

United States and Mexico's Bilateral Relationship Think Tank Monitoring: Annual Report

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Understanding the U.S.- Mexico bilateral agenda is essential to achieve greater cooperation and find synergies that benefit both nations. To better comprehend the narrative that some of the most important Think Tanks in both countries are publishing, the U.S.-Mexico Foundation (USMF) and IMCO joined efforts to monitor publications related to the relationship between Mexico and the United States. This document is an annual report that contains a descriptive analysis of the type of publications, topics covered, as well as format in which these contents are being distributed. The document also includes an analysis on the five most mentioned topics.



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

1. Introduction

Understanding and keeping informed of the U.S.- Mexico bilateral agenda is essential to achieve greater cooperation and boost both countries competitiveness. The USMF and IMCO joined forces to monitor publications related to the relationship between Mexico and the United States, made by 25 Think Tanks in both countries to produce a bi-weekly report that collects publications related to our bilateral relationship.

The project began in July 2020, where 25 Think Tanks were monitored, 10 of which are based in Mexico and 15 in the U.S. (See Annex A). Twenty-four biweekly reports have been produced gathering all publications related to the bilateral relationship. Finally, each publication has been classified according to its content.

This document contains information collected throughout the year. It begins by describing the type of publications, topics covered, as well as the format in which these contents are being distributed. It also includes an analysis on the five most mentioned topics, as well as identified opportunities derived from the publications. Lastly some final remarks are included.

Objectives:

- Identify the main issues covered by Think Tanks regarding the Mexico – U.S. relationship.
- Identify the Think Tanks that are most focused on the Mexico – U.S. relationship and the subjects they study.
- Compare whether the topics covered by Think Tanks are aligned with the current state of affairs and/or with the medium- and long-term bilateral agendas.
- Identify what relevant issues are not addressed in the publications and what are the analysis and research gaps that exist with regards to the bilateral relationship.

1. Descriptive Analysis

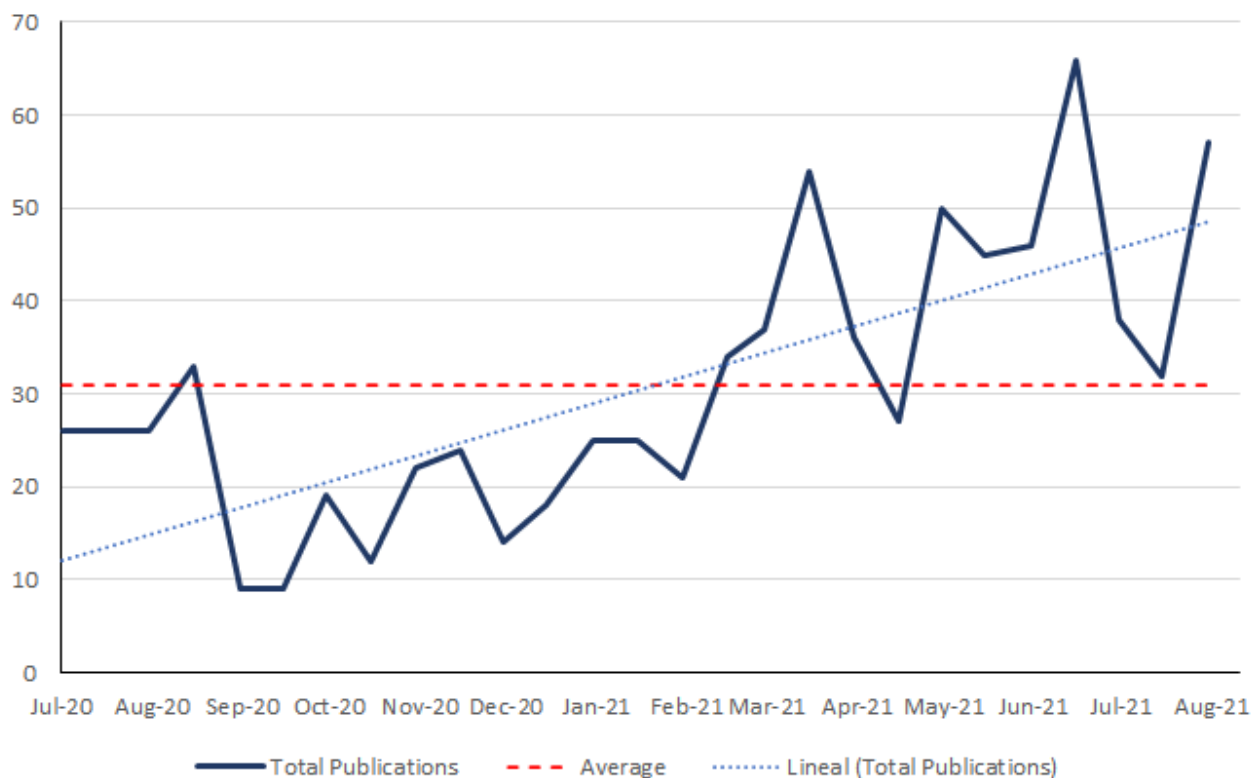
Number of Publications

This report covers from July 1, 2020, to July 31, 2021. In this period, there were a total of 758 publications related to the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States; 57.5% of the publications were by US-based Think Tanks, while 42.5% were publications by Mexican-based Think Tanks. The three US Think Tanks with the most publications were: Woodrow Wilson’s Mexico Institute, Baker Institute, and Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Similarly, the Think Tanks in Mexico with the most publications were: *Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales* (COMEXI), *Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad* (IMCO) and *México Evalúa*.

