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DIVIDE AND RULE

POLITICAL IMPACT OF PRESIDENT TRUMP'S US-MEXICO BORDER WALL INITIATIVE

ABSTRACT While announcing his participation in 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump promised, if elected, to build a wall along the US-Mexican border to limit the flow of illegal immigrants from Latin America to the United States. During the campaign, he repeatedly stressed the necessity to control the situation at the border, which he indicated as one of the biggest threats for US national security, claiming that Mexico should pay for the construction of the wall. After winning the election, President Trump decided to fulfill his promise and signed an executive order enabling the wall to be erected. During four years of his tenure, the wall was built in almost half of the planned length It had impact not only on the flow of immigrants from Latin America, but also on the debate about U.S. immigration policy, as well as on the bilateral relations with Mexico. The purpose of the article is to analyze political consequences of putting up the wall, both in the US and Mexico, and to assess the impact of Trump's immigration policy on the relations between both countries.

Keywords: U.S.-Mexico relations, national security, U.S. presidential campaign, border wall, immigration policy, Donald Trump

INTRODUCTION

The nearly 2000 miles long[1] U.S.-Mexico border has raised concerns of American political leaders since it was defined as a threat to the US security. The border between the two countries is considered the busiest in the world with more than 1 million people and 1.4 billion dollars in trade crossing every day,[2] as well as the most-often crossed illegally.[3] Apart from the problem of illegal immigration, one of the biggest challenges of the border concerns the drug trafficking and its consequences on the crime rate in the United States. Various US Presidents introduced policies aiming to limit the scope of criminal activities caused by an enormous smuggling of illegal substances from Latin America via Mexico to the United States.[4] Despite joined efforts with the Mexican government to solve the drug trafficking problem, contemporary estimates indicate that the US Customs and Border officers seized a significant amount of heroin and fentanyl attempted to be smuggled through the border in 2021.[5]

In the meantime, the growing number of Latin American citizens (Hispanics), with Mexicans being the largest nationality, became a challenge in South-Western states due to their status of illegal, undocumented migrants. According to statistics, there are around 36 million Mexicans living today in the United States, one fourth of whom hold US citizenship. Although most of Mexican immigrants tried to assimilate and enhance their legal status, there were cases of individuals who committed crimes, thus alarming the political establishment in Washington to react effectively on the dangers they brought to the safety of US citizens.[6] Regardless of the problem of crime, the growing number of Mexican citizens living in the United States must have had an impact on social, economic, and political situation in particular US states, as well for the direction of US immigration policy.

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[1]   The length of the wall is exactly 1989 miles.

[2]   M. Shifter, B. Binetti, "The United States and Mexico: Partnership Tested," *Great Decisions*, (2019), p. 79.

[3]   Estimates differ as to the amount of people entering the US from the south without permission, but annual figures exceed 400,000. See: A. Bartnik, "Granica – newralgiczny punkt w relacjach meksykańsko-amerykańskich," in K. Derwich (ed.), *Meksyk w XXI wieku. Polityka – społeczeństwo – gospodarka*, Kraków 2009, p. 113.

[4]   A.N. Paik, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary: Understanding U.S. Immigration for the Twenty-First Century*, Oakland 2020, pp. 54-65.

[5]   For the statistics of drug seizures in 2021, see: A. Isacson, "Weekly U.S.-Mexico Border Update: Remain in Mexico Restarts, Drug Seizures, Caravans," WOLA – Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas, 3 December 2021, at https://www.wola.org/2021/12/weekly-u-s-mexico-border-update-remain-in-mexico-restarts-drug-seizures-caravans/ – 10 October 2022.

[6]   The newest analysis on the problem of illegal immigration and crime in one of the crucial states can be found in: A. Nowrasteh, A.C. Forrester, M. Landgrave, *Illegal Immigration and Crime in Texas*, CATO Institute, 13 October 2020, at https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2020-10/working-paper-60.pdf – 10 October 2022.

There is no doubt that since the 1970s the US-Mexico border has become an important issue in American politics, especially during presidential and congressional campaigns in which Republicans and Democrats were trying to propose different solutions to the challenges that illegal immigration and drug trafficking brought to US economy and the security of citizens. The rhetoric of national security became especially prominent in recent election campaigns, although it was more characteristic of Republican candidates as their constituents expected substantial actions to be undertaken in that respect.[7] The problem of illegal immigration became a highly political issue in the 2008 presidential election won by Democratic candidate, Barack Obama. As there were about 14 millions of illegal immigrants in America, 60% of which were Mexican citizens,[8] Obama promised to introduce reforms which could enhance governmental control of the problem at the border, including collaboration with Mexican government to cope with the migration challenges faced by both countries.[9] Although very active in initiating pro-immigrant programs, the President failed in his attempts due to political reasons, and when most of the immigration problems from his two tenures remained unsolved, it became obvious that immigration policy would be a leading topic during the 2016 presidential campaign. Unsurprisingly, Republican candidates were active in proposing ideas of managing the problem of undocumented migrants, however, none presented so far-reaching plans as Donald Trump, who promised to build a barrier ('the Wall') along the border to protect the uncontrolled flow of people and drugs to American soil. Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton made it possible to turn the idea into reality and since the first day of his presidency, the Republican politician worked to fulfill his campaign promise.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the conduct and outcome of the 2016 presidential election and the political consequences of Trump's border Wall initiative, both in the US and Mexico, as well as to assess the impact of Trump's immigration policy on US politics and the relations between both countries. The analysis of the content of the 2016 presidential campaign with reference to the immigration issues may help to understand the surprising outcome of the race to the White House, considering that Mexican citizens were repeatedly presented in negative light by the Republican candidate. Trump, who promised to 'make America great again,' used arguments which aimed at dividing the society over the problem of immigration, and the strategy proved successful.

It is also expedient to review the actions undertaken by President Trump which led to the partial construction of the Wall, both in the context of domestic US politics and bilateral relations with the Mexican government. Moreover, it is important to analyze political and social consequences of the erection of the Wall both in Mexico and the

[7] On the issue of national security in US politics, see: P. Laidler, "Secrecy versus Transparency in the U.S. National Security Surveillance State," in idem, L.A. Viola (eds), *Trust and Transparency in an Age of Surveillance*, London 2022, pp. 107-126.

[8] A. Bartnik, "Granica – newralgiczny punkt...," p. 124.

[9] A. Gutierrez, A.X. Ocampo, M.A. Barreto, "Obama's Latino Legacy: From Unknown to Never Forgotten," in B.A. Rockman, A. Rudalevidge (eds), *The Obama Legacy*, Lawrence 2019, pp. 91-115.

