

Discursive Representations of Migration

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Scholarship on the Mexican state's role in migration to the United States has been hampered by a lack of comprehensive engagement with meaning. We address this shortcoming by examining a data set of Mexican presidents' public speeches (1994–2012). We argue that increased engagement with migration has been accompanied by more expansive conceptualisations of migration and willingness to politicise the issue. We identify a discourse of *reaction* characterised by a defence of Mexican migrants in the United States that is sometimes expressed defiantly; and a discourse of *construction*, defined by a more measured approach that allows for long-term policies to be enacted.

Keywords: discursive practices, Mexico, migration, presidential speeches, public agenda, United States.

Scholarship on migration has paid little critical attention to the nation-state and its role in shaping migration (Hansen, Koehler and Money, 2011; Fargues, 2013). The general approach in North American studies of immigration 'directs our attention to individual (micro-level) and group-based (meso-level) agency, within a set of institutional constraints that are taken for granted' (Bloemraad, 2013: 197). However, particularly in the United States (US), this has become increasingly untenable, as the opportunities for legal entry have dwindled, criminalisation has increased, and the failure of comprehensive federal reform has led states and cities to enter the policy-making landscape (Alba and Nee, 2003; Massey, 2013: 3–15).

The role of sending states in emigration was also neglected for many years (Massey, 1999; Rosenblum, 2004: 91–125), but in the last decades scholars have begun tracking the Mexican government's emigration policy changes throughout the twentieth century (Sherman, 1999: 835–878; Fitzgerald, 2006: 259–293; Fitzgerald, 2009). Although this research is sorely needed, we argue that it has been mainly concerned with the behaviour of socio-political actors and the policies they have enacted or opposed but has seldom scrutinised and analysed comprehensively and comparatively the networks of meanings and theories that underpin these behaviours and policies.

In this article we examine the conceptualisations, meanings, ideas and theories that Mexican presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de

León (1994–2000), Vicente Fox Quesada (2000–2006) and Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006–2012) attached to migration and the diaspora by analysing their public speeches. Specifically, our goal is to understand these conceptualisations and determine if and how they reflect changes in Mexican migration policy, the migration flows towards the US, and remittances back into Mexico. Our findings show that during the period examined there was an increase in engagement with migration issues from Mexican presidents, as previous work on the topic has argued. We further argue that this increased engagement is accompanied by more expansive and detailed conceptualisations of migration, its root causes and solutions, as well as increased willingness to politicise the issue (*main conceptualisation*). This change is captured by two types of discourse: one of *reaction* characterised by a traditional, ‘individualised’ defence of Mexican migrants in the United States, sometimes expressed with a defiant tone and mostly aimed at the national public; and a second one based on an attitude of *construction*, defined by a more measured approach that underscores the importance of collaboration and understanding and that is for the most part aimed at international public opinion – especially that of the US and the Mexican diaspora in the US. It also points to a growing number of concrete long-term public policies mostly aimed at the Mexican diaspora and less focused on the topic of migration itself.

The reaction discourse is more predominant early on, while the construction discourse becomes more prevalent in the second half of the examined period. But their incidence also varies depending on migration factors. Overall, both types of discourse are prominent in periods of sustained growth in remittances, which we argue is a sign of the growing economic importance of the diaspora for the Mexican government. The reaction discourse is more important during migration crises triggered by specific dramatic/consequential events (for example, the killing of a migrant by American law enforcement, the discussion or passage of American legislation considered to be discriminatory), while the construction discourse is less salient when the migration rate increases. The latter might indicate that Mexican presidents are less willing to engage with the US or other countries in collaborative endeavours when migration is high due to fear of being rebuked.

Methodology

Sending States, Ideologies and Presidential Speeches

The state is one of the main sites where reality and some of the fundamental categories through which society and individuals understand reality are created (Bourdieu, 1994: 13). The state and the president in turn have had a dominant role in constructing state ideologies in the Mexican case. The president became the most important political actor during Mexico’s post-revolutionary regime, a political system characterised by presidentialist overtones and a ‘benign authoritarianism’ (Teichman, 1996: 256). The president was elevated to be the ultimate decision-maker, shaping the state while maintaining its institutional status and its place in the popular imagination as the sole representative of the people’s will (Roux, 2005). Although Mexico has slowly democratised since the late 1980s, the president continues to play a key role in foreign matters and emigration. As a prominent scholar on migrations puts it, ‘the history of centralism and presidentialism that characterised Mexican politics for decades continues to be key to explaining Mexico’s foreign policies, including emigration’ (Délano, 2011: 10).

Mexican presidents should therefore be considered 'primary definers' (Hier et al., 2011: 267), actors whose position in the political system allows them to mobilise great symbolic capital to 'problematisé' social life or, in other words, shape issues as problems amenable to state and societal intervention (Bourdieu, 1994: 2; Miller and Rose, 2008: 14–15). This position also allows them to be the primary decision-makers in terms of public policy and the main catalysts for the management of the bureaucratic apparatus (Cossío Villegas, 1972; Stevens, 1991).