Table 1: Number of publications by country

Country	No. Publications
United States	436
Mexico	322

Figure 1: Number of publications per report



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

Type of Publications

The publications were classified according to their format. Most of the publications appear in three main formats: 61% were digital articles, 6.7% were blog posts, and 6.1% were reports or policy briefs. Also interviews, opinion and commentary articles were usual, as well as podcasts and webinars.

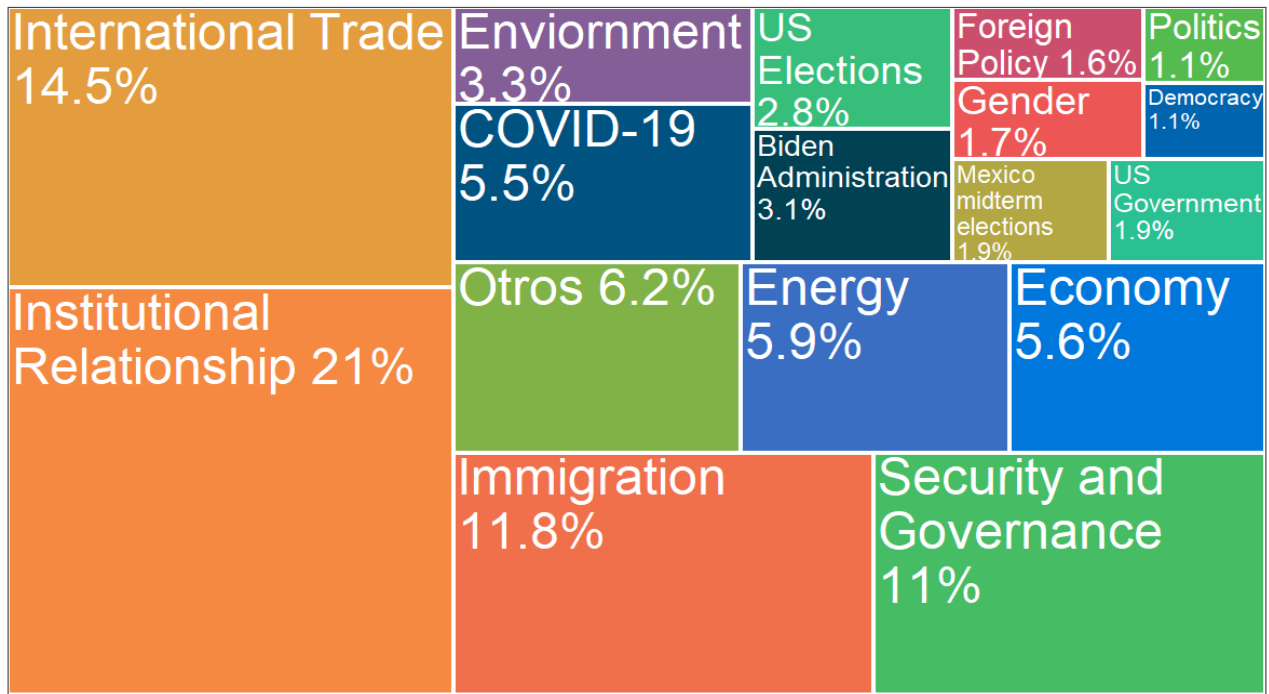
Tabla 2: Type of publications

Type of Publication	No. Publications
Digital Article	468
Blog Post	49
Report	48
Commentary	38
Podcast	27
Webinar	27
Interview	17
Research Document	11
Infographic	5
Book	5

Topics Covered

The 758 publications covered challenges and opportunities of the bilateral relationship; they were classified into more than 25 major topics. The ten most mentioned topics were: institutional relationship with 21% of the publications, international trade with 14.5%, immigration with 11.8%, security and governance with 11%, energy with 5.9%, economy with 5.6%, COVID-19 with 5.5%, elections in the US and Mexico with 4.7%, and environment with 3.3% while President Biden domestic agenda had 3.1% of the total. These ten topics accumulate 86.4% of the total publications during the year (Figure 2). Other mentioned topics include gender, democracy, politics, racism, the US-Mexico border, foreign policy, and North America.

Figure 2: Publications distribution by topic



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

Given the broad spectrum of each topic, they were further segmented into subthemes. The ten most mentioned are briefly described below:

1. **Institutional relationship:** The main sub themes included the bilateral cooperation. Among the most prominent were: AMLO's visit to the US, Kamala Harris's visit to Mexico, diplomacy, foreign policy, the Biden-AMLO relationship, Trump, and the binational agenda.
2. **International trade:** the main topic in this category included the United States, Mexico, Canada Agreement (USMCA). Issues related to trade and regional cooperation along the Mexico – U.S. border were also highlighted, as well as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), globalization: its challenges and opportunities, the trade war between the United States and China, and mechanisms to boost competitiveness for a US - Mexico business relationship with greater dynamism.
3. **Immigration:** this topic covers primarily the importance of an immigration policy between both countries, the challenges and rights of the immigrant community, and management problems of the border area. Furthermore, child migration and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) were included.

4. **Security and governance:** its main subtopics include drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption, money laundering, public safety, freedom of expression, weapons, border security, the conflict over water at the border, and innovation of judicial processes.
5. **Energy:** this topic mainly focused on oil, Mexico's energy reform, dependence on natural gas, as well as CFE and PEMEX. Renewable energy, fracking, and climate change also appear.
6. **Economy:** This topic covers the labor market, challenges of globalization, creative economy, investment in technology, innovation, and infrastructure. Additionally, inflation, remittances, and opportunities in the region were popular subtopics.
7. **COVID-19:** This topic covers everything related to the COVID-19 pandemic, from economic reactivation, vaccination challenges, health, multilateral cooperation, to gender issues.
8. **Elections:** This theme was recurrent in the period due to the various elections that were held in the region. First, the presidential election in the US, where Biden and Trump were the main topics, followed by political parties and ideologies, the debates, the outcome, as well as the Latino vote and the impact on Latin America. Secondly, the midterm elections in Mexico held in July 2021 and its implication for the bilateral relationship. Finally, several articles on elections in Latin America and trends in the region.
9. **Environment:** the main subtopics that appeared in this category were management of natural resources, protection of the flora and fauna of the region, illegal fishing, and commercial practices regulation regarding natural resources, as well as facing climate change threats.
10. **Biden Administration:** This topic specifically encompassed the US domestic agenda and the Biden presidency, including Biden's first 100 days as US president, the US Congress and its challenges, as well as the agenda of Vice President Kamala Harris.