United States in order to determine how it affected mutual relations between the two neighbors, and whether it enhanced security at the border, as expected by the proponents of the idea, or not. Finally, the analysis should focus on the potential impact of Trump's immigration policy towards Mexico on the 2020 presidential election campaign in the US and the possible future of the Wall, which divides two countries and two nations deeper than many other borders.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF US-MEXICAN BORDER RELATIONS

The border between the United States and Mexico was the source of several tensions between the two countries in history, but there were also many positive aspects of bilateral relations between the neighbors, mainly regarding economic and political cooperation. Still, the beginnings of US-Mexican relations were challenging due to American involvement in the expansion of its territory to the West. On the basis of the agreement the United States signed in 1819 it ceded large Western territories of the continent, including California, New Mexico, and Texas to Spain (Adams-Onis Treaty). However, when two years later, Mexico declared its independence, several disputes over neighboring territories arose.[10] Migration conflicts in the early 1830s resulted in the independence of Texas from Mexico which, in turn, became a US state in 1845, resulting in suspension of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Expansionist policy of American government willing to purchase new territories was the main reason of an official war between US and Mexico which ended in 1848 with the peace treaty according to which Americans gained territories of future states of California, New Mexico, and Arizona, whereas Mexicans received financial compensation.[11] The next years brought border conflicts, which were finally resolved in mid-1850s with the US's purchase of the territory between California and Texas, thus establishing the almost 2000-miles-long border between the two countries.[12] It is worth observing that the expansion of US territory to the West and South was connected with the implementation of two important doctrines in American 19th-century history: the Manifest Destiny and the Frontier Thesis, presented by Frederick Jackson Turner,[13] which also determined the role of the US border.

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[10]   For details of Mexican independence and the first years of its statehood, see: K. Derwich, *W krainie Pierzastego Węża. Historia Meksyku od podboju do czasów współczesnych*, Kraków 2014, pp. 45-77.

[11]   'No other Latin American country suffered more from 19th century U.S. expansionist appetites than Mexico.' See: J.I. Dominguez, R.F. de Castro, *The United States and Mexico: Between Partnership and Conflict*, New York 2009, pp. 8-9.

[12]   It was so-called Gadsden Purchase, based on the Treaty of Mesilla of 1954. See: S.M. Deeds, "Gadsden Purchase," in B.A. Tenenbaum, G.D. Dorn (eds), *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, vol. 3, New York 1996.

[13]   See: G.H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest*, New York 1997; J. Bartkiewicz-Godlewska, *Amerykańskie przeznaczenie. Rola Frontier i Manifest Destiny w polityce zagranicznej USA 1898-1921*, Warszawa 2019.

In the beginning of the 20th century, first waves of migrants from Mexico entered the United States in a consequence of Mexican revolution forcing hundreds of thousands of people out of the country as well as the growing demand for Mexican workers in the times of anti-Asian legislation in the US.[14] Further unrests in Mexico caused several incidents involving deaths of US and Mexican citizens and led to the invasion on part of Mexican territory by the US army.[15] After World War I, the nativism of American society forced the government to impose quotas limiting the flow of migrants from Europe and Asia, excluding Mexicans from restrictions, which, in turn, led to another wave of migrants entering the US from the south. Many of them did not stay long in America, as economic problems made the government introduce repatriation programs forcing many Mexicans to return to their homeland.[16]

At the beginning of the Cold War, both countries tightened their relations establishing closer economic and political cooperation, and the development of Mexico slowed down the process of migration to the US. Mexico was not the top priority of US foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s, which resulted in a non-interventionist attitude of the American government towards their 'almost completely ignored' southern neighbor.[17] However, the growing concern in the United States over the increasing flow of drugs through the border forced President Richard Nixon to declare in 1969 the 'war on drugs,' a unilateral policy of the American government, which turned into a bilateral efforts of law enforcement units to strengthen the security at the border. A newly created institution in the US Department of Justice, the Drug Enforcement Administration, was mainly responsible for investigating drug crimes on American and Mexican territories, enhancing cooperation with Mexican authorities.[18] Despite initial successes, the collaboration was not ideal due to changing attitudes of the Mexican government to the initiative, which provoked several tensions between the two countries in the 1970s and 1980s. During Ronald Reagan's presidency, drug trafficking became one the leading threats to the US national security, forcing the US government to invest more funds and resources at limiting the negative consequences of smuggling of drugs through the border.[19]

One of the most important instruments of economic cooperation between the United States and Mexico was introduced in 1992 and came into force two years later. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which aimed at strengthening

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[14]   According to the statistics, the number of Mexican citizens which fled from the country because of the Revolution is estimated around 900,000. Regarding Mexican immigration to the United States in the 20th century, see: A. Kaganiec-Kamieńska, *Tożsamość na pograniczu kultur. Meksykańska grupa etniczna w Stanach Zjednoczonych*, Kraków 2008, pp. 124-132.

[15]   See: K. Derwich, *W krainie Pierzastego Węża...*, pp. 121-138.

[16]   A.N. Paik, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary...*, pp. 51-53.

[17]   J.I. Dominguez, R.F. de Castro, *The United States and Mexico...*, p. 10.

[18]   More on the origin and the course of war on drugs in America, see: D. Farber (ed.), *War on Drugs: A History*, New York 2021.

[19]   U. Drzewiecka, "Przemysł narkotykowy jako kluczowy problem społeczno-polityczny Meksyku," in K. Derwich (ed.), *Meksyk w XXI wieku...*, p. 69.

economic and trade relations between Mexico, United States and Canada, reinstated closer political contacts between Mexican leaders and their North American counterparts.[20] However, NAFTA did not solve all the problems between the two countries, and both drug trafficking and growing numbers of illegal immigrants from Mexico continued to be leading concerns for U.S. politicians. During the presidency of Bill Clinton, a physical barrier was built from Tijuana, California to El Paso, Texas, as a consequence of the economic crisis in Mexico which could result in a further uncontrolled flow of people through the border.[21]

The key program introduced to limit negative consequences of these problems was the Merida Initiative, which involved a close cooperation between law enforcement agencies of both countries based on four pillars of the collaboration: preventing drug trafficking through the border, public safety, institution building, and support programs.[22] Among other achievements, Merida resulted in an annual contribution of $400 million from US to Mexico to cope with drug trafficking and migration challenges on Mexican soil. The Bush administration, despite focusing mainly on the war on terror, did not refrain from the necessity to control the southern border by closer cooperation with Mexican authorities. Unfortunately, due to several factors, including changing attitudes of the Mexican governments towards the fight against drug dealers and cartels, the effects of Merida Initiative were far from expected.[23] The growing crime rate in Mexico and continued drug trafficking through the US-Mexico border were the reality in which both countries entered their relations under Barack Obama's and Felipe Calderon's presidencies.

For the first African American President, racial and ethnic minorities were crucial in building his identity as the leader of the country and a Democratic Party nominee. In his 2008 presidential campaign, Obama proposed several initiatives to manage the problem of uncontrolled migration to the US, as well as the growing numbers of illegal immigrants in the US. His pro-immigration approach was highly supported by the Hispanic voters, with 67% of them casting their vote on Obama, which strengthened his victory over the Republican candidate, John McCain.[24] After winning the election, President Obama had to cope with the pending economic crisis, but since 2010, he started to focus on various aspects of immigration law reform, including the introduction of the legislation enhancing the position of undocumented migrants. However, the biggest legislative attempt – passing the Dream Act via Congress – failed due to the lack of political

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[20]   K. Derwich, *W krainie Pierzastego Węża...*, pp. 281-283.

