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WEBINAR

MARAS, MIGRANTS, AND MEXICO: POLICY ISSUES FOR THE NEXT US ADMINISTRATION

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Good afternoon. I am Vanda Felbab-Brown, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and I welcome you today to our Brookings event on “Maras, Mexico, and Migrants.” The focus is on U.S. policy in Mexico and Central America.

Brookings is a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, D.C. Our mission is to conduct in-depth research that leads to new ideas on how to deal with global as well as local policy challenges. And, of course, the U.S. relationship with Mexico and Central America is a vital one. It is one that has preoccupied much of the existing administration of Donald Trump. His campaign focuses on that relationship very much today as it did in 2016. And it’s often something that has long been at the center of focus for any U.S. administration, including the next administration.

And in our webinar today we are going to be exploring some of the key dimensions of the issues facing the forthcoming administration. For that, we have a terrific panel.

We will start with Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan, who is a former Mexican ambassador to the United States. We are also very fortunate to be able to claim Ambassador Sarukhan as a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings. Among his many distinguished accomplishments is also the fact that he was the first accredited ambassador to the United States to pioneer digital diplomacy particularly restricted in his official capacity. In addition to what you will hear from Arturo today, you can also read his views in both his occasional Brookings blog and his biweekly column in El Universal.

We are also very fortunate to be joined by Steven Dudley, who is the co-founder and co-director of InSight Crime. Steve has a long career as a distinguished investigative journalist who has focused extensively on Latin America, worked all across Latin America in many capacities and for many major newspapers. He is also the author of a fresh book called “MS-13: The Making of America’s Most Notorious Gang.” And I highly recommend the book. Some very terrific investigative as well as analytical work.

Another highly distinguished speaker is Professor Alexandra Délano Alonso, associated professor and chair of Global Studies at The New School in New York. She is also the current holder of

the Eugene Lang Professorship for Excellence in Teaching and Mentorship, as well as the co-founder and former co-director of the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility. And indeed, her work on migration issues and communities across the border are of leading renown.

And finally, I will moderate the event and join in with my remarks.

So, we will now do two rounds across our speakers. First, we will lay out some of the basic facts and developments over the past four years in U.S.-Mexican relationship in Central America and U.S. relations with Central America, particularly as they pertain to migration, the maras, criminal gangs, crime, and border security. And we will then do a second round in which all of our speakers will provide their own policy recommendation and thoughts for what the policies should be for the next administration, what is likely to be, what are some of the pitfalls, and what are some of the positive possibilities for the next administration.

With that, let me first, please, turn to Ambassador Sarukhan. Mr. Ambassador, I would be grateful if you could reflect on key issues in Mexico over the past four years and in the U.S.-Mexican relationship.

AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN: Thank you, Vanda. And it's a great pleasure to be here with you and with Alexandra and Steve, two individuals who worked hard and long hours trying to understand some of the structural dynamics that impact public insecurity in Central American, which is particularly Honduras and El Salvador, an important push factor; a bit different in Guatemala. And Alexandra, who has studied immigration issues for so many years and, more importantly, how a lot of these issues then play out in the United States with diaspora communities here in the U.S.

Let me start by trying to frame the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship in all of this. Because I know that every political cycle we're used to the cliché that this is the most important election in our lifetime. I think certainly this is most important election for the democratic life of the United States. We don't have to go as far back as even last week and the first presidential debate to understand why this is so. But it also happens to be an extremely consequential U.S. presidential election for Mexico; in many ways, one of three particularly consequential U.S. elections in the recent history of U.S.-Mexico

bilateral relationship.

The first one was in -- sorry, the first one was in 1992 during the last phase of negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. And the other two were in 2016 with the Clinton-Trump campaign, and now in this one.

There are commonalities and differences with these three elections. The commonality is that it's been in these electoral processes where the Mexico has in some way or another played a role in the U.S. election. The difference is that whereas in 1992 the Mexican government overtly supported the reelection of George H. Bush because the government of Carlos Salinas was concerned because of the rhetoric during the Democratic campaign of what would happen if Bill Clinton won the election on the negotiation that had finished on NAFTA and Mexico overtly supported George H. Bush's reelection.

The 2016 and this presidential cycle probably weren't as overt as what happened in 1992. One more than the other, I think; certainly this trip by President López Obrador to visit Donald Trump at the White House in July, despite all the signs and all the counsel to postpone the visit after the November elections. But commonality between the 2016 and the 2020 U.S. presidential elections is that both administrations, the Peña Nieto administration and the López Obrador administration, seemed to have been oblivious to the political electoral impact of the decisions that Peña Nieto administration made in inviting then-candidate Trump, the decisions that the López Obrador administration made in reconfirming a trip that had already been postponed and coming up in July; oblivious to the impact that has had and will have on Democratic candidates, Democratic leadership, and Democratic members of Congress.