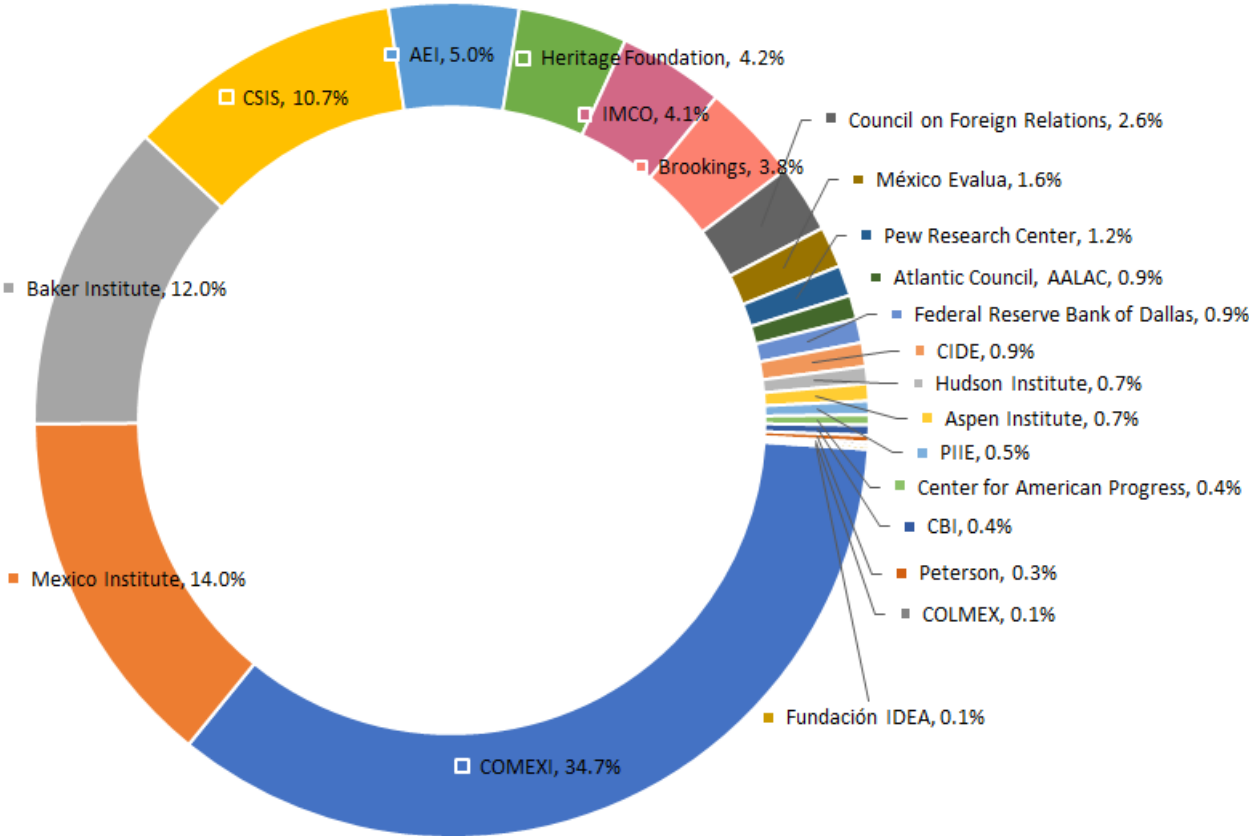
Think-Tank Coverage

As a result of the biweekly reports, we've identified that some Think Tanks are more specialized in the U.S.- Mexico bilateral relationship than others, resulting in greater coverage. The centers with the most publications were: *Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales (COMEXI)*¹, Mexico Institute, Baker Institute, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), and American

¹ COMEXI's publishing methodology is different from other Think Tanks. It has a network of contacts called press associates who publish in different media (newspapers, websites, etc.) and COMEXI publishes them on its page, achieving a much higher number of publications than the other centers.

Enterprise Institute (AEI). These five centers accumulate 76.4% of the total publications collected during the year.