[21]   Clinton's administration initiated several programs to enhance security at the border, including the 'prevention through deterrence' strategy of border control and allocating a few billions for a more secure border control. See: A.N. Paik, *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary...*, pp. 59-60.

[22]   The program was launched in 2007. See: U. Drzewiecka, "Przemysł narkotykowy...," p. 71.

[23]   The changes in Mexican politics in the early 2000s are discussed in: K. Derwich, "Prezydentura Vicente Foxa – sukces czy porażka?," in idem (ed.), *Meksyk w XXI wieku...*, pp. 44-62.

[24]   The conduct and results of the 2008 presidential election are discussed in: K. Kenski, B.W. Hardy, K.H. Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election*, New York 2010.

support, leaving most of the planned reforms untouched.[25] The failure of the reform did not discourage Obama to propose other means of solving the problem of undocumented migrants, and in 2012 the President announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), which was to become the leading immigration policy during his tenure. Its main purpose was to prevent undocumented migrants who came to the US as children from being immediately deported to their homeland by providing a two-year period during which they could enhance their legal and employment status.[26] The initial success of the program encouraged Obama to expand its scope in 2014, which, in turn, became highly criticized by the Republicans and some state authorities that tried to limit its effectiveness. Finally, the Supreme Court blocked the operation of the program in 2016, thus limiting the pro-immigrant achievements of Obama's administration and deepening the disappointment among Hispanic voters, including the members of the Mexican diaspora.[27] It turned out that the immigration reform would become a hot topic during the coming presidential election campaign.

THE WALL IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Donald Trump announced his participation in the presidential election in June 2015. Almost nobody regarded him a serious candidate, but Trump gradually increased his popularity in the race before the Republican primaries, which were scheduled for the beginning of 2016.

As early as April 2014, he publicly shared some aspects of his potential electoral program, and, among various issues of his conservative agenda, there was a strong statement concerning the reform of immigration policy, which he considered one of his primary goals. His most crucial and controversial idea was the proposition to strengthen security at the US-Mexico border by building a wall which would prevent illegal immigration.[28] Since June 2015 to the last days of the presidential campaign, in various speeches, meetings, and rallies, Trump had repeatedly referred to the concept of the Wall, resorting usually to a very harsh and negative language towards the Mexican community in the United States. In his first official speech after announcing his bid for presidency, he criticized US-Mexican relations and the situation at the border: *When*

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[25]   For more on Obama's immigration reforms and failures, see: A. Gutierrez, A.X. Ocampo, M.A. Barreto, "Obama's Latino Legacy…"

[26]   T.K. Wong, *The Politics of Immigration: Partisanship, Demographic Change, and American National Identity*, New York 2017, p. 6.

[27]   *United States v. Texas* 579 U.S. 15-674 (2016).

[28]   The Republican candidate was not referring to the wall at the beginning, but to a fence, however, the idea was clear: to erect a physical construction of a size necessary to stop the flow of illegal migrants. As Trump said in New Hampshire: "Building a border […] how could we possibly build a fence that nobody can climb over? I would build a border like nobody's seen before. Nobody's climbing over." See: J.W. Peters, *Insurgency: How Republicans Lost Their Party and Got Everything They Ever Wanted*, New York 2022, p. 176.

do we beat Mexico at the border? They are laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they're killing us economically. The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. […] When Mexico sends its people, they are not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people who have lots of problems, and they are bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.[29]

At the beginning of 2016, when the frequency of campaign meetings and interviews increased, Donald Trump readily referred to his immigration policy program which was premised on the construction of the Wall. He explained that, due to natural barriers, only 1000 miles of the Wall need to be built, which would cost about $8 billion to be paid by the Mexican government.[30] Later, during the speech celebrating his convincing victory in the Super Tuesday primaries on March 1, Trump corrected his initial estimates increasing the cost to $10 billion, but he repeatedly referred to economic relations between US and Mexico, and, especially, the trade deficit of $58 billion, promising that *Mexico* [was] *going to pay for the wall*.[31]

When the campaign entered the decisive phase, Trump remained consistent in his promises to build the Wall and to implement deportation programs which would solve the problem of illegal migration. During an emotional speech in Arizona, the Republican candidate confirmed his main plans regarding the financial aspect of the initiative: *We will build a great wall along the southern border, and Mexico will pay for the wall. 100 percent. They don't know it yet, but they're going to pay for the wall*.[32] Then he shared more details concerning the construction: *On day one, we will begin working on an impenetrable, physical, tall, powerful, beautiful southern border wall. We will use the best technology, including above- and below-ground sensors. That's the tunnels […]. Above- and below- ground sensors, towers, aerial surveillance and manpower to supplement the wall, find and dislocate tunnels and keep out criminal cartels and Mexico, you know that, will work with us. I really believe it. Mexico will work with us. I absolutely believe it*.[33]

It is interesting to notice how often the Republican candidate referred to the financial responsibility of the Mexican government, which he assumed an obvious and expected reality. At the same time, Mexican officials had a quite opposite opinion on

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[29] "Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech," *The Time*, 16 June 2015, at https://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/ – 10 October 2022.

[30] A. Brand, "Trump Puts a Price on His Wall: It Would Cost Mexico $8 Billion," MSNBC, 9 February 2016, at https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/donald-trump-says-his-wall-would-cost-8-billion-msna791966 – 10 October 2022.

[31] "Donald Trump's Super Tuesday Victory Speech," *The Time*, 1 March 2016, at https://time.com/4245134/super-tuesday-donald-trump-victory-speech-transcript-full-text/ – 10 October 2022.

[32] N.D. McCaskill, "Trump Promises Wall and Massive Deportation Program," *Politico*, 31 August 2016, at https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/donald-trump-immigration-address-arizona-227612 – 10 October 2022.

[33] Ibid.

the issue, refusing to finance Trump's initiative. Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto made it clear during the meeting with the Republican candidate to the White House, stating that Mexico would not pay for the Wall.[34] The approach of the Mexican President was not surprising, not only because of the financial burden of the construction, but because he generally opposed the idea of putting up a physical barrier at the border. The reaction of the former President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, who headed the country in the beginning of the 21st century, was even more critical; he called the Republican candidate a fascist, comparing the way US President referred to Mexican citizens to Adolf Hitler's methods.[35]

The rhetoric used by Trump in his campaign focused not only on his plans to solve the problem of illegal immigration, but also on accusations towards his counter candidate Hillary Clinton, who, according to the Republican politician, supported uncontrolled, low-skilled immigration which would reduce jobs and wages for American workers and especially for African-American and Hispanic workers.[36] Negative campaign seemed as important for Trump as his ideas about managing crucial social problems, because even if his constituents were not convinced to the idea of the Wall, they were definitely opposed to more open and liberal policy towards illegal immigration. The argument of job loss and wage reduction was catchy, considering the rate of unemployment in the country, especially among representatives of ethnic minorities. Trump's campaign deliberately applied black-PR tools, such as labeling, repeatedly using such terms as 'amnesty,' 'soft on crime' or even 'bigot' while referring to Clinton and her approach towards the issue.[37]