Having said this, I firmly believe that we face a very complex moment in the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship. Setting rhetoric aside, setting the fact that Mexico for the 2016 campaign and for most of the Trump administration has been the President's political electoral piñata, this relationship is facing a unique challenge for two or three reasons. It has lost strategic traction and vision.

Some of that has been picked up again as a result of the COVID pandemic and the

sudden awareness by not only Mexico and the United States, but also Canada, that when supply chains of essential strategic sectors in the United States got disrupted as a result of COVID and the shutdown, the three countries realized something that should have been apparent from the get-go, which was that they needed to work together to ensure that disruptions in the supply chains were mitigated by aligning essential sectors in the three North American countries; seeking to ensure that there was as much symmetry as possible in terms of the essential -- sectors that were deemed essential by each one of the three countries. So, a bit of that is being picked up, but certainly the type of strategic dialogue, strategic traction that was achieved particularly in the Bush 43, George W. Bush, and Obama administration has been lost.

Second one, two of the pillars of the modern era relationship, particularly as a result of the negotiation of NAFTA, the principle of no surprises. That is, that one country will not surprise the other with policies coming out of the left field. That has been jettisoned.

And another key principle that finally morphed as one of the key paradigms of the U.S.-Mexico bilateral relationship with George W. Bush and then with President Obama, the principle of joint responsibility. That is, that in this very complex bilateral relationship, the only way Mexico and the United States will be able to deal constructively and effectively with many of the policy challenges, whether it's border infrastructure or drugs or immigration or scarce water resources on the Rio Grande and Colorado River Basins, that a sense of shared responsibility of co-stakeholdership on the fact that for us to be able to move the agenda forward, both countries need to have a sense of joint responsibility; that only together, by working together will we be able to move this agenda forward.

And what we've seen displace that is a policy coming from Washington, coming from the White House, of ultimatums, of what I would call the Sinatra policy of my way or the highway, which was evident last year when President Trump decided to link two separate issues, trade and immigration policy, and threatened Mexico with punitive tariffs unless Mexico stopped transmigration patterns of Central Americans through Mexico on the way to the United States. Forgetting that you can't enforce your way out of a migration crisis.

Where this relationship goes forward, we'll obviously have to wait until we know what happens come November 3rd and whether there are costs regarding how Mexico has played, whether it's a fair or unfair assessment. But there is a perception in Washington, in Democratic circles, that Mexico has jumped on the electoral bandwagon of Donald Trump twice now, in 2015 and 2016, and now in 2020. We won't be able to measure that until we know, A, who's won the White House; and, B, whether Democrats were able to wrest majority control in the Senate away from the Republicans or not.

But I think sort of what I wanted to in my initial five minutes of remarks is sort of try and set the context in which this conversation over immigration policy both of the United States and of Mexico and transmigration patterns in Central America play out.

The only other thing that I would probably say is that in my mind, and I'll be very blunt and frank, there's no better outcome for the future of the U.S.-Mexico relationship than a Biden victory simply in terms of the rhetoric. Simply in terms of the narrative of having a man in the White House that probably of all the politicians in Washington today is the one that knows the relationship with Mexico better than anyone. Joe Biden has been present at the creation, so to say, in every single one of those definitive moments of what this modern relationship between Mexico and the United States looks like today.

NAFTA, the peso bailout in 1994, the elimination of the unilateral congressional drug certification process, the establishment of a more forward-looking security and intelligence relationship in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the U.S. in 2001, the enhanced and the deepened law enforcement collaboration with the Merida Initiative, and the first signs of these important shifts in migrations patterns of Central Americans coming through Mexico when we had the crises of unaccompanied minors from Central America showing up on the Mexico-U.S. border in 2014. Joe Biden has been at the forefront of every single one of these very important emblematic moments in modern U.S.-Mexico relationships. He knows the relationship like very few people in Washington do today.

I think you're muted, Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. For some reason my mic keeps switching itself off.

Thank you for the reminder.

So, thank you very much, Ambassador Sarukhan, for this excellent overview of the relationship over the past four years and really going historically back.

I would remind everyone now that, as I mentioned, Brookings is an independent, nonpartisan institution focused on the research. There is no Brookings institutional position on anything. And the comments and remarks of all of us, each of our speakers, both our guest speakers and Brookings personnel, are their own and they do not speak for the Institution.