Presidential public speeches constitute an essential mechanism to understand each president's problematisations and state ideologies, since every administration depends upon language to describe reality and 'represent' it (Cheek, 2004; Miller and Rose, 2008: 31). Furthermore, public speeches are the official presentation of an administration and allow presidents to set the policy-making agenda. Large state apparatuses with complex bureaucratic processes and inter-institutional relationships, growing institutional autonomy, and highly technocratic knowledge have restricted the president's capacity to lead particular institutions or put in place specific public policies (Neustadt, 1960). But presidents have retained a great capacity to shape public opinion and persuade political adversaries and other actors and to move them to support their agendas.

As such, presidents have become active players in building public opinion. The president's public appearances and statements are highly scrutinised and evaluated as the outcome of strategically designed political manoeuvring, and this is precisely the president's fundamental contribution to the deployment of public policy: 'going public' is the presidential way of 'doing politics' (Hart, 1987). The traditional formal powers of the president have been partially replaced with the office's power of persuasion. The *new* presidential power turns the public into an actor with agency in the political arena (Kernell, 1986) and it is measured in terms of whether it can sway the public in favour of the president's agenda to use it against other institutional (e.g. Congress, the Judiciary) and non-institutional (e.g. economic elites) actors. In this context, the president's public speeches must be seen as state acts that are instrumental to the feasibility of the president's agenda, particularly on foreign policy (Peake, 2001). Indeed, although some scholars question the idea of a strong and influential presidential agenda (Edwards and Wood, 1999), there is widespread agreement that the president is responsible for drawing media attention to foreign policy.

Strategy of Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was performed in several stages. We obtained all the presidential speeches between 1994 and 2012 from numerous sources, including official websites and several archives and public libraries (e.g. General Archive of the Nation). We then digitalised the speeches and performed automated searches on these raw data using the codes 'migra*', 'emigra*' and 'inmigra*'. These codes search for all the words within the speeches that begin with those letters and were used because they identify all the variations of the words 'migration' and 'migrants' in Spanish. The codes 'migra*' and 'inmigra*' are included because Mexican emigrants are indistinguishably called 'migrants' and 'immigrants' and topics about emigration are often discussed as 'migratory' or 'immigration' issues. We then refined this indexed system by eliminating any irrelevant mentions from the results (for example, those referring to animal migrations). Our analytical sample is comprised of all the speeches that contain at least one mention of any of the code words.

To analyse the data, each author scrutinised and codified these migration speeches individually by conducting successive sweeps of information, that is, by using prior codified speech patterns as a benchmark for further analyses, a process that improves the validity and reliability of the results (Morse et al., 2002: 13–22). This iterative process rendered a coding scheme of the concepts, meanings and ideas that each president evoked when addressing migration. In essence, the analyses are based on the themes of *main conceptualisation*, *reaction* and *construction*. These themes capture how Mexican presidents describe and explain what they understand to be the causes and consequences of migration (*main conceptualisation*), as well as the occasions when they challenge and resist the US in defence of Mexican migrants (*reaction*) and/or adopt a measured and collaborative attitude towards the US and a broader international audience on migration issues (*construction*). We argue that these themes are broadly representative of the ideas and positions that Mexican presidents adopted regarding migration.

We complement this qualitative analysis with basic descriptive quantitative analyses. The main goal of these analyses is to identify quantities of interest (Hopkins and King, 2010) – mainly the number of speeches where the code words were used, the number of code words used, and the prevalence of the main discursive themes. They also help to tentatively correlate language (presidential speeches) with migration indicators (migration rate, remittances).

Mexico and its Migration Policy

Recent historical analyses have delineated the Mexican government's migration-related policymaking and its relationship to the Mexican diaspora, which can be understood in four stages during the twentieth century (Cano and Délano, 2007: 695–725; Délano, 2009, 2011). In the first stage, from the early 1900s until 1942, migration was not a priority in the Mexican government's policy agenda. There were minimal, inconsistent and unsuccessful efforts to manage migration (prevention or repatriation), but migration policies were generally passive and limited to uneven consular protection. The second period was defined by the Bracero Program (a temporary bilateral labour agreement) (Calavita, 1992). It marked the first time that the Mexican government was able to negotiate a migration agreement with the US advantageous to its citizens and the first time the Mexican government encouraged massive temporary emigration (Fitzgerald, 2006). The end of the agreement in 1974 marked the beginning of the third period, defined by the Mexican government's 'policy of no policy' (Rosenblum, 2004) that sought to maintain the status quo. As Fitzgerald (2006: 277) notes, 'Both governments grew to accept, at least tacitly, massive undocumented migration' to support US labour demands. Instrumental to this strategy was the 'delinkage' of migration from other topics on the domestic and bilateral agendas (Délano, 2009; 2011).