To understand the circumstances of the 2016 presidential campaign fully, it is important to analyze the attitude of American society towards immigration policies and, more specifically, the initiative to build a barrier along the southern border. At a very early stage of the campaign, in July 2015, The Economist/YouGov poll showed that almost half of the American society (48%) treated the problem of illegal immigration very seriously, with only 20% of respondents not caring about the issue. The same poll indicated that 46% of citizens were in favor of building a wall along the border with Mexico, whereas 35% opposed the idea, and 20% had no opinion.[38] A year later, in a poll conducted by the same body, there were only 36% of proponents of the wall

[34]   B. Schreckinger, "Mexican President: I Told Trump We Wouldn't Pay for the Wall," *Politico*, 31 August 2016, at https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/who-will-pay-for-mexico-wall-trump-nieto-227607 – 10 October 2022.

[35]   "Former Mexican President Says Donald Trump 'Reminds Me of Hitler'," *The Time*, 27 February 2016, at https://time.com/4239982/vicente-fox-donald-trump-hitler/ – 10 October 2022.

[36]   See: "Transcript of Donald Trump's Immigration Speech," *The New York Times*, 1 September 2016, at https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/us/politics/transcript-trump-immigration-speech.html – 10 October 2022.

[37]   J. Sides, M. Tesler, L. Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*, Princeton 2018, p. 134, 181.

[38]   *The Economist*/YouGov Poll, 11-13 July 2015, at https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/6m13c6u1qq/econTabReport.pdf – 10 October 2022.

compared to 48% of its opponents.[39] Other polling stations reached similar results, which means that the support of American citizens towards constructing the Wall was diminishing over time.

Two months before the general election, pollsters asked about the biggest concerns of American citizens regarding the immigration issues. Most respondents believed that the best way to manage immigration problems was to establish programs legalizing the status of illegal immigrants who already had jobs (51%), whereas only one-third felt that actions should be undertaken to limit their entry, with 11% supporting deportation of those who stayed in the US illegally. However, asked about the next priority US government should implement in its immigration policy, 53% of respondents indicated the necessity to limit illegal entries to the US. On the other hand, the same poll showed that the closer to the election, the greater the number of opponents of the Wall, reaching as many as 58%.[40]

The results of the 2016 presidential election were surprising for polling stations and for most of the observers, who predicted that Hillary Clinton would defeat Donald Trump. Even during the election night, the members of Trump's campaign were not fully convinced that their candidate could win.[41] However, despite Trump's clear defeat in popular vote,[42] he won the electoral vote exceeding Clinton by 76 votes. Among many, Trump won in such states as Arizona and Texas, which were the border states with Mexico, although he lost in New Mexico and in the traditionally Democratic California. It is also worth noticing that he received a significant support of Hispanic voters, 29% of whom decided to cast their vote on the Republican candidate, despite the earlier opinion polls indicating much smaller support. Although Clinton won most Hispanic votes in the states, Trump's result among the representatives of the community he regularly offended during the campaign seemed quite surprising.[43]

Many studies were conducted concerning the possible reasons of Trump's victory, and scholars and experts listed at least five factors determining the outcome of the 2016 presidential election: Trump's ability to convince middle-class voters about the effectiveness of his economic policies, his anti-establishment rhetoric, the effective use of social media in Trump's campaign, as well as the gender issue and the weakness of the Democratic nominee's campaign. Trump won despite his offensive language, small support from the Republican establishment, and the polling stations' predictions indicating Hillary Clinton's success. It is worth noticing that especially

[39]   *The Economist*/YouGov Poll, 27-29 August 2016, at https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumu-lus_uploads/document/d1qd4msxfd/econTabReport.pdf – 10 October 2022.

[40]   CNN/ORC Poll on Immigration. 7 September 2016, at http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2016/imag-es/09/06/immigration.pdf.pdf – 10 October 2020.

[41]   J. Sides, M. Tesler, L. Vavreck, "The 2016 U.S. Election: How Trump Lost and Won," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2017), pp. 34-44.

[42]   Hillary Clinton received about 2.87 million votes more in popular vote.

[43]   H.K. Sonneland, N. Fleischner, "Chart: How U.S. Latino Voted in the 2016 Presidential Election," Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 10 October 2016, at https://www.as-coa.org/articles/chart-how-us-latinos-voted-2016-presidential-election – 10 October 2022.

the first three factors influencing voters' decisions in 2016 had direct connection with immigration issues.

There is no doubt that the economic situation in the United States had impact on the choices of voters, who believed that Trump could 'make America great again' and 'bring back jobs' to the American people. The promises to create millions of new jobs and to diminish national debt were especially popular among white lower-income class whose economic condition worsened in previous years, as pointed out in the Republican campaign as one of the main accusations towards Obama's government.[44] Similarly to the former president, who was able to convince the voters in 2008 that he would be a reliable leader of the country in times of economic crisis, Donald Trump triggered voters' attention by a skillful reference to their basic needs and concerns. Among several arguments raised during his campaign, the impact of illegal immigration on the economic situation of the country was an often-recurring rhetoric, thus strengthening the anti-immigrant sentiment among the poorest white voters.[45] It was not difficult to convince them to connect the dots: the unsolved problem of illegal immigration was the result of an excessively liberal policy of Democratic politicians who cared more about the rights of migrants than American citizens.

Trump also gathered supporters who felt disappointment or even anger towards the federal government, defined in his campaign as 'Washington.' He built a strong notion of anti-elitism as a virtue, in contradistinction to Hillary Clinton, who, at least since the 1990s, personified the essence of elitism. It was easy for Trump's campaign to portray the Democratic nominee as the candidate of the political establishment which could be blamed for all unsuccessful policies of the last two-and-half decades. The Republican candidate was most effective in using such a populist rhetoric, which helped him to gain support of the people who considered themselves victims of unfair policies of the federal government.[46] One of the policies criticized most frequently was, of course, the immigration policy introduced by Obama's administration, which, according to Trump, was going to continue if Clinton took office.

Although the impact of social media was not as big as in the 2008 campaign, its significance for the campaign resulted from the huge amount of fake news spreading all over the media, most of which related to Trump's rather than Clinton's campaign.[47] Many of his statements referring to the Mexican community and to the statistics of illegal immigration were not fully true, producing huge uncertainty among the future voters. It was also the first campaign in which Twitter became one of the main channels of communication for the candidates and an important source of information for the

[44] M. Nelson, *Trump: The First Two Years*, Charlottesville 2018, p. 9.

[45] R. Hinojosa, E. Telles, *Trump Paradox: How Immigration and Trade Affected Voting in 2016 and 2018*, UCI Center for Population, Inequality, and Policy, 1 November 2020, at https://www.cpip.uci.edu/files/docs/CPIP%20Working%20Paper%2020210%20-%20Telles.pdf – 10 October 2022.

