent took place at a trilateral summit convened by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in Virginia.
- 1957: Lester B. Pearson, former Head of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations for ten years, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to peace, particularly in the Middle East. He later served as Leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister of Canada.
- 1959: The first official bilateral visits took place. Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos met with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in Ottawa, Canada. The following year, Mexico hosted the return visit.
- 1963: While Mexico maintained its Latin Americanist vocation, Canada supported Atlanticism and promoted the mixed economy as a path to development (Pearson's Doctrine).
- 1965: The current Canadian flag was officially adopted.
- 1974: The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (PTAT) was established.
- 1980: The General Delegation of Quebec was opened in Mexico.

- 1981: Diplomatic delegations from both countries participated in the North-South Summit held in Cancún, Mexico.
- 1982: The Constitutional Act of Canada was enacted.
- 1984: Jeanne Sauv  became the first woman to serve as Governor General of Canada.
- 1994–1995: The Commercial Representations of the Provinces of Ontario and Alberta were opened in Mexico.
- 1994: Entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which had been signed two years earlier by Presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (Mexico), George H. W. Bush (United States), and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (Canada).
- 1999: Administrative reorganization of Canada into ten provinces and three territories: Nunavut, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories.
- 2004: Negotiation of the Mexico–Canada Alliance.
- 2007: Mexico and Canada signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by a majority of 143 states at the 61st UN General Assembly.
- 2015: Implementation of visa requirements for Mexican tourists traveling to Canada.
- 2019: Signing and entry into force of the Mexico–United States–Canada Agreement (USMCA or T-MEC).
- 2022: Resumption of the North American Leaders’ Summit.
- 2023: Launch of the “Mexico–Canada Action Plan.”
- 2024: Signing of the document Towards a Shared Future between Mexico and Canada in commemoration of the 80th anniversary of official diplomatic relations.
- 2024: Partisan continuity in Mexico with the continued leadership of the Morena party.
- 2025: Canadian federal election resulting in a fourth consecutive term for the Liberal Party.

Final Comments

Over the past eighty-one years, the bilateral relationship between Mexico and Canada has undergone significant transformations, often shaped by the consequences of sharing a continent—and strategic interests—with the United States. The evolution of this relationship has progressed from a focus primarily on trade and investment to encompassing migratory flows and the strengthening of political dialogue, particularly in the context of international summits and United Nations forums.

As of the conclusion of this chronicle in 2025, the future of the bilateral relationship faces serious uncertainty. A political and commercial decoupling among the three North American countries appears to be on the horizon, driven by a series of executive orders

signed by President Trump during his first hundred days in office. This shift could negatively affect diplomatic ties between Mexico and Canada, which—as this analysis has shown—have been historically defined since the early 20th century by mutual exchange in goods, services, and investment.

Despite the various meetings held and the existence of bilateral agreements—such as the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program—limited interaction can be attributed in part to the geographical distance between the two countries, as well as to the fact that both are neighbors of a global superpower.

Canada's foreign policy appears likely to remain oriented toward multilateralism and Atlanticism, given its strong ties with the United Kingdom and the European Union. In contrast, Mexico has leaned toward a Latin American-focused discourse since the previous six-year presidential term. While both countries are economically dependent on the U.S. market, this interdependence does not necessarily stem from a unified trilateral regional perspective. ❧

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