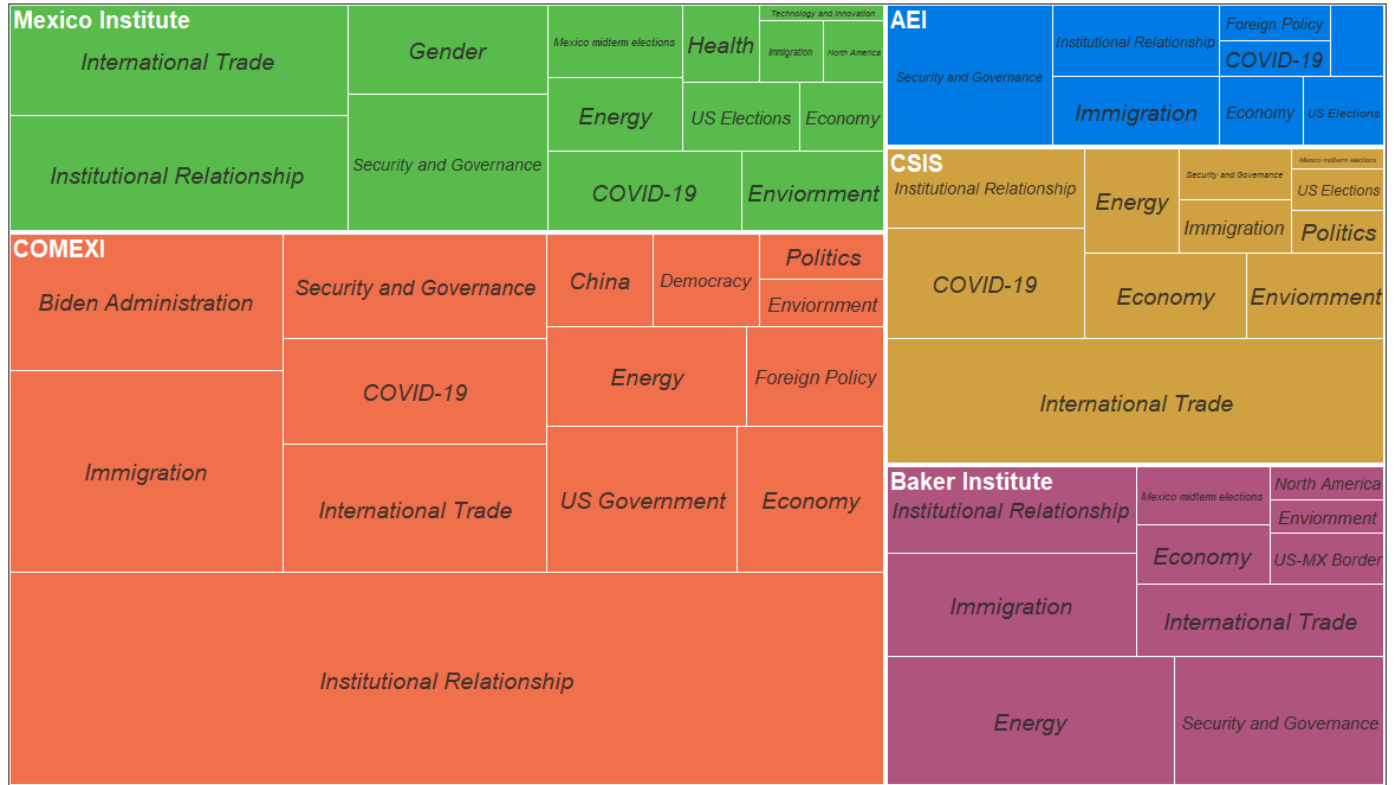
Figure 3: Publications distribution by Think Tank



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

During this period, it was possible to identify the main issues addressed by each Think Tank. COMEXI’s main themes were institutional relations, immigration and President Biden administration while the Mexico Institute focused mainly on institutional relations and international trade. The Baker Institute main themes were energy, security and governance, and immigration; for CSIS it was international trade and COVID-19, and finally, AEI focused mainly on security and governance, immigration, and institutional relationship (See Figure 4). The most common topics were *institutional relationship, international trade, energy, security and governance, and immigration*.

Figure 4: Think Tanks main topics



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

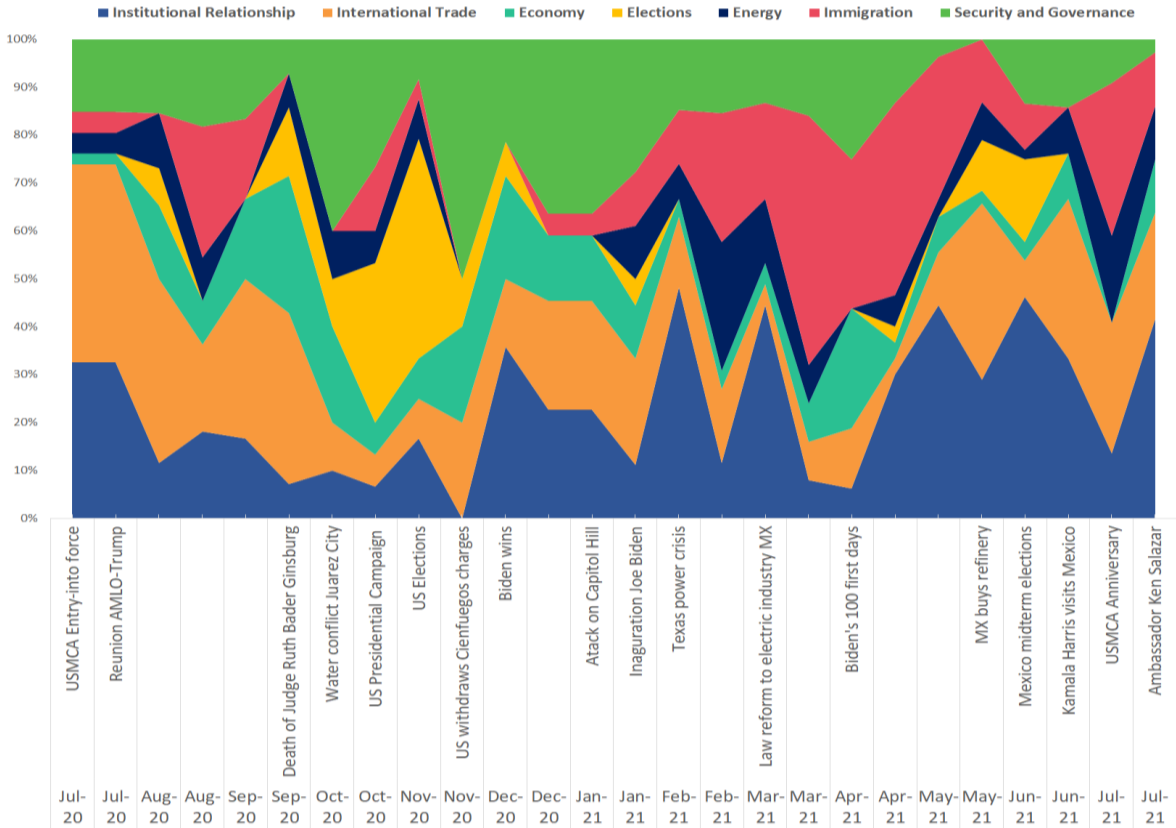
Publications: Short-term vs. medium and long term