By the mid-1980s, however, this position became untenable due to Mexico's increasing economic reliance on the US and the international markets, Mexico's gradual democratisation, and the growing political and economic salience of the diaspora in both countries (Rosenblum, 2004; Délano, 2009, 2011). A conceptualisation of the Mexican diaspora began to take shape that understood it as (a) a homogeneous community that has (b) a 'natural' bond with the Mexican land and that can be (c) a legitimate interlocutor of the Mexican government and their policies (Ragazzi, 2008). Salinas's (1988–1994) and Zedillo's (1994–2000) administrations in particular assumed a

stronger, proactive position regarding emigration management and Mexico's connection to the diaspora in the US, bringing about the fourth period of heightened interest in migration. Vestiges of Mexico's traditionally guarded, noninterventionist and nationalistic position remained, as evidenced by Mexico's acceptance of the exclusion of labour migration from the NAFTA (Massey, 2013). However, Fox's administration placed immigration as a top priority, aggressively pursuing a migration agreement with the US, though unsuccessfully (Rosenblum, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2006). Throughout this period, Mexico developed what Gamlen (2014) calls 'diaspora institutions', that is, public bodies that cast migration as a form of 'external citizenship' (Collyer, 2013); migrants were honoured as national heroes (who suffer discrimination and abuse in the US) (Durand, 2004); and opportunities for their political participation were created, diplomatic efforts for recognition within the US were ramped up, and remittances increased (Newland and Taylor, 2004; Aparicio and Meseguer, 2012). The 'diaspora institutions' (as well as their programmes and initiatives) became commonplace in Mexican national foreign policy (Barry, 2006; Gamlen, 2008).

Thus, the Salinas, Zedillo and especially Fox administrations were critical in moving beyond the 'policy of no policy' that characterised past Mexican politics (Smith, 2003; Rosenblum, 2004). This article focuses on the shift (at the level of public discourse) that underscores the abandonment of the 'policy of no policy.'

Findings

General Descriptive Trends

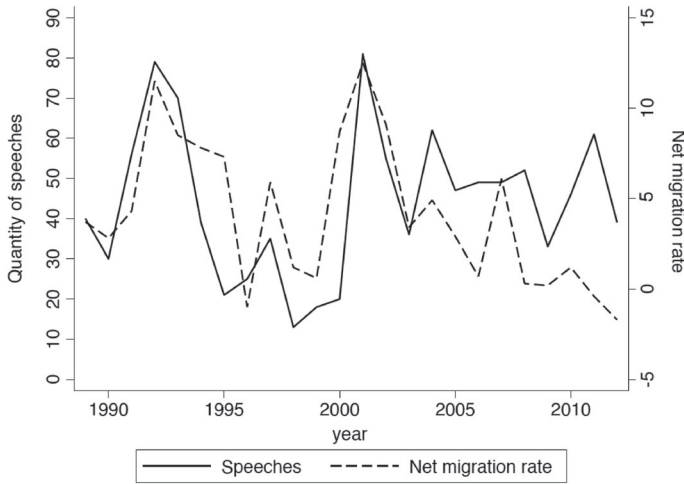
In this section we quantify the magnitudes and trends observed in our data and compare them to several measures of migration. We use two measures of migration in presidential speeches. In the first one, we use a dichotomous coding scheme to classify speeches as 'non-migration speech' (0 = no code words used) or 'migration speech' (1 = one or more code words used). Figure 1 shows the high level of correspondence between the number of 'migration speeches' per year and the net rate of Mexican migration to the US across the four presidential terms.

The number of migration speeches is not a function of the quantity of public speeches that each president gave (Table 1). Zedillo gave more speeches than Calderón, which means that Calderón has a higher proportion of migration speeches than Zedillo. Furthermore, even though the percentage of migration speeches is almost equal for three of the presidents, the yearly distribution of speeches within each presidential term is quite different (Figure 1).

In Table 2 we provide the count and percentage of migration speeches in each of the three analytical categories *main conceptualisation*, *reaction* and *construction*. Overall, this table shows increased levels of engagement through both reaction and construction discourses across time, again with important yearly variations.

The second measure of migration is the frequency of code words or 'migration density', which captures the 'migration speech' intensity. The yearly pattern of 'migration density' in Figure 2 reflects a general upward trend in the number of migration-related words that presidents used. The pattern shows consistently low levels from 1989 to 2000, but increases thereafter, with large bumps in 2001, 2007 and 2011. Contrasting the first two figures it is possible to determine that the surge in migration speeches in

Figure 1. Migration Speeches and Net Migration Rate



Source: elaborated by the authors, based on the number of speeches and estimates provided by the National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población, CONAPO) using data from the US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), 1989–2018. In the first (left) axis is the number of speeches and the second (right) measured the migration rate.

Table 1. Total and Migration Speeches per President

President	No. total speeches	No. migration speeches	migration speeches (%)
Salinas (1988–1994)	3047	314	10.31
Zedillo (1994–2000)	2875	132	4.59
Fox (2000–2006)	3146	330	10.49
Calderón (2006–2012)	2742	280	10.21

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Note: Total number of speeches in the period: 11,810.

1992–1993 did not translate into a large increase in the number of words used. Additionally, from 1995 to 2003 the number of speeches and words seem to map each other closely (excluding 2009).

The density of speeches is correlated with the rates of annual remittances ($r = .66$; $p < .05$). Annual remittances are also correlated with the percentage of reaction ($r = .43$; $p < .05$) and construction ($r = .47$; $p < .05$) speeches, respectively. These moderate positive correlations suggest that presidents paid more attention (at least discursively) to the topic of migration as remittances sent to Mexico by migrants in the US increased. In turn, the net migration rate and the percentage of construction speeches are negatively correlated ($r = -.45$; $p < .05$), suggesting that as the net migration rate increased a lower percentage of presidents' speeches contained discursive elements of construction.