[46] T. Rudolph, "Populist Anger, Donald Trump, and the 2016 Election," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2021), pp. 33-58.

[47] H. Alcott, M. Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2017), pp. 211-236.

voters, who could learn candidates' thoughts and feelings concerning current events as well as their responses to the initiatives of their rivals. The new medium was more often used by Donald Trump, who received a status of a 'tweeting candidate' and, after winning the election, the 'tweeting President.'[48] The Republican candidate often used Twitter to present his opinions on US-Mexican relations, as well as Mexican citizens and Hispanic immigrants, portraying them in discriminative words as a real danger to American democracy.[49]

Joshua D. Wright and Victoria M. Esses, who analyzed voters' perceptions of immigrants as various categories of threat, found out that perceiving immigrants as a security concern was predictive of increased support for Donald Trump among voters.[50] In this light, the arguments of the impact of economy on the result of the election are weakened in favor of security as the leading issue in the 2016 campaign. Importantly, security was defined not only as dependent on US policy toward terrorism, but also on the state of the US-Mexico border, which was portrayed as one of the main threats to American democracy, the rule of law, economy, and the safety of the citizens. Although Trump was not the first politician who connected border safety with national security, he did it skillfully using the rhetoric expected by many of his voters in the states which faced immigration challenges. As Jacqueline Mazza observes, *Mexicanizing a more diverse set of U.S. immigration and employment trends clearly had political utility in the 2016 electoral campaign.*[51]

Many studies proved the influential role of immigration issues on the preferences of the voters in the 2016 presidential election.[52] Some showed the importance of Trump's reference to ethnic and social identities of voters, mostly in the case of African Americans, whose votes weighed even more than in 2012 presidential election.[53] Others stressed that US-Mexico border was a factor in several campaign issues presented in the political program of the Republican candidate, such as economy, foreign policy, taxes, regulations, trade, and, of course, immigration.[54] Some claimed that the issue of immigration ideally addressed the concerns of white voters, thus leading to the rhetoric of nationalist populism represented by Trump's campaign.[55] There were also studies which

[48] S. Briggs, "The Freedom of Tweets: Intersection of Government Use of Social Media and Public Forum Doctrine," *Columbia Journal of Law and Social Problems*, vol. 52 (2018), pp. 1-38.

[49] A.N. Heuman, A. Gonzales, "Trump's Essentialist Border Rhetoric: Racial Identities and Dangerous Liminalities," *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, vol. 47 no. 4 (2018), pp. 326-342.

[50] J.D. Wright, V.M. Esses, "It's Security, Stupid! Voters' Perception of Immigrants as a Security Risk Predicted Support for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2019), pp. 36-49.

[51] J. Mazza, "The U.S.-Mexico Border and the Mexican Migration to the United States: A 21st Century Review," *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2017), p. 46.

[52] T. Rudolph, "Populist Anger…"

[53] J. Sides, M. Tesler, L. Vavreck, *Identity Crisis…*

[54] C. Rackaway, "The Disruptive Campaign of Donald J. Trump," in P.E. Rutledge, C. Rackaway (eds), *The Unorthodox Presidency of Donald J. Trump*, Lawrence 2021, pp. 13-39.

[55] R.C. Rowland, *The Rhetoric of Donald Trump: Nationalist Populism and American Democracy*, Lawrence 2021.

aimed to prove that Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric convinced large number of voters, although many of his campaign statements were not all true or were even straightforwardly false. According to Jamie Winders, the Republican candidate's statements about the rate of crimes committed by illegal immigrants, or about the uncontrolled flow of undocumented Mexicans through the US-Mexico border were misleading, as the facts concerning crime rates and the data regarding the border passage were quite different.[56]

Last-but-not-least, some experts underlined the importance of negative voting, arguing that many voters made a choice based on their negative attitude towards the other candidate, which would mean that Trump won, but more significantly, Clinton lost.[57] Although it is difficult to determine the real reasons of the reluctance of some independent voters towards the former First Lady, doubtlessly, the gender issue played a significant role in their final voting decisions. On the other hand, Clinton was not supported by those who believed she would continue Obama's unsuccessful policies, including the growing problem of illegal immigration.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE WALL

On January 20th, Donald Trump took oath of the office and gave his inauguration speech. He did not refer directly to the immigration issues, such as the construction of the Wall, but he promised that every decision, including those on immigration, would be made 'to benefit American workers and American families.' While stressing that the aim of his presidency was to protect the interest of the citizens of the United States, he referred to the security at American borders: *We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.* [...] *We will bring back our borders.*[58]

Although the word 'border' in the President's speech could have several meanings and relate also to virtual borders, as Trump defined several threats during his campaign (for example Islamic terrorism and China as a growing superpower), still, his rhetoric on the US-Mexico border was consistent with the one used in his campaign. Moreover, 'bringing back borders' could refer to the process of securing borders and providing them with more means of protection. The Wall was one of such means.

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[56] J. Winders, "Picking Up the Pieces: the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election and Immigration," in D. Lilleker et al. (eds), *U.S. Election Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, CSJCC, November 2016, p. 42, at https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/24976/1/US%20Election%20Analysis%202016%20-%20Lilleker%20Thorsen%20Jackson%20and%20Veneti%20v1.pdf – 10 October 2022.

[57] One study proved that both Clinton and Trump had the most unfavorable ratings of all major party presidential nominees since 1950s. See: M.P. Fiorina, *The 2016 Presidential Election – An Abundance of Controversies*, A Hoover Institution Essay on Contemporary American Politics, no. 10 (2017), at https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/fiorina_webreadypdfupdated.pdf – 10 October 2022.

[58] "2017 Donald Trump's Inauguration Speech Transcript," *Politico*, 20 January 2017, at https://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/full-text-donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-233907 – 10 October 2022.

Five days later, Trump followed the main promise he gave during the campaign and signed an executive order to erect a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border as a *contiguous, physical wall or other similarly secure, contiguous, and impassable physical barrier*. The document delegated power to executive agencies to strengthen security at the southern border of the country to *prevent further illegal immigration into the United States*.[59] Surprisingly, there was no reference to the cost of the Wall, but, according to the internal report of the Department of Homeland Security created a month later, the real cost was estimated around $21-22 billion, whereas some other calculations prepared later expected the cost to be between $25 billion and $70 billion.[60] These amounts were clearly far bigger than the ones presented by Trump during the presidential campaign which raised concerns about the financial burden it would bring to the federal budget. At the same time, although the President stressed the necessity to build the wall for the benefit of American citizens, especially in the states bordering with Mexico, some representatives of local authorities opposed the idea, worrying about the future of trade relations with Mexico, which determined local and regional economy.[61]

The problem of financing the erection of the Wall became one of the main sources of the conflict between the President and the Democratic-led Congress over the appropriation of money for Trump's core initiative. Although temporary government shutdown took place in the US in recent decades a couple of times, the 2018-2019 crisis turned out to be the longest in history. The 35-day-long period of political rivalry and uncertainty for the federal employees, who did not receive their salaries, was only ended when Trump gave up on his initiative to force Congress to appropriate funds for the further construction of the Wall.[62] The failure of presidential initiative to get $5.7 billion based on congressional legislation proved, on the one hand, political victory of the Democratic Party, and, on the other, that if the President wanted to continue constructing the Wall, he would have to search for the funds within his administration. As time showed, to appropriate the funds necessary to carry on the construction, Trump decided to declare national emergency which brought new political and legal tensions in Washington,[63] indicating that the road from the idea to build a barrier at the border

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[59]   Executive Order No. 13767: *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements*, 30 January 2017, 82 FR 8793 (2017).