With every passing month it was possible to identify that most of the publications were linked to current affairs. During 2020, the most relevant events regarding the bilateral relationship were: in July, the USMCA came into effect and the AMLO-Trump meeting; in September, the death of Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg; in October the conflict over water in Ciudad Juárez and the US presidency campaign; and in November the US presidential elections, as well as the case of General Cienfuegos. Similarly, in 2021 the most important events were January’s attack on Capitol Hill and the inauguration of Joe Biden; in February the Texas power crisis; April marked Biden's first 100 days as president; in June the mid-term elections in Mexico and the visit of Kamala Harris; finally, in July, the first anniversary of USMCA was celebrated and Ken Salazar was appointed to be the U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

Figure 5 shows the aforementioned events in contrast to coverage of certain topics. The graph shows the percentage covered in each report for each of these six topics: institutional relationship, international trade, economy, elections, energy, immigration and, security and governance. It shows how certain topics are mentioned more frequently in the period where there is a theme-related

event. For example: In the first report of November 2020 and the first report of June 2021, the theme elections increased considerably, during these times the presidential campaign in the United States and the midterm elections in Mexico took place. Likewise, it can be observed with energy in February and March of 2021, clearly related to the power crisis in Texas and the reform to the electricity law in Mexico. On the other hand, security and governance has been a popular subject during the year, where medium- and long-term issues such as the U.S. - Mexico border and organized crime were commonly discussed. However, it can be seen how coverage of the topic increased with certain events such as the water conflict in Cd. Juárez, the case of General Cienfuegos, and the attack on Capitol Hill. In the same way, institutional relationship and international trade are constant themes in the publications where the medium- and long-term agenda are present, as well as short-term events. Finally, immigration has become a more popular topic in publications since the beginning of the year 2021. This topic may have been triggered by the arrival of Joe Biden to the presidency and Vice President Kamala Harris as the person in charge of leading immigration issues and the humanitarian crisis in the U.S. - Mexico border, even with this pinpoint event, Think Tanks have consistently published about immigration policy.

Figure 5: Relevant short-term events for the bilateral relationship vs. % of publications for selected topics



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites.

Short-term events usually generate a greater number of publications. However, current affairs' publications tend to focus on narrating the facts and not on analyzing the existing problems and possible solutions. To name a few, "COVID-19", "US Elections", and "Energy" have been themes present during the monitoring period, mainly because of an event. In contrast, it has also been identified that there are also medium- and long-term issues that are frequently present in the publications. "International Trade" and "Security and Governance" were the most popular themes in the reports of the second half of 2020. While "Immigration" and "Institutional Relationship" have appeared as the most popular topics during the year 2021. Finally, it should be noted that Mexican Think Tanks mainly publish articles on current issues; they generally tend to post about the domestic agenda and rarely post about the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. in the medium- or long-term.

2. Content Analysis

For the five most mentioned topics, an analysis was carried out on the content of the publications associated with each topic. This analysis involved appraisal of more than 358 thousand words contained in the published texts.

Table 2: Number of publications for top 5 topics

Topic	No. Publications
Institutional Relationship	157
International Trade	108
Immigration	90
Security and Governance	82
Energy	46

Institutional Relationship

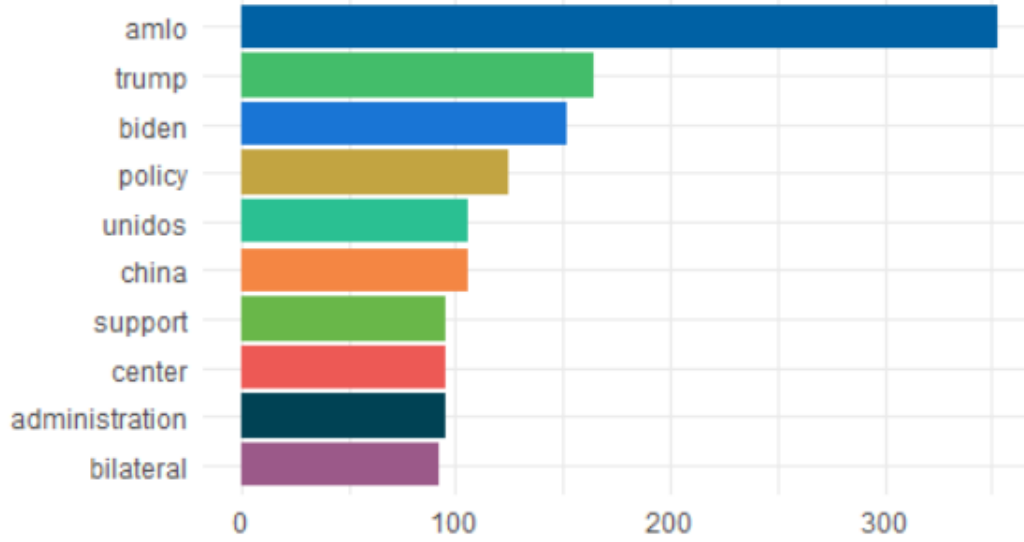
This topic includes all publications that refer to policies between Mexico and the United States, excluding those whose focus is trade policy, as well as meetings between leaders and diplomacy. Figure 6 shows 20% of the most mentioned words in the articles classified within this category and figure 7 the most mentioned words and the number of occurrences.