These associations should be interpreted with care given the small number of observations. Likewise, many factors can shape these trends and it is neither possible with these data nor our intent to establish causal links between speeches and these migration

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Table 2. Speeches per President and Analytical Categories

President	Year	Main conceptualisation (No.)	Main conceptualisation (%)	Reaction (no.)	Reaction (%)	Construction (No.)	Construction (%)
Salinas	1989	30	75.00	5	12.50	8	20.00
	1990	19	63.33	3	10.00	7	23.33
	1991	48	85.71	9	16.07	9	16.07
	1992	67	84.81	2	2.53	5	6.33
	1993	54	77.14	7	10.00	3	4.29
Zedillo	1994	22	56.41	14	35.90	4	10.26
	1995	10	63.33	4	19.05	7	33.33
	1996	9	36.00	9	36.00	14	56.00
	1997	16	45.71	9	25.71	10	28.57
	1998	7	53.85	2	15.38	3	23.08
Fox	1999	10	55.56	2	11.11	5	27.78
	2000	10	50.00	1	5.00	4	20.00
	2001	38	46.91	23	28.40	32	39.51
	2002	20	36.36	14	25.45	10	18.18
	2003	17	47.22	11	30.56	17	47.22
Calderón	2004	25	40.32	20	32.26	29	46.77
	2005	24	51.06	9	19.15	17	36.17
	2006	37	75.51	25	51.02	34	69.39
	2007	21	42.86	15	30.61	12	24.49
	2008	19	36.54	15	28.85	21	40.38
	2009	13	39.39	5	15.15	16	48.48
	2010	13	28.26	8	17.39	12	26.09
	2011	25	40.98	11	18.03	13	21.31
	2012	18	46.15	11	28.21	10	25.64

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Note: Analytical categories are not mutually exclusive.

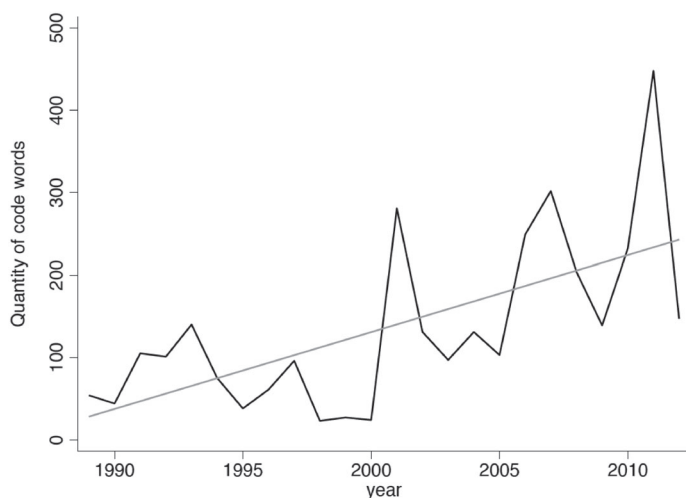
indices. But these analyses do provide tentative evidence that during times when remittances were high, presidents tended to speak publicly more about migration, in terms of both defending migrants (*reaction*) and attempting to construct long-term policy through international collaboration (*construction*). In turn, presidents tended to speak less in constructive terms when migration was high. In the following section we use our speech data to ascertain how presidents spoke about migration when the migration rate or remittances were high.

Carlos Salinas (1988–1994)

President Salinas mostly understood migration in domestic terms as an economic phenomenon (*main conceptualisation*). Governmental prying created market inefficiencies, blocked socioeconomic opportunities, and caused poverty, which forced peasants to migrate to places that afforded better opportunities, such as cities in the North of the country or the US:

For many decades, the Mexican economy was based on a protectionist strategy, a closed economy ... What was the result of this? Much investment in the North of the country. What did Mexicans do? What is called ‘voting with your behaviour’: they migrated, and they migrated to the North. (Salinas de Gortari, 1994)

Figure 2. Migration Speeches (Code Words)



Source: elaborated by the authors with data from the database.

The problematisation of migration in these terms sets the stage for the types of intervention that Salinas advances discursively. The Salinas administration enacted numerous migration programmes, including *Paisano* (compatriot), the Mexican Communities Abroad, and matching funds initiatives (2×1 and 3×1). Yet, in over 300 of Salinas's speeches addressing migration, the *Paisano* programme appears in five and the rest go unmentioned. This absence is also notable in his administration's National Development Plan (NDP) (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1989) and annual government reports with one exception, a brief mention in its second report (Dirección de Servicios de Investigación y Análisis, 2006a: 100). In fact, Salinas constantly connects migration to particular economic policies – and not migration policies – claiming the solution resides in the liberalisation and modernisation of the economy. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is particularly lauded and is linked to emigration in over 70 migration and liberalisation speeches. Salinas claims that NAFTA would create the necessary jobs to keep potential emigrants in Mexico:

The agreement [NAFTA] will allow us to revert this regional concentration of opportunities in Mexico. With this agreement we will be able to take the jobs to where the people live and avoid major migration processes. (Salinas de Gortari, 1992)

This discursive connection between migration and the economy, and NAFTA in particular, is what likely accounts for the large increase in public speeches mentioning migration during 1992–1993 that mobilise his main conceptualisation (migration as an economic issue) and the seemingly paradoxical stability in the number of code words used in those speeches (Figures 1 and 2; Table 2). Amidst opposition in both Mexico and the US, NAFTA was negotiated between June 1991 and August 1992, ratified in Mexico during 1993, and set in motion on 1 January 1994 (Fernández-Kelly and Massey, 2007). The increase in migration-related speeches derives from an increase in NAFTA-related

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speeches, not migration issues or policies. This is why the main conceptualisation in Salinas's discourse (migration as an economic issue) is more prevalent in this period (Table 2) and the total number of code words on migration did not increase at the same rate.