[60]   V. Felbab-Brown, "The Wall: The Real Costs of a Barrier Between the United States and Mexico," *Brookings*, August 2017, at https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-wall-the-real-costs-of-a-barrier-between-the-united-states-and-mexico/ – 10 October 2022.

[61]   L. Garcia-Navarro, "A Texas Border Town Mayor's Take on Immigration, Trade, and the Wall," interview with Pete Saenz, the Mayor of Laredo, Texas for NPR, 22 January 2017, at https://www.npr.org/2017/01/22/511048769/a-texas-border-town-mayors-take-on-immigration-trade-and-the-wall?t=1659339256281 – 10 October 2022.

[62]   A. Restuccia, B. Everett, H. Cagle, "Longest Shutdown in History Ends After Trump Relents on Wall," *Politico*, 25 January 2019, at https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/25/trump-shutdown-announcement-1125529 – 10 October 2022.

[63]   J. Pramuk, C. Wilkie, "Trump Declares National Emergency to Build the Border Wall, Setting Up Massive Legal Fight," CNBC, 15 February 2019, at https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/15/trump-national-emergency-declaration-border-wall-spending-bill.html – 10 October 2022.

to its implementation was long and bumpy, especially in the US government system based on checks and balances.

Apart from the executive order concerning the Wall, Trump initiated several policies which could be defined as anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican, such as sending troops to the border, increasing the number of border patrol agents, and introducing the 'Remain in Mexico' program and 'Zero Tolerance Policy.'[64] The program, announced in 2019, required migrants who were seeking asylum to stay in Mexico until their trial in the US immigration court. It complemented the 'Zero Tolerance Policy,' introduced a few months earlier, which enabled the detention and criminal prosecution of any migrant who was not crossing the border at an official port of entry.[65] The President not only implemented several measures to enhance security at the border, but used other means to try to force Mexican government to collaborate in migration and drug trafficking issues, such as a threat to impose tariffs against Mexican imports.[66] Still, the construction of the Wall remained the leading initiative regarding the US-Mexico border.

Public opinion's attitude towards Trump's immigration policy fluctuated. According to a Gallup's poll two months after the presidential inauguration, 36% of Americans were in favor of building the Wall, whereas 56% opposed that idea. As Frank Newport argues, the decline in support for President's idea was not motivated by financial concerns or by the opposition to the concept of the barrier at the border, since another poll indicated around 80% of Americans being in favor of enhancing control and tightening security at the border with Mexico.[67] Even more interesting polling results came in early 2019 during a partial government shutdown which affected the federal workers, as the main purpose of the crisis was connected with the dispute between the President and Congress over the budgetary resources for building the Wall. Most adult Americans were of the opinion that the President was responsible for the government crisis (51%), and only 35% of respondents approved of a congressional bill which would finance construction of the Wall. Not surprisingly, Republican voters blamed Congress for the shutdown, with 77% of them supporting the presidential initiative and 54% being in favor of copying with the shutdown until Congress would approve financing of the Wall.[68]

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[64] M. Verea, "The Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Mexican Attitudes and Policies during the First 18 Months of the Trump Administration," *Norteamerica*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2018).

[65] "The Trump Zero Tolerance Policy: A Cruel Approach with Humane and Viable Alternatives," Refugees International, 31 July 2018, at https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2018/7/31/trump-zero-tolerance-policy – 10 October 2022.

[66] J. Tan, "Trump Says U.S. Will Impose 5% Tariff on All Mexican Imports from June 10," CNBC, 30 May 2019, at https://www.cnbc.com/2019/05/31/trump-says-us-will-impose-5percent-tariff-on-all-mexican-imports-from-june-10.html – 10 October 2022.

[67] F. Newport, "Building a Wall Out of Sync with American Public Opinion," Gallup, 27 April 2017, at https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/209384/building-wall-sync-american-public-opinion.aspx – 10 October 2022.

[68] C. Kahn, "A Growing Number of Americans Blame Trump for Shutdown: Reuters-Ipsos Poll," Reuters, 8 January 2019, at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-shutdown-poll/a-growing-number-of-americans-blame-trump-for-shutdown-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKCN1P223U – 10 October 2022.

Trump's ratings at home were not fully determined by his immigration policies as there were several other challenges of his domestic and international policy, but for the Mexican people, relations with the US during Trump's tenure were interpreted through a prism of his approach towards the construction of the Wall. If in 2015, two-thirds of Mexicans had a favorable opinion about the United States with less than 30% representing the opposite view, after just one year of Trump's governance, the attitude changed dramatically showing 65% of Mexican citizens with an unfavorable view of the US. The bilateral relations between the two countries had worsened after the Republican politician won the election, according to more than 60% of the respondents, vast majority of whom expressed negative opinion about the US President. In addition, more than three--fourths claimed that due to the idea of the Wall, Mexico and the US were moving in opposite directions. [69]

Definitely, the crucial aspect of bilateral relations was the future of economic and trade cooperation. Both as a presidential candidate and as the chief executive, Trump often criticized Mexico for taking advantage of the NAFTA, which he considered one of the worst international agreements in American history.[70] Some of his promises related directly to the necessity of US withdrawal from the Agreement which would mean dissolving it, with the most common argument used by Trump to strengthen his negative approach towards NAFTA being inequality in fulfilling its purposes by the Mexican side. Finally, in 2020, the leaders of the United States, Canada and Mexico signed a new agreement, called United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which aimed at closer and better-balanced cooperation among its signatories.[71]

After the new agreement came into force, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador visited President Trump in the White House. Both leaders discussed the status of bilateral relations, focusing mainly on economic issues (namely USMCA) and immigration policies, which had divided the two countries in previous years. Despite harsh language often introduced by Trump toward Mexico and Mexican people, Lopez Obrador expressed his gratitude for the US President's 'understanding and respect,' instead of focusing on 'the insults.' The rhetoric used by the White House also changed, as Trump praised Mexican Americans for their hard work and important role they had always played in the US economy.[72] It seemed as if both leaders decided to ease the

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[69]   For more statistics and poll results see: C. Kafura et al., *For First Time, Majority of Mexicans Hold Unfavorable View of United States*, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, January 2018, at https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/For%20First%20Time%2C%20Ma-jority%20of%20Mexicans%20Hold%20Unfavorable%20View%20of%20United%20States%20PDF%20Report.pdf – 10 October 2022.