Figure 6: 20% of the most mentioned words for: Institutional Relationship



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

Figure 7: Number of appearances per word



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

On the other hand, figure 8 shows the most common relationships between words. Phrases such as: economic development, supply chains, improve understanding and communication, policy issues, and encouraging public discussion, among others were found.

Figure 8: Most common combination of words for Institutional Relationship



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

Figure 13: Number of appearances per word

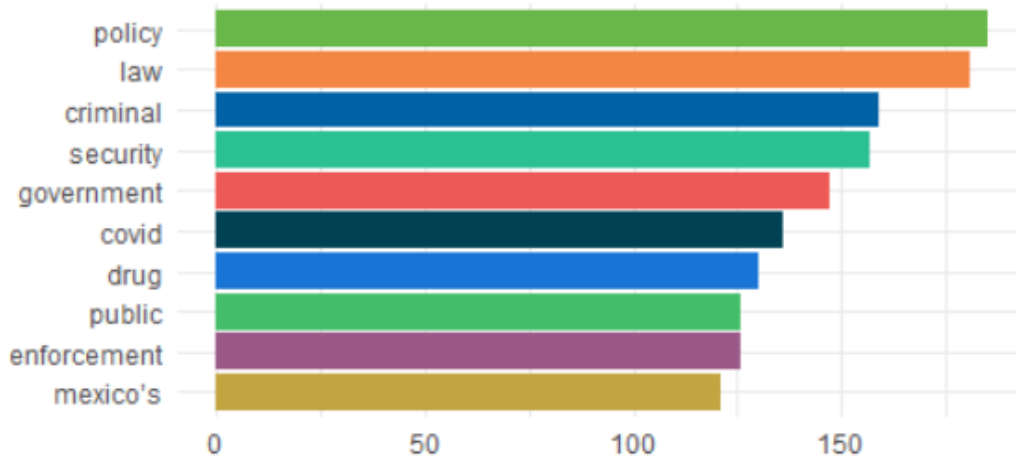


Figure 14 shows the most common relationships between these words. The word network analysis for the topic of security and governance, from which phrases such as: poppy cultivation & cannabis legalization, Sinaloa cartel, organized crime, Merida initiative, law enforcement, money laundering, and national security cooperation, among others were identified.

Figure 14: Most common combination of words for Security and Governance



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

Immigration

The topic includes all publications that refer to the border, immigration policy, the migrant community in both countries, as well as their rights. Figure 15 shows the 20% of the most mentioned words in the articles classified within this category. Likewise, figure 16 shows the ten most mentioned words and the number of occurrences. Finally, figure 17 shows the most common relationships between these words.