A relatively small proportion of Salinas's migration discourse was focused on the defence of migrants (*reaction*) (Table 2), a reaction to policies and events in the US that were perceived to be discriminatory or exploitative. Salinas believes that migrants' rights are transgressed systematically in the US, but his solution is to deal with these transgressions on a case-by-case basis through the Mexican embassy and the consulates, and to that end Salinas strengthened the Mexican consular network in the US (Délano, 2009, 2011: 146–147). In fact, the only two, brief mentions of Mexican migration to the US in the *NDP* refer to this one topic: the idea that the Mexican government should 'defend the rights of undocumented Mexican workers residing in neighbouring countries' (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1989: 47) and that it 'will insist on a fair and human treatment of the undocumented in that country' (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1989: 49). This last mention was also found in the 'Program for Mexican Communities Abroad' (Dirección de Servicios de Investigación y Análisis, 2006a: 94).

Salinas's reaction discourse became more prevalent towards the end of his administration (1993–1994) in response to proposed anti-immigrant policies that in turn were probably triggered by a few years of massive Mexican migration to the US. Chief among these policies was California's 'Proposition 187', which the Salinas administration promptly qualified as discriminatory and xenophobic (Dirección de Servicios de Investigación y Análisis, 2006a: 380). But throughout these complaints, Salinas remains committed to the idea that both Mexico and the US are sovereign countries, each with the legal right to enact the policies that they wish to enact in their own territories.

Sovereignty looms large in Salinas's outlook on migration, which could explain his emphasis on solving the problem domestically via the economy. This explanation fits well with the 'Estrada Doctrine', the Mexican government's traditional position that national sovereignty does not depend on the recognition of foreign governments (although sometimes it became instrumentalised as a way to elude confrontation with the international community over its lack of democratic transparency and corruption, Délano, 2009, 2011). As our data suggest, the asymmetry of power in the bilateral relationship pushed Mexico to 'decouple' migration from other topics to maintain the relationship as undisturbed as possible. It is reasonable to conclude that Salinas's political discourse may well have been constrained by a combination of these factors. This constrained political discourse is best seen in Salinas's *construction* speeches (Table 2). Salinas does talk about collaboration and reaching agreements, especially early in his administration (1989–1991), coinciding with relatively low migration levels. However, this cooperation is framed in generic terms that reference the need for solidarity and understanding. In the few instances when agreements are referenced, they are not described and themselves seem to be generic (commitments to respect migrants' human rights).

Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994–2000)

Zedillo is the president in this period who talks less about migration, as he mentions migration in only 132 speeches out of 2,875 in total (Table 1). However, he has a more comprehensive understanding of migration than Salinas, building upon the latter's conceptualisation by approaching migration from an 'integral perspective' (*main conceptualisation*) (Table 2).

As Salinas, Zedillo emphasises the economic processes that underlie migration, as well as the importance of respecting the rule of law and each nation's sovereignty:

Migration is caused by the economic disparities between the two countries. Consequently, its solution can only reside in Mexico's sufficient and sustained economic development. [...] While we build our national development, we will continue to utilise every legitimate means available to us to protect the basic human and labour rights of our countrymen in the US. (Zedillo Ponce de León, 1997a)

However, Zedillo also articulates an 'integral perspective' to address migration. He states that solutions to migration issues should attend to the preservation of family unity, the protection of the rule of law and of nations' sovereignty, the defence of immigrants' human and labour rights and dignity, the fight against human trafficking and exploitation, and strengthening the judiciary and democratic governance (Zedillo Ponce de León, 1997c; 1999). The emphasis on human rights is particularly noticeable. The coupling of human rights and migration is present in 45 of his migration speeches, a fact which suggests more interest in human rights violations against Mexican emigrants than Salinas did.

Another element of Zedillo's 'integral perspective' is his administration's attempts to reconnect the diaspora with Mexico symbolically and legally. His government's efforts culminated in the Nationality Act of 1998, which for the first time permitted dual citizenship, allowing migrants to remain Mexican citizens. Furthermore, his administration's NDP put forth the 'Mexican Nation' initiative. The idea of this programme was specifically to promote the organisation of Mexican communities in the US and enhance transnational solidarity through business- and research-related exchanges and leisure visits (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1995: 15).