Steve, I would like now to go to you for five minutes to give us your take on what are the key issues with respect to the Central American maras and how they impact on U.S. policymaking. I mentioned your terrific book, "MS-13: The Making of America's Most Notorious Gang." A very useful background and current narrative about what President Trump has made one of his key issues and very many aspects of policy, whether it is privileging of Central American presidents who've tried to cut down on migration. As Ambassador Sarukhan mentioned, drove it as a crucial element, perhaps the dominant element of his relationship with Mexico, but also in the United States, where repeatedly he attempted to direct U.S. law enforcement to focus very strongly on the maras.

What is the reality of the maras? What are their activities like in Central America, key issues on the horizon, and what is the reality in the United States?

MR. DUDLEY: Thanks. Thanks, Vanda. Thanks to Brookings and thanks to the other panelists here. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

That is a lot to cover in five minutes, Vanda, so I'm going to narrow it down a little bit. And I also don't envy the ambassador's job of talking Mexico-United States relations because it's so much more complex. The relationship of the United States with most of Central America really centers on these two questions of migration and gangs. I'm going to focus just a couple of comments about what we're seeing as it relates to gangs in the region right now.

Three quick points and then we can talk a little bit more later in the Q&A. But the first is just thinking about this pandemic and a little bit about what it's revealed. And what it's revealed in, I

would say, a limited but certainly important extent is this idea that there is an increasing amount of gangs that exert what I would call criminal governance in certain spaces, in physical spaces, in territories, neighborhoods, that they control.

We've seen this in the fact that they have been the ones who have been controlling in certain instances the handouts that are given in certain areas. In particular, in El Salvador and in some spaces in Guatemala there have been efforts on their part to exert control over quarantines and those sorts of thing. So, we've seen them sort of exert some sort of criminal governance where they become the de facto government in those spaces.

We would expect that to continue and perhaps even expand because the way that these governments are dealing with this is just not sustainable. It's going to be very hard for them given limited resources to have the kind of presence that they've had in terms of the street presence of police and military for a sustained amount of time. So, we would expect that to continue, an almost certain amount of reliance on the government -- or on the criminals to exert that control over those spaces.

And that leads me to the second observation of what we're seeing in the region. And that is that governments are increasingly having to negotiate that space with the gangs that are operational in some of those territories and, in particular, with the gang that I wrote the book about, the MS-13. These kind of what I would call informal packs are very difficult to wrap your hands around because they're not -- obviously there's nothing written there. They're very much under the table. They're secret negotiations. And the quid pro quo isn't always clear.

What we're seeing in a space like El Salvador is a swapping of -- sort of putting the gangs and the gang allies at the front of the line in terms of what they can receive in terms of assistance and controlling that assistance that comes into neighborhoods that they control. So that they can then divvy out that assistance and thereby gain this sort of political and social capital that comes with the control of those resources.

And in return, you see lower levels of violence and space for political activities, namely campaigning. So, this is the type of quid pro quo that you can begin to see in these spaces. And maybe I

shouldn't say "begin" because this has been a process and it's something that I chronicle in my book in detail, which is this increasing political involvement of the gangs themselves. They're understanding that they are political actors, and this is kind of de facto political actors.

They're largely devoid of ideology in that regard, but they have -- they're kind of a manifestation of a lot of failures. So, they find themselves in a political position almost by default. And they've used their increasing amount of political power to create these kind of informal exchanges with political parties and government actors. So, that's the second thing that we're seeing in the region.

The third thing we're seeing in the region as it relates to gangs is that there are lower levels of violence, and that's most evidence as it relates to homicide. But the gangs themselves continue to operate in their areas of influence, most notably as it relates to their very hand-to-mouth criminal economies.

Gangs are still largely predatory criminal actors in the sense that they are extracting rent from all of those that are operational around them, in particular informal vendors or local shops or mechanics. And they're extorting money from those actors.

There are other parts or parts of the gang, I should say, that are a little bit more sophisticated and certainly are, you know, raising red flags for us. Probably the most notable of them is there are factions of the MS-13 operational in Honduras that have moved from drug peddlers to wholesale distributors and are possibly now controlling drug routes themselves, which would put them in a whole other category. So, that evolution is very worrying.

And all of these things kind of put together is something that really causes headaches inside the United States Government to no end. So, this sort of combination of criminal governance, these sort of informal pacts that are going on, but the continued criminal operations of these gangs leads to a lot of migration. And so that is obviously a major concern for the United States.

And with that, I'll close it. Thanks.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Steve, if I can ask you one quick follow-up. What about the gangs in the United States that was at the core of President Trump's many law enforcement actions?