Figure 15: 20% of the most mentioned words for: Immigration

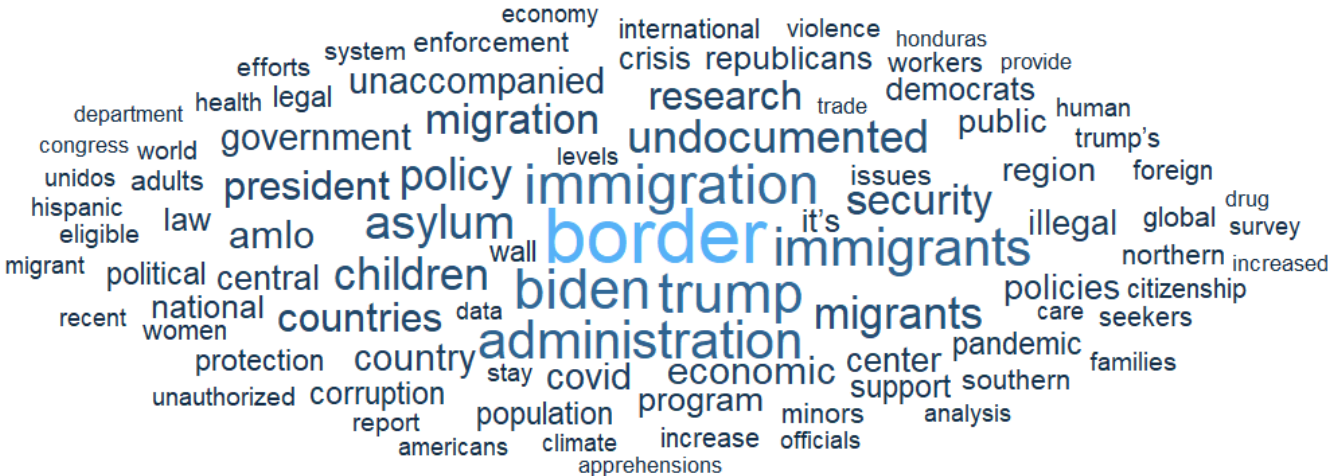


Figure 16: Number of appearances per word

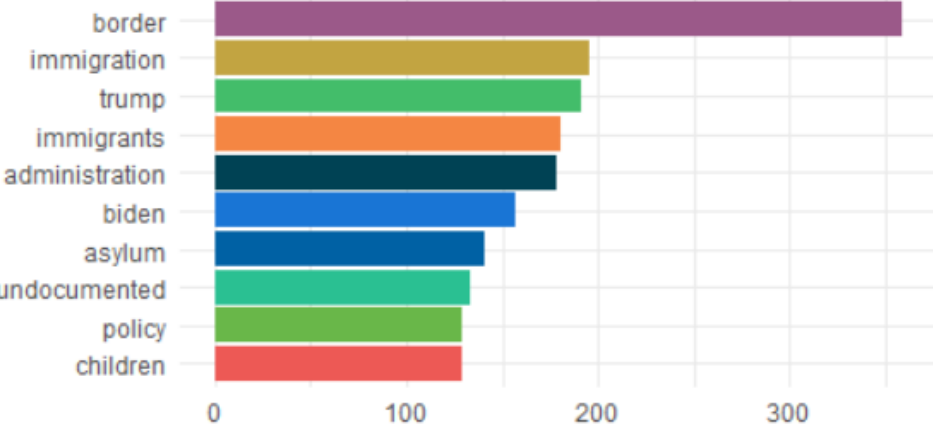


Figure 17: Most common combination of words for Immigration



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

In this case, groups of words were identified which phrases such as: asylum seekers, human trafficking, immigration policy, child migrants, and humanitarian assistance, among others.

Energy

This topic includes all publications that refer to the energy environment of both countries. It touches on issues like the electrical and oil industry, renewable energy, fracking, and climate change. Figure 18 shows 20% of the most mentioned words in this category. Likewise, figure 19 shows the ten most mentioned words and the number of occurrences.

On the other hand, figure 20 shows the most common relationships between words. In this case, groups of words were identified from which phrases such as: oil production, economic growth, energy transition and national security can be recognized, among others.

Figure 18: 20% of the most mentioned words for: Energy

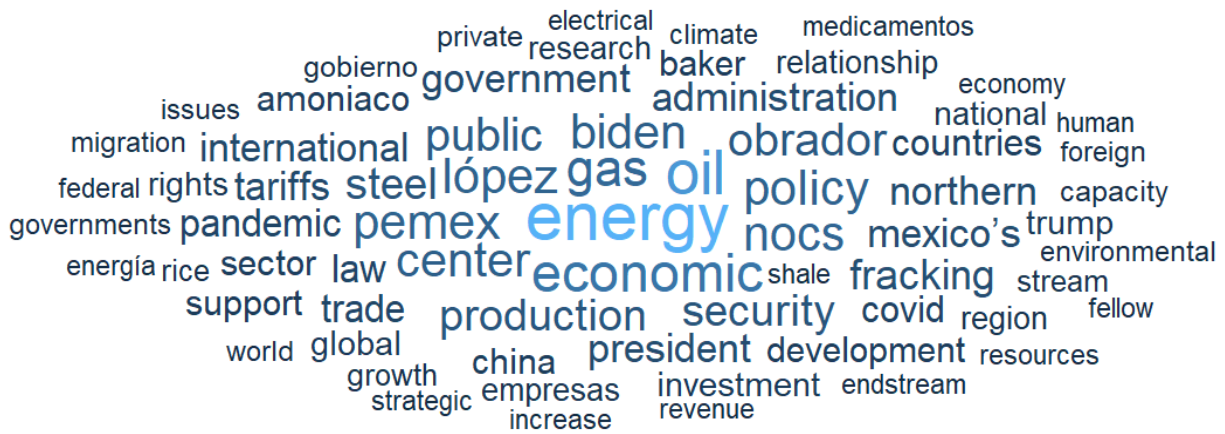


Figure 19: Number of appearances per word

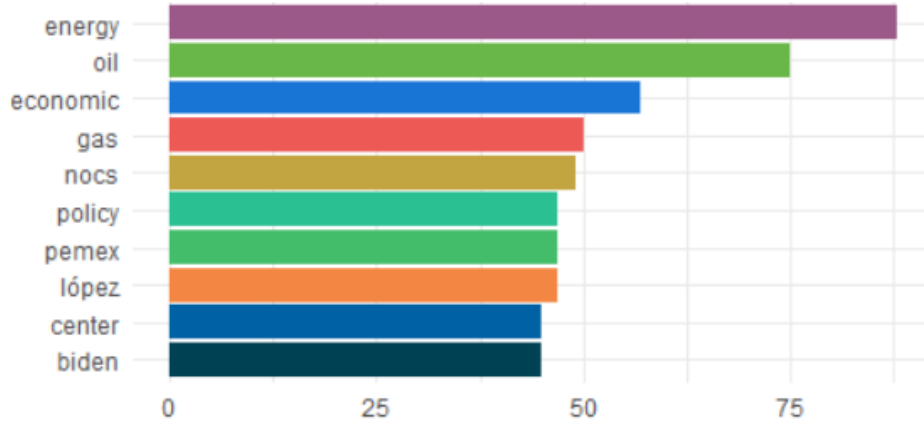
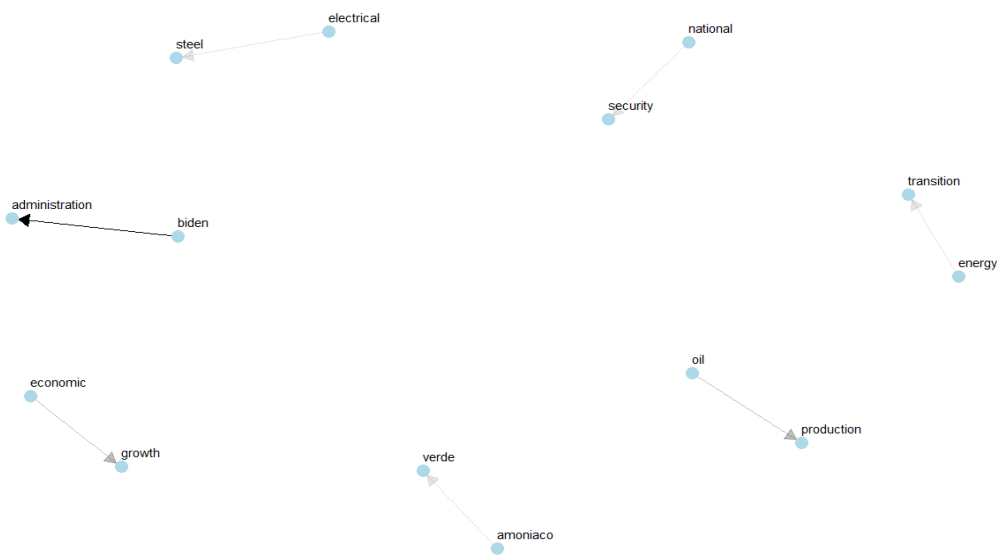