As Salinas, Zedillo resorted to a *reaction* discourse throughout his period to defend Mexican migrants (Table 2). The language used, the prevalence of this type of discourse, and the timing are also similar. Zedillo denounces human rights' violations and discrimination, calls for a dignified treatment of Mexican migrants in the US, and vows to protect them from xenophobia and intolerance (Zedillo Ponce de León, 1996; 1997b). This language is particularly prevalent in 1996–1997 when important legislation was passed in the US ('The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996', signed by President Clinton) that hardened immigration laws and signalled a more punitive approach to undocumented immigration, at least in the perception of the Mexican government. However, just as Salinas, these complaints were tempered by a steadfast respect for sovereignty and the rights of each nation (and the legal arenas within which to solve political conflicts).

Lastly, Zedillo's *construction* discourse is more prevalent than his reaction discourse (Table 2) and also slightly more specific than Salinas's regarding the type of collaboration that Mexico and the US agree upon. According to him, this collaboration would focus on three key principles that are connected to his main conceptualisation: each nation's right to enforce their laws in their own territory; the observance of the human rights of every individual, and the necessity to address the migration phenomenon from an integral perspective that combines the rule of law, the preservation of the family unity and the protection of human dignity (Zedillo Ponce de León, 1997a). But as with Salinas, there is no indication that Zedillo is referring to the legalisation of Mexican immigrants as part of the bilateral cooperation.

Vicente Fox Quesada (2000–2006)

President Fox emphasised migration much more than his predecessors, marking a watershed moment for migration issues in Mexico. Two days after his presidential term began, Fox welcomed a group of Mexican emigrants to 'Los Pinos', the official presidential residence, making them the first guests of the first democratically elected government in contemporary Mexican history. This reception coincided with one of the points emphasised in the NDP, on recognising the contributions of migrants in the US and in Mexico (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2001: 107). After praising emigrants for their determination, passion and courage, Fox gave a speech that placed migration at the centre of his political agenda. After stating that 'Current migration policies have failed because they ignore the reality of the Mexican-US integrated labour market, which has been developing for over a hundred years', he proposed a migration agreement with the US to 'regularise the status of Mexican migrants [...] unblock legal migration channels [...] broaden opportunities for Mexican workers to obtain work visas [...] promote economic growth in Mexico' (Fox Quesada, 2001).

Generally, scholars have argued that the Mexican government's shift on migration issues under the Fox administration has come about as a result of an increased willingness to intervene, in turn caused by many factors, such as Fox's desire to cash in on his democratic bonus and extend the Mexican nation beyond its borders (Délano, 2011). Our analysis reveals an important aspect of this shift that is worth emphasising, namely the reframing of migration from a predominantly socioeconomic to a political issue (*main conceptualisation*). Fox wanted to discuss migration in a broader bilateral agenda and he used economic issues as a platform to move the discussion towards a political solution. He demanded an integral migration policy to be negotiated with the US (something that does not appear in his NDP either) (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2001):

The only long-lasting solution will be to regularise the situation of the millions of undocumented Mexican workers who are already in his country [...] This will be the moment of truth for our commitment towards a new and closer relationship. (Fox Quesada, 2002)

The push for a migration agreement is reflected in the count of migration code words during Fox's first year in office (Figure 2), which was considerably higher than in the two previous terms, and in the percentage of construction speeches (Table 2). However, as the chances of striking a bilateral migration agreement faded in the midst of the US reconfiguration of international policy after September 11, 2001, so did Fox's emphasis on migration. The word count was considerably lower for the rest of his period.

Fox's push for immigration reform in the US displays another key element in his political conceptualisation of migration, namely his willingness to lobby and pursue agreements with holders of political power other than the US president, most notably the US Congress and US state and local governments (Fox Quesada, 2006). Fox and his team were cognisant of the fact that local governments in the US have played increasingly prominent roles on immigration issues (Varsanyi, 2010) and that the federal system allows these governments to manoeuvre without much restriction. Fox attempted to exploit the federal political organisation of the US to improve the daily lives of migrants and forward his government's agenda: 'And we have come, also, in this trip [to Texas] because we find in local governments a wide avenue to make progress with specific decisions on issues related to migration' (Fox Quesada, 2003a).

Perhaps his most successful attempt to influence local policies came with his advocacy for *Matrículas Consulares* (Consular Identification Cards). The *Matrículas* were first established in 1871 as a form of identification for Mexicans in the US, but Fox's government used them innovatively to counteract the pernicious effects of local legislations (Délano, 2009). He pushed to have them accepted as official identification by local governments and financial institutions (Fox Quesada, 2003c), the latter being particularly relevant because the growth of the Mexican population in the US was accompanied by an increase in remittances. For the first time, remittances are included as an issue in the political agenda in the third annual government report: 'Thanks to our Consular Identification Card, Mexicans who live outside the country can access services that did not exist before [...] Just in 2002, remittances reached the record level of 9,814 million dollars' (Dirección de Servicios de Investigación y Análisis, 2006b: 159).

Fox's political conceptualisation of migration also manifested itself on the domestic front, most notably in his endorsement of expatriate voting: 'we are also working so that in the next federal election, in 2006, the election for the next president of the republic, you participate with your vote, you steer the country with your vote' (Fox Quesada, 2003a). Although the Bill fell short of activists' expectations and the voting turnout was not substantial (Waldinger, 2014: 483–511), it did signal Fox's interest in incorporating the Mexican diaspora into Mexican politics, beyond the largely symbolic and economic incorporation that Salinas and Zedillo had fostered previously.