What is the reality of what they look like in Long Island and other parts of the country?

MR. DUDLEY: They're mostly very small cells, not nearly as big as what they call cliques that operate in Central America. So, we're talking about cells of 10 to 15 to 20 tops as opposed to upwards of 50 to 70 in places like Central America. So, in terms of size, they're smaller.

They are much more part-timers. You know, most of them have jobs unless they're teenagers who are in school and whatnot. So, their relationship to the gang is a little bit different in that regard.

Most of the havoc that they wreak in the United States is related to violence. The gang gains their strength in a lot of ways by committing collective acts of violence. This is what fortifies them as a group, this kind of anti-social group. And that is the thing that is most impacting communities in the United States.

They certainly do extort on a small level. There are some areas where they're very vibrant actors in the drug market and other markets, especially in places where they've been around for now 40 years, like Los Angeles. But their sophistication as an organization, both as kind of a social criminal organization and as just kind of as a criminal gang, it's much less so in the United States.

And the last thing I would say about that is that the gang -- and I'm speaking about "the gang," it's mostly about the MS-13, but certainly the 18th Street, as well -- there is no kind of central leadership. That is, you know, the sort of picture that people get is that somebody's kind of moving around their cliques and their members like they were pieces on a chessboard. That's not happening. That's not how this works. It's very organic. They move with the way migrants move, in the same general pattern, and not even at the behest of the gang. They're moving mostly for their own reasons.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much, Steve.

Professor Délano, if I can, I'll turn to you. Both Ambassador Sarukhan and Director Dudley spoke about migration. Migration as being at the centerpiece of U.S.-Mexico relations during the Trump administration. Migration as being a focus of the United States in Central America, where the maras are one of the sources of migration; poverty; as well as natural disaster being another important

one. It is, of course, something that has defined so much of the Trump administration, an enormous anti-immigration, anti-legal immigration, as well as anti-illegal immigration thrust.

Just last week, the Trump administration announced major operations in sanctuary cities against undocumented migrants as part of the campaign.

Can you please give us the core issues that we should be aware regarding migration in Mexico, through Mexico from Central America, and in the United States?

MS. DÉLANO ALONSO: Thank you so much, Vanda. And it's a pleasure to join my fellow panelists and be part of this event.

So, I'd like to start just by pointing out that, of course, it's nothing new to establish that there has been a significant deterioration of conditions for the protection of migrant rights in the past four years, since the beginning of the Trump administration, and even before. But I want to emphasize in my remarks that this is an issue that is not just a Trump issue; that some of these conditions were present before. And also that the deterioration and the precarity that migrants are facing is not just on the U.S. side of the border, but also on the Mexican side.

So, from both countries we've seen an increasing focus on border enforcement, more limits in the access to asylum, and a move away from policies focused on regularization of flows and inclusion; a move away from principles of shared responsibility that Ambassador Sarukhan already touched on, including the need to focus and address the structural conditions that push and pull migrants from Mexico, Central America, and other countries into the U.S. and Canada.

It's obvious that the Trump administration has built a restrictionist and anti-immigrant climate that includes Executive Orders and policies that go from the travel ban to an increase in rates on deportations without distinction to different migrant conditions, families, et cetera. Ending the temporary protected status programs, the fight for the rescission of DACA, the public charge measures that restrict access to public services for non-citizens, lowering refugee admissions, the refusal of asylum, the backlogs in the courts.

So, all of this is a very difficult context to revert if there is a new administration. But also,

the fact that it has been built on a xenophobic and anti-immigrant discourse that's not just anti-Mexican, but anti-Muslim, anti-African, anti-China. That has left communities in a very vulnerable situation subject to discrimination and exclusion that will take more than a change in the policies from the upper level, from the higher level to revert.

And on this point it's important to keep in mind for our discussion regarding the potential for a transition is that a lot of this infrastructure, especially the structure for deportation, detention, border enforcement, is not new. It was built by Democratic and Republican presidents alike since the 1990s, but it was significantly reinforced during the Obama-Biden administration.

So, if Trump wins again, obviously there's not much to expect rather than further deportation -- further deterioration of these conditions with an increase in deportation, detention, raids, and limits to access to services, which will push towards more local government responses and community resistance, as you were reciting referring to sanctuary city policies, which are also under attack. But it's likely that these conditions would be further strained if Trump were to be reelected, especially if the balance in the Supreme Court changes. Because a lot of the possibility for challenging or limiting the effects of Trump policies has been based on a fight in the courts to delay some of these measures or revert them. But if there is a change in balance, that would become more difficult.

