



## Mexico responds to the Trump administration's policy of pressure

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The current US administration's confrontational approach towards its southern neighbours, driven by a prioritisation of security and economic interests, poses major challenges for Mexico. President Claudia Sheinbaum's government has been responding mainly by emphasising dialogue, highlighting the benefits of cooperation and demonstrating effectiveness, for example, in combating organised crime. It has been avoiding confrontation so as not to hamper talks on the upcoming review of the USMCA treaty, but has also sought to demonstrate its ability to resist pressure from the Trump administration.

The current administration's approach to Mexico reflects its [view of Latin America as the main source of threats to the US](#)—namely, irregular migration, international criminal groups, and the growing influence of rivals, primarily China. In 2024, US authorities detained an average of over 137,000 undocumented migrants per month at the border with Mexico, a third of whom were Mexican nationals. Both countries remain closely linked economically, so the Trump administration's protectionist policies have greatly impacted bilateral relations. According to the Bank of Mexico, in 2025, the US accounted for over 83% (\$552 billion) of Mexico's exports and 38% (\$250 billion) of its imports. This high trade volume results from the [USMCA free trade agreement](#), to which the two nations and Canada are parties, which took effect in 2020 and expires in July 2036. While the parties are scheduled to decide on a 16-year extension of the treaty on 1 July 2026, the US position remains uncertain.

**The main source of tension in bilateral relations.** The friction mainly comes from the US administration's pressure on Mexico to better protect the shared border and fight organised crime. On 20 January 2025, Trump declared a border emergency, citing fentanyl smuggling and mass migration. In March, he [imposed 25% tariffs on Mexico \(and Canada\)](#), which were later modified in accordance with USMCA rules. Earlier, he designated certain Mexican cartels as terrorist organisations, and President Trump has also

repeatedly threatened to send US troops into Mexico to combat these groups.

Bilateral cooperation is also adversely affected by ideological differences between the Republican administration and the left-wing Mexican authorities, dominated by the Morena party (Sheinbaum is one of the founders). When the US inaugurated the ['Shield of the Americas'](#), a regional coalition aimed at combating organised crime, at a March summit in Florida, the presidents of Mexico, Brazil and Colombia – all of whom represent the left – were notably absent. During the meeting, Trump even criticised Sheinbaum for refusing to accept his support. The current administration's efforts to rebuild its influence in the Western Hemisphere, including by military means, clash with Mexico's approach to foreign policy, which is based on principles including openness to cooperation with various partners, including Cuba and Russia.

US pressure on Mexico has increased over the past three months. In April, the Department of Justice charged a group of high-ranking Sinaloa state politicians—including those linked to Morena—with having cartel ties. In June, media reports said the US revoked visas for two other governors from the same party. The Secretary of State also announced a review of the 53 Mexican consulates in the US.

The ongoing negotiations on the USMCA review are the main source of economic tensions. The US administration has made its position conditional on Mexico's commitment to

# PISM BULLETIN

combating shared threats. On 10 June, Trump suggested that he might not agree to extend the treaty's validity. In this scenario, the agreement will remain in force until 1 July 2036, with the parties obliged to conduct annual reviews until they agree on an extension or the expiry date is reached.

Mexico also remains subject to punitive US tariffs on categories not covered by USMCA exemptions – including steel, aluminium, copper, certain vehicles and car parts. The Trump administration also demanded that China's economic influence on the country be curtailed, arguing that it was using Mexico to gain easier access to the US market for its goods. It also pointed out that the PRC is a key source of the precursors that Mexican cartels use to produce fentanyl. In June, the US administration listed Mexico among the countries facing potential new tariffs, citing its failure to block the use of forced labour.

**Mexico's response to the new administration's policy.** Since the start of Trump's second term, Sheinbaum and members of her government have stressed the importance of resolving disputes through diplomacy. They have also highlighted successes such as the reduction in the number of undocumented migrants at the shared border—recent US figures show it has seen a significant drop in detentions, at an average of 11,000 people per month. At the same time, they have publicly challenged the Trump administration's actions, which they regarded as interference with Mexico's sovereignty, alongside attempts to draw attention to the US's shared responsibility for certain problems, such as how widespread access to smuggled firearms from the US fuels Mexican gangs.

In February 2025, the Sheinbaum government deployed additional forces to bolster border security and then stepped up operations against the cartels, extraditing dozens of their members to the US. These measures were not just a response to US pressure, but also the implementation of the president's public security policy concept, followed [since she took office in October 2024](#). Both countries have intensified intelligence cooperation and collaboration in areas such as investigating illicit financial flows. Although the Mexican government had consistently rejected the possibility of US forces participating in operations on Mexican territory, it emerged in April that two CIA agents had died during an operation in the country. The Sheinbaum government denied any knowledge of the operation, blaming the Chihuahua state authorities for allowing a US presence.

The Sheinbaum government has refrained from reciprocal measures in response to punitive US tariffs, instead attempting to negotiate the relaxation of the imposed

restrictions. In December 2025, the Mexican Congress even approved the introduction of 50% tariffs on over 1,000 types of products imported from countries with which Mexico has no preferential trade agreements, including China. The Mexican authorities have also engaged in diversifying their economic partners, strengthening ties with Canada, amongst other countries. In May, [Mexico and the European Union reactivated their strategic partnership](#) and signed a new agreement, which aims to expand the scope of trade and investment liberalisation.

However, the Sheinbaum government has responded with a firmer stance to the Trump administration's allegations against Morena politicians, denying extradition demands. For example, at the end of May, Sheinbaum used the ceremony marking the second anniversary of her presidential election victory to publicly oppose the US demands and to assert that her government is defending the country's sovereignty. She has maintained high approval ratings since the start of her term, which currently stand at around 70%. Her government's policy towards the US is currently supported by around 40% of the public and opposed by around 45%, which nevertheless represents a notable improvement compared to the start of the year (24% in favour, 65% against). In 2027, voting for 500 federal deputies will take place, and on 28 May, Morena pushed through a constitutional amendment in the Mexican Congress, allowing elections to be annulled in the event of foreign interference, which the government expects from the US.

**Conclusions.** Mexico's ability to challenge the Trump administration's policies is limited by the country's extensive ties, especially its economic dependence on the US. The Sheinbaum government has tried to balance concessions to US demands by imposing boundaries in other areas. However, its policy has mostly been reactive.

The Mexican authorities will intensify their efforts to demonstrate their commitment and effectiveness in combating organised crime. To meet the Trump administration's expectations, they will continue to target cartel leaders—including through intelligence sharing with the US—and permit the extradition of cartel members to the US. Still, they are unlikely to entirely avoid new friction or potential political costs if the US levels charges against further Mexican politicians over alleged cartel links.

The upcoming USMCA review will show how well this balancing act and Mexico's efforts to strengthen its negotiating position have worked. Faced with uncertainty over US economic policy, Mexican authorities will look to further diversify their partners—such as by swiftly ratifying the new EU agreement.