[70]   J.H. Davis, M.D. Shear, *Border Wars: Inside Trump's Assault on Immigration*, New York 2019, pp. 243--245.

[71]   Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement," at https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement – 10 October 2022.

[72]   "Trump, Obrador Hail U.S.-Mexico Relationship During Meeting," VOA News, 8 July 2020, at https://www.voanews.com/a/usa_trump-obrador-hail-us-mexico-relationship-during-meeting/6192474.html – 10 October 2022.

tensions by focusing on the effectiveness of future relations and often referred to the need of pursing diplomacy rather than seeking confrontation. Such an approach did not change the fact that the Mexican government did not participate in financing the Wall, and the whole burden was on the American side.

According to the data provided by US Customs and Border Protection, during four years of Trump's tenure, slightly more than 450 miles of the Wall at the US-Mexico border were constructed. Actually, large parts of the Trump's Wall appeared in the areas where a fence or some other type of barrier had already existed. Still, the government tried to convince the public that the construction brought a new level of security at the border. The Wall consisted of steel barriers of the size from 18 to 30 feet, depending on the area of its erection. The longest part of the Wall built under Trump's presidency was created in Arizona, and smaller parts appeared in New Mexico, California, and Texas.[73] The estimated cost of the Wall was around $15 billion and it was paid in full by various departments of the federal government, including Department of Homeland Security and Treasury Department.[74] Although Donald Trump promised greater achievements regarding his immigration policy, the fact that the Wall was under construction became a strong argument for his voters to support the President in the race for the second tenure in the White House. However, the social, political and economic circumstances in the last months of Trump's term significantly differed from the 2016 campaign reality.

During the 2020 presidential campaign, the issue of illegal immigration and the construction of the Wall was not at the center of social and political concerns. The Covid-19 pandemic determined the agenda-setting and the conduct of the campaign, affecting both the candidates and their election staff, as well as the voters and voting procedures.[75] Still, the candidates were presenting their electoral program and referring to issues which they considered important for American society. The acting President visited border states to announce the success of his policy of strengthening the security at the US-Mexico border, and to ensure that the construction of the Wall would be continued. Trump claimed that more than 200 miles of the new Wall had been erected, although the estimates were not fully clear, and in any case, these figures were far from the planned length of the barrier promised two years earlier.[76] This time the Republican candidate did not refer to the financial aspects of the construction, which had already cost American taxpayers billions of dollars with Mexico not paying a cent. According

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[73]   C. Hansen, "How Much of Trump's Border Wall Was Built?," U.S. News, 7 February 2022, at https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2022-02-07/how-much-of-president-donald-trumps-border-wall-was-built – 10 October 2022.

[74]   C. Giles, "Trump's Wall: How Much Has Been Built During His Term?," BBC News, 12 January 2021, at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46748492 – 10 October 2022.

[75]   More on the 2020 presidential election campaign see: P. Laidler, "Amerykańskie wybory prezydenckie w roku 2020 w kontekście pandemii COVID-19," in M. Kijewska-Trembecka, E. Michna (eds), *Pomiędzy Starym a Nowym Światem. Historia, migracje, etniczność*, Kraków 2022, pp. 81-97.

[76]   E. Stokols, "Trump Campaigns on Border Wall Progress. There's Not Much of It," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 June 2020, at https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-06-23/trump-campaigns-on-border-wall-progress-theres-not-much-of-it – 10 October 2022.

to Chapman Rackaway, *Trump's approach in 2016 was to focus a significant amount of energy on a clear and divisive strategy on immigration*.[77] In 2020, such a strategy did not work anymore.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE WALL IN THE POST-TRUMP ERA

Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election with 306 electoral votes beating President Trump, who received 232 votes. Apart from the obvious impact of the pandemic on the mode of voting and, therefore, on the outcome of the election, one of the reasons of the Democratic candidate's win that analysts pointed out was demographic shifts in particular states, including the significant growth in the attendance of Hispanic voters.[78] Compared to 2016, there was a growth of about 30% of Hispanic votes, and the analysis of the election results in the states where there were large groups of such voters proves that the majority of them supported the Democratic candidate.[79] Still, the new President had a lot of challenges in front of him, including the necessity to shape a new immigration policy, contrary to his predecessors' approach. This opposite attitude was reflected both in the decision to stop the construction of the Wall, as well as to suspend all anti-immigrant activities introduced by Trump, including the 'Remain in Mexico' program. From the beginning of his tenure, Biden was trying to cancel all projects concerning the further erection of the Wall, suggesting that Congress moved the funding allocated to the Wall to other activities strengthening the security at the border.[80] In this way, the President confirmed his wish to fulfill his promises reflected in the 2020 election campaign: *There will not be another foot of wall constructed on my administration* [...] *I'm going to make sure that we have border protection, but it's going to be based on making sure that we use high-tech capacity to deal with it. And at the ports of entry – that's were all the bad stuff is happening*.[81]

Despite Biden's pro-immigrant and pro-Mexican rhetoric and his initial efforts to change Trump's policies, the Mexican government was very reluctant towards the new American President. While Biden was celebrating his victory over Trump and the world leaders were sending their congratulations to the new President, Mexican head

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[77]   C. Rackaway, "The Disruptive Campaign…," p. 20.

[78]   "A New Analysis Uncovers the Demographic Shifts That Led to Joe Biden's Victory," *The Economist*, 14 May 2021, at https://www.economist.com/united-states/2021/05/14/a-new-analysis-uncovers-the-demographic-shifts-that-led-to-joe-bidens-victory – 10 October 2022.

[79]   *Vote Choice of Latino Voters in the 2020 Presidential Election*, UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute, 18 January 2021, at https://latino.ucla.edu/research/latino-voters-in-2020-election/ – 10 October 2022.

[80]   C. Hansen, "How Much…"

[81]   B. Sprunt, "Biden Would End Border Wall Construction, But Wouldn't Tear Down Trump's Additions," NPR, 5 August 2020, at https://www.npr.org/2020/08/05/899266045/biden-would-end-border-wall-construction-but-wont-tear-down-trump-s-additions – 10 October 2022.

of state was acting as if he wanted to show that Mexican attitude towards the US is going to be difficult and tense. He became one of the last world leaders to acknowledge Biden's win, allegedly waiting for all legal challenges to the election result raised by Trump's campaign to be cleared out. At the same time, he signed the law which restricted the presence and activity of foreign agents in Mexico, which was mainly aimed against the US.[82]

The relations between Mexico and the US remained difficult in the first period of Biden's tenure due to several factors which could be labelled as 'political,' including different party affiliation and often opposite approach of both leaders to important social and economic issues, the unsolved problems of migration policies of both countries, contradictory visions of how to tackle economic challenges of post-pandemic and inflation reality, as well as different attitudes towards geopolitical and strategic issues. The reluctance of the Mexican President towards his American counterpart was visible during the Summit of the Americas held in California, which Lopez Obrador, along with several leaders of Latin American countries, boycotted, because of the absence of Cuban, Nicaraguan and Venezuelan representatives, not invited by the US administration.[83] Furthermore, he criticized the American government for the support which Joe Biden provided to Ukrainian leaders and nation, claiming that the aid which was given to Ukraine should have been provided for Central American countries and societies.[84]