Similarly, our data support the claim that during the Fox administration 'Never before had the Mexican government been so vocal against U.S.-proposed federal legislation on immigration issues' (Délano, 2009: 788). But the Fox administration's *reaction* discourse was also aimed at state and local policies that it perceived to be discriminatory. A higher proportion of Fox's discourse was based on a reactionary attitude than both Salinas's and Zedillo's (Table 2). Fox pledged repeatedly to protect migrants from human rights and labour violations and condemned proposals to build a wall on the southern border (Fox Quesada, 2003b, 2005).

Yet, Fox's discourse is overall and in essence more constructive than reactionary (*construction*). As shown above, he never stopped trying to reach agreements with US representatives at every level and branch of government. Fox was no longer content to defend the rights of undocumented workers on a case-by-case basis. From his perspective, protection from human rights abuses stems not from individualised safeguards and advice from the Mexican diplomatic corps to immigrants – although this is part of the strategy – but from a response that would be spearheaded by a regularisation agreement. Indeed, Fox claimed that 'a migratory agreement between both nations will constitute the best guarantee for the respect of the human rights of the Mexicans that go to the US' (Fox Quesada, 2003c). This push for migratory accords took place in the context of the second great migration crisis (2001) when rates surpassed the previous record reached in the 1992 crisis during the Salinas government (Figure 1). This crisis may explain the elevated energy at an institutional level dedicated to protecting migrants –through both reaction and construction – since it is not a salient topic of the administration's foreign policy as described in the NDP (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2001).

Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006–2012)

The first level of analysis in Calderón's discourse on migration is similar to the previous ones: emigration is driven by the lack of jobs and opportunities. However, unlike previous governments, for the first time the NDP (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2007) includes

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Mexican emigration to the US as a fundamental component of foreign policy. Calderón's *main conceptualisation* is that migration is a natural and inevitable process that benefits both Mexico and the US and because of this it should be addressed from an 'integral perspective' that – unlike Zedillo's understanding – includes a migratory agreement.

Calderón understands migration as deeply rooted in historical and social processes accentuated by economic macro-structural processes and globalisation. He continually emphasises the complementarity of the Mexican and American economies, the former being workforce intensive and the latter capital intensive:

Migration, especially now, is a natural, social and economically inevitable phenomenon, I would say, even economically convenient; there are no two neighbouring economies in the world so clearly complementary to each other as the American and the Mexican. (Calderón Hinojosa, 2007a)

Given that migration is natural and inexorable, Calderón argues that laws that criminalise it are futile. He got the Mexican Congress to approve a new Migration Bill that would improve services for foreign migrants in Mexico (including unauthorised immigrants) and, most importantly, completely decriminalise unauthorised migration. He connects this reform to the kind of reform that the US should carry out:

With this new law, the criminalisation of the migratory phenomenon is completely abolished in our country. This is why the Mexican government is now doing what we have requested for many years, for example, from the US: decriminalise migration and deal with it in a more sensible way, more sensitised to the complex reality that we live in, above all in our borders [...]. (Calderón Hinojosa, 2011)

Since criminalisation of migration cannot be the solution, the solution must be 'integral'. In Calderón's discourse, an 'integral perspective' includes a migration agreement or reform, as well as the respect of human rights and American recognition of Mexicans' contributions to the US. Calderón further connects this 'integral reform' with the net migration between US and Mexico reaching zero toward the end of his presidential term (Calderón Hinojosa, 2012).

In general, Rosenblum's (2004) argument that Fox's approach to the bilateral agenda on migration constituted a watershed moment after which Mexican presidents would be unable to revert to a 'policy of no policy' on migration seems to hold in Calderón's presidency. Although Calderón does not push for a migration agreement as vehemently as Fox did, he does make public statements about American migration policy and challenges their government to pass migration reform. Calderón does not routinely engage local American politicians directly as Fox did, but he does pressure the US federal government. And he continued to enact and discursively support policies that benefitted the diaspora and their families and communities in Mexico, chief among them those that made sending remittances cheaper and more efficient (Calderón Hinojosa, 2007b).

In terms of *reaction*, the Mexican government during the Calderón administration continued to emphasise the defence of migrants in the US at a similar rate than Fox (Table 2). At times the language appears to be more confrontational than before, to convey a heightened sense of urgency and indignation. However, just as Fox, Calderón's main message regarding migration is one of *construction*. The idea that migration is inevitable because of the complementarity of the Mexican and American economies leads him to conclude that the solution to migration can only be the construction of

bilateral or regional agreements. His political engagement with the US is not as comprehensive as Fox's, but his push for a long-term, collaborative treatment of migration does resemble Fox's perspective.

Discussion

In this article we have analysed the discursive patterns of Mexican presidents regarding migration between 1988 and 2012. This analysis reveals some of the ideas, conceptualisations and theories that they use to define and 'problematisé' migration and migrants and deploy policies and solutions. These conceptualisations can be key to understand how meanings were mobilised and constructed by the most relevant figures of the Mexican government. This is the case even if these conceptualisations were offered to rationalise or justify events or actions that were not completely under the control of these presidents because they are still being mobilised to shape the definitions and public perceptions of these events or actions.