Figure 20: Most common combination of words for Institutional Relationship



Source: USMF-IMCO with data collected from Think Tanks websites

3. Opportunities

Think Tanks tend to publish articles related to current events; the frequency of appearance of a topic is not always synonymous with in-depth analysis. Likewise, although there are Think Tanks that consistently address certain issues of the bilateral relationship, there is a gap in the publications for the long-term agenda that are only being addressed superficially or do not even appear in the publications. We identify that there is an opportunity to accompany the topics addressed with recommendations and analysis that propose possible solutions.

These following issues are among those that are scarcely addressed in the publications:

1. It is necessary to promote the strengthening of the **binational institutional architecture**, since it has proven useful to generate better cooperation mechanisms between both nations that are functional and efficient regardless of the conditions in which one or both nations find themselves. This could be a way to maintain stability, continuity, and progress between the two countries, without having to depend on political will.
2. The **integration and mobility of the labor force** is essential to generate a coordinated bilateral economic policy. Both Mexico and the United States could benefit from greater labor mobility. This would help develop a bilateral agenda that equips the workforce with the necessary toolkits for current and future economic demands. Also, it would help foster innovation, so that integration is accompanied by inclusive economic growth, regional development, and poverty reduction. Currently, the labor market phenomenon in the US could be a key example to promote labor mobility policies between the two countries.²
3. **Regional development of the border area**, we must recognize and work on the economic development opportunities derived from being one of the busiest crossings in the world. Although there have been significant improvements in border administration and management by both countries, there is still a lack of cooperation and investment to modernize these crossings to be more efficient and beneficial. This could lead to better public services and regional development.
4. The **supply chain** between the two countries was an aspect that shook several industries during the pandemic. Several economic activities had to be suspended, interrupting supply chains completely, coupled with border closures. However, Think Tanks did little to address

² PIIE, June 2021
<https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/follow-trend-us-demand-back-supply-lagging-both-are-likely-grow>

the relevance of the issue. Supply chains must be robust enough to supply the economic activity derived from the USMCA, this also implies the necessary infrastructure to do so.

5. **Agriculture** is another issue absent from the publications, despite the importance of the agroindustry in the relationship between the two countries. Mexico is the largest agricultural trading partner of the United States in terms of combined exports and imports. In 2020, Mexico accounted for 12.2% of US agricultural exports and 22.5% of US agricultural imports³. Health issues, technological innovation, environmentally friendly crops, environmental issues and the quality and wholesomeness of the products should be included in this category.
6. **Immigration policy**, although several Think Tanks have addressed immigration issues, there has not been a formal space to propose policies on an immigration reform that address the fundamental issue of the southern border of Mexico and the U.S. - Mexico border. This space would open a debate to analyze the challenging and sensitive topics that must be included in a reform, as well as possible paths to the current situation.

4. Conclusion

Part of the U.S. - Mexico relationship is written by Think Tanks, these also help to build the long-term government agenda. That is why their active participation is crucial, not only in current affairs, but also when conducting in-depth analysis of political, economic, and social issues, which in turn help to have greater cooperation and a stronger bilateral relationship.

Given the opportunities identified, we consider that one of the most relevant findings of this analysis is the impulse to the continuous construction of a binational institutional architecture. This largely depends on the efforts of civil society to strengthen and demand better mechanisms to guarantee their rights and a better quality of life. Think Tanks have a very important role to play, one of their main assets is the independence to publish on different topics, their analysis tools, their prestige, and the capacity to inform the population; opening the debate on relevant issues from different perspectives to face current and future challenges while proposing solutions. For this reason, it is necessary to strengthen the synergy that exists between the Think Tank community and the governments of both countries to create mutual support that results in the creation of public policies that benefit both countries and their population.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-us-trade/countries-regions/usmca-canada-mexico/mexico-trade-fdi/>

5. Annex

Annex A

Think Tanks included in the study

The Think Tanks included were chosen by the USMF and IMCO at the beginning of the project. A list was compiled and based on their importance, focus, and affinity in terms of the bilateral relationship it was decided which of these would be monitored. Some Think Tanks have been added throughout the year since the team considered them pertinent. Similarly, it is possible to add Think Tanks if beneficial to the project.

United States: American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Atlantic Council AALAC, Baker Institute, Brookings, Center for American Progress (CAP), Center for International Development (CID), Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Heritage Foundation, Hudson Institute, Mexico Institute, Peterson, Pew Research Center, Center for US-Mexican Studies at UCSD (USMEX).

Mexico: Aspen Institute México, Centro de Estudios Espinosa Yglesias (CEEY), Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), Colegio de México (COLMEX), Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales (COMEXI), Fundación Idea, Fundar, Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad (IMCO), México Evalúa, The Coppel-Intuit Center for Binational Institutions.

Methodology

- The compilation of publications was carried out on the Think Tanks main websites as well as Think Tanks blog sites.
- Publications were classified into general topics based on their content.
- On each publication url, a *web scraping* was performed of the html code, from where all the texts included in the portal were obtained.
- Graphics and text analysis were performed in Excel and R software.