During a meeting of both leaders in July 2022, President Biden was trying to ease the tensions, stressing the importance of mutual economic and political cooperation, especially around migration policies. The problem was raised in the joint statement of both Presidents, who promised to collaborate closer to solve the most urgent challenges of illegal migration. According to their statements, they were willing to establish a working group of representatives of both countries devoted to strengthen the border, but also to protect the workers crossing the border, and to enhance financial support, especially by Mexican government, which promised to invest $1.5 billion to strengthen border infrastructure.[85] Despite more optimistic conclusions stemming from political declarations of both sides, it is important to acknowledge that Biden's promises to stop the construction of the Wall are not fulfilled in the late 2022. The recent estimates of the number of illegal migrants entering the US through the border forced the American government to continue the construction by allowing to fill in the gaps in the Wall

[82]   A. Deslandes, "Sovereignty and Sensibility: What Now for U.S.-Mexico Relations?," *The Interpreter*, 27 January 2021, at https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/sovereignty-and-sensibility-what--now-us-mexico-relations – 10 October 2022.

[83]   O. Lopez, ., "Mexico President Will Not Attend Americas Summit to Blow in Biden," *The New York Times*, 6 June 2022, at https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/06/world/americas/mexico-obrador-americas-summit.html – 10 October 2022.

[84]   *AMLO Criticizes the Biden Administration for Prioritizing Ukraine Aid Over Central America*, 24 March 2022, at https://mexicodailypost.com/2022/03/24/amlo-criticizes-the-biden-administration-for-prioritizing-ukraine-aid-over-central-america/ – 10 October 2022.

[85]   S. Rodriguez, "This Isn't the Trump Era of U.S.-Mexico Relations. In Fact. Its Widely Different," *Politico*, 13. July 2022, at https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/13/trump-biden-amlo-mexico-immigration-00045600 – 10 October 2022.

which were left since the moment the new President suspended the further erection of the barrier.[86] It seems clear, that despite opposite rhetoric, Joe Biden is facing the repetitive problem of every American president who tries to change the direction of a policy of his predecessor, but realizes that such a drastic change is not only difficult in practical terms but also unacceptable socially.

The discontinuation of the construction of the Wall does not mean giving up the policy of strengthening security at the border. The example of the first wall erected at the US-Mexico border during the times of Clinton's presidency proves that party affiliation is not a determinant of the approach towards a physical barrier between the two countries. Barack Obama's failure to implement comprehensive immigration reforms along with the significant number of deportations taking place between 2010 and 2016 only strengthens the observation that border security and illegal immigration are today leading concerns of American society and being 'too soft' on the issue is not popular among voters.

There is no doubt that, as Anna Bartnik observes, the most difficult aspect of bilateral relations between the United States and Mexico may be derived from the approach towards the flow of people between the two countries. The Mexican perspective focuses on achieving similar status of transfer of people as transfer of other goods stemming from economic agreements between the countries, whereas the American approach has changed from the economy-based to security-focused, especially after 9/11.[87] Therefore, even if drug trafficking seems a crucial part of American crime rate, most of the debates between the leaders of both countries come down to the problem of illegal border-crossing by individual people. That was the main agenda for the last three presidential administrations in the US and that is going to be the leading challenge for the future of U.S.-Mexican relations. The current US government is imposing a strategy of prevention through deterrence, trying to allocate more funds to initiatives which are aimed at achieving more security at the border. Although the idea to build new parts of the Wall has been rejected by Biden's administration, which brought positive reactions from the Mexican leaders, there are still several open issues that may affect relations between the two countries. The number of illegal migrants crossing the border, as well as the number of illegal substances smuggled through it raises concerns about the effectiveness of contemporary American policy. In times when security has become the fundamental value for the society which faces, at the same time, economic problems, the issue of illegal immigration will remain one of the leading topics during election campaigns, forcing candidates of both parties to search for strong arguments in support of their proposed policies.

The 2022 midterm election are an important test for the candidates to the House of Representatives and Congress, especially those who represent immigrant-fragile

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[86] "The Biden Administration is Quietly Completing Bits of Donald Trump's Wall," *The Economist*, 4 October 2022, at https://www.economist.com/united-states/2022/10/04/the-biden-administration-is-quietly-completing-bits-of-donald-trumps-wall – 10 October 2022.

[87] A. Bartnik, "Granica – newralgiczny punkt...," p. 121.

districts. The absence of the Wall in presidential rhetoric as the key initiative to strengthen security at the border does not mean that Democrats have no obstacles in implementing their immigration policies. Although the suspension of the 'Remain in Mexico' program turned out to be effective after the Supreme Court ruling which supported Biden's decision, there are several other programs and initiatives which will have to be addressed by both American and Mexican politicians during their discussions about the future of bilateral relations. The challenges of the post-pandemic reality, including the growing inflation, will provoke the Republican Party to raise the issue of illegal immigration as one of the sources of the current crisis, which, in turn, will determine the agenda of the 2024 presidential election campaign. If Donald Trump survives the pending FBI investigation, the Wall will undoubtedly become the core of his presidential campaign, and the idea to divide the already-polarized US society may, once again, prove successful.

On the other hand, some optimism may come from the statement made by the US deputy secretary of state, John Sullivan, who observes that the United States and Mexico 'share more information related to migration and border security, enabling [them] to better identify criminal threats, analyze migration trends, and reduce human smuggling on both sides of the border.'[88] Only close collaboration between the two governments, border security institutions, and experts guarantees the proper management of the border issues, and, despite often contradictory statements, the benefits of regulating the illegal flow of the people to the US are mutual. The crucial question remains whether the current uncertain times which bring political, economic and security challenges to the United States and Mexico are the best moment for both countries to introduce effective policies other than building the Wall as a solution of the problem of migrants crossing the border illegally. History proves that the answer to this type of question is negative. Although there are several other instruments which could provide a stronger security at the border, such as the use of smart technologies or closer cooperation of border patrols, the Wall remains as one of the leading tools determining political and social relations between the two countries. And, as Karol Derwich, the leading Polish expert on US-Mexican relations correctly observed in his book, many of the problems at the border may not be solved until Mexico, defined as a dysfunctional state, becomes a stronger proponent of the rule of law.[89] Unquestionably, much depends on the US approach, too, and the recent appropriation of additional funds for Mexico by Congress proves that political leaders in Washington are fully aware of that.

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[88]   J.R. Cardenas, "Elephants in the Room: The U.S.-Mexico Relationship has Survived and Thrived Under Trump," *Foreign Policy*, 22 March 2018, at https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/22/the-u-s-mexico-relationship-has-survived-and-thrived-under-trump/ – 10 October 2022.

[89]   K. Derwich, *Meksyk – między demokracją a dysfunkcyjnością*, Kraków 2017.

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