Specifically, we draw from a novel data set to support the claim that the official Mexican interest on migration has generally increased in the last decades. But we also show that this increase has not been completely sustained across time. More importantly, we argue that this increased engagement is accompanied by more expansive and detailed conceptualisations of migration and willingness to politicise the issue. We identify two discursive types during the period examined. On one hand, a discourse of *reaction* characterised by a defence of Mexican migrants in the US that is sometimes expressed defiantly; and, on the other hand, a discourse of *construction*, defined by a more measured approach that underscores the importance of collaboration and understanding and allows for long-term policies to be enacted.

The reaction discourse is more predominant early on, while the construction discourse becomes more salient in the second half of the examined period. But their relative importance also varies depending on migration factors. Overall, both types of discourse are related to periods of sustained growth in remittances, which we argue is a signal of the growing economic importance of the diaspora for the Mexican government. The reaction discourse is more important during migration crises triggered by specific dramatic/consequential events, while the construction discourse is less salient when the migration rate increases. The latter might indicate that high migration rates could make Mexican presidents more hesitant and less willing to engage the US or other countries in collaborative endeavours due to fear of being rebuked.

Salinas and Fox faced sharp increases in migration in 1992 and 2001, respectively. Both reacted discursively with an increased focus on migration (in terms of number of migration speeches) and with an emphasis on defending the rights of undocumented migrants (*reaction*). But whereas Salinas mostly looked inwards for a solution based on his *main conceptualisation* (increased investment and employment), Fox looked outwards by pushing for a migratory agreement with the US (*construction*), a sign that Mexico was abandoning a 'policy of no policy' regarding migration. But this push had not yet been institutionalised, as it does not appear in his administration's NDP.

During times of stability or decline of the migration rate and an increase in remittances, the *main conceptualisations* of presidents are broader, more far-reaching, and often advance solutions beyond calls for the legal protection of migrants that involve the US and other countries ('integral approach', 'shared responsibility'). During the presidencies of both Zedillo and Calderón and for most of Fox's the migration rate was

declining or stable. Their main conceptualisations suggest an expanding understanding of migration and the solutions to the problems that arise from it. Fox and Calderón have a more comprehensive view of what such approach entails, arguing repeatedly for a migratory agreement and policy changes in the US, again suggesting increased engagement with migration across the period under examination. This engagement is political in nature, a feature of their discourses that is more evident in Fox, who attempts to reach agreements and lobbies for policy changes across all levels of the American federal government. The formalisation of this approach reached its highest point in Calderón's tenure, however, as his administration is the only one that made migration a key public policy issue in the NDP.

With the increase in remittances, long-term public policies were proposed and established, more often than not directed at Mexican communities in the US – for example, to facilitate sending economic resources – and less so as a response to pressure from the North American government. This is particularly evident during Fox's administration, especially once the migration crisis of 2001 subsided. Fox's discursive and policy emphasis turned to securing concrete, long-term changes that would help the Mexican diaspora in the US. Diaspora institutions were discursively formed and imagined for the most part during these times.

Other changes and continuities are important to understand how migration was understood and deployed in this period. First, the four presidents established the protection of the human rights of Mexican migrants as one of their main goals with varying intensity and approaches (depending on migration crises). The specific type of human rights' protection more prevalent in Salinas and Zedillo is individualistic and bureaucratic (*reaction*). Abuses are to be handled on a case-by-case basis through the consular network. However, both of them also forcefully recognise the sovereignty of the US and Mexico and each country's right to do what they wish. Conversely, Fox and Calderón argue that this type of protection can only be temporary: the definitive safeguard comes exclusively from a migration agreement or comprehensive immigration reform in the US (*construction*). Their view of sovereignty is more limited and often vaguely stated. They favour ways of thinking about migration that rely less on what each country has the right to do and more on their shared responsibility, values and interests.

Second, the economic problematisation of migration has been present throughout the period, again with important differences. For Salinas, migration is almost exclusively about the lack of jobs in Mexico. Zedillo adds deficiencies in education and asymmetries of wages between the countries. Fox sees these economic processes as embedded in the political negotiation of a migration agreement, while Calderón adds the complementarity of both economies. The 'network of concepts' that is attached to the connection between the economy and migration evolves according to framing choices. Due to these framing choices, all of the presidents understand migration as a 'forced' response to economic deprivation. Especially for Fox and Calderón, one main goal of migration policy is to make migration 'optional'.

Third, the incorporation of the Mexican diaspora has shifted from being almost exclusively symbolic to also being instrumental, although perhaps not effective. It is clearly inscribed in a line of construction discourse oriented towards building a long-term public policy that would strengthen the ties between Mexico and its diaspora. But the intention goes beyond this, particularly in the case of Fox and Calderón, who are also interested in helping Mexican emigrants assimilate and incorporate into the US (Waldinger, 2014).

Nation-states act in response to their context and to this extent context helps explain policies and discourse. But this does not mean that we could derive the substantive content of policies, or the meanings that are mobilised through discursive practices, directly from these constraints. The discursive analysis of migration is necessary because the meanings that each president attached to the same concepts vary, in large part according to the function that such a concept serves within the network of discursive meanings of each president.

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