If Biden wins, many of these actions could be reverted through executive action just as it was done during the Obama administration and then which Trump used on the opposite side. But it's not necessarily that easy or straightforward to change these conditions and especially without an approach from Biden that hasn't been clear so far about truly addressing the structural conditions that have generated some of this context for these policies to be enacted.

I think especially we need to take into account how the effects of COVID-19 are going to also create different conditions through which some of these debates are going to take place given the changing priorities, the economic impact of COVID, and how that has also been part of strengthening arguments for further control of borders, restrictions to immigration, and protection of certain sectors of the economy at the expense of immigrant rights or immigrant labor.

On the Mexican side there was a lot of hope that the López Obrador administration, elected into office in 2018, would shift away from this focus on enforcement and the lack of protection for migrants rights, which had been prevalent during the Peña Nieto era, especially through the programa from Terra Sul, which ended up also being a policy of border enforcement, although it was framed as a program that would support safe, orderly, and regular flows. But, in fact, this program was enacted in the context of weak rule of law and rampant corruption within the National Institute for Migration and the police, which, in fact, led to an increase in violence, kidnappings, extortion, sexual abuse, trafficking, disappearance, and death of migrants along migration routes, which has been present for many years and leaves migrants in transit in very vulnerable conditions.

Mexico has also more than doubled the number of deportations and detentions from Mexico to Central America, sometimes in even worse conditions than the ones it argues against in the U.S.-Mexico context. And migrants face more risk in their journeys through Mexico.

Although migration wasn't really a priority during López Obrador's campaign and his agenda is surprisingly limited, particularly given the fact that he was running in a context of Trump administration where migration was such an important issue. But in response to that, AMLO's government consistently has expressed that development would be the answer to the pressures of migration; that it would reduce the push to migrate north, making it a choice rather than a necessity. And that the best foreign policy would be a domestic policy of strengthening the economy and other policies for protection within Mexico rather than respond to pressures from the Trump administration.

So, there was a lot of hope that that would signal a very significant change in Mexico's agenda and possibly shift conditions in the region. But in reality, this short-lived optimism was quickly stunted in the context of the so-called "migrant caravans" that took hold of the public's attention in the last month of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, and then marked fully the administration's agenda so far.

So, the López Obrador administration quickly shifted from a discourse of open doors and solidarity or a promise of jobs for anyone from Central America that came to Mexico or humanitarian visas, or the promise of regional development as a way to shift structural conditions. Instead, calling for

stricter policies at the southern border bringing the Guardia Nacional, which is a new police force that's not trained or connected to the migration agency or trained on migration issues.

And instead we've seen a stricter enforcement of border controls, a discourse of criminalization that replicates some of the same ideas that have trickled down from the U.S., even leading to anti-immigrant sentiment in Mexico with campaigns like Make Tijuana Great Again. And challenging the presence of migrant camps in the southern border and migrant camps that have been established on the northern border as a result of the Migrant Protection Protocols Program remain in -- or remain in Mexico.

We've also seen instead of increasing support for the migration agencies that are dealing with these new flows, both return migration, transit migration, and asylum seekers from Central America and other countries, we've seen budget cuts and lack of infrastructure to support some of the work that would need to be done in response through a framework of protection and humanitarianism.

And I'll end with just a point that the migrant protection protocols have been sort of the main policy now that has driven Mexico's agenda in response to pressures from the United States. Although it's supposedly not accepting the condition of becoming a safe third country, de facto that's what Mexico has become and possibly worse than that because more than 60,000 people have been returned to Mexico. And without sort of formal protocol from the Mexican side, they live in unsanitary and unsafe conditions in some of the most dangerous areas of the country where there is a lot of presence of drug cartels and other forms of organized crime, and where it's practically impossible for them to access legal support from the U.S. side or from lawyers on the other side of the border.

So, the conditions have become increasingly dire and Mexico has not really put forward an alternative agenda that we could sort of see as a signal of hope if there was an opening on the U.S. side with a change of power -- a change of party. Mexico has uncritically joined discourse that's prevalent in the U.S. and in other parts of the world of, you know, we're facing a migration crisis, a migration emergency. And Mexico, like many other countries, has just emphasized control and security at the expense of a humanitarian approach and a discourse and a practice that truly lives up to the principles

that are already in our laws and that Mexico has been fighting for many years in the international agenda, and also vis-à-vis the U.S. that would prioritize the promotion and protection of human rights over controls and enforcement that Mexico knows very well the consequences that that has for migrants and for their families.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Alexandra, very much. I will come to everyone for a second, much faster round of two minutes of what are the key policy issues to focus on, two, three key points and recommendations for the next administration, whether it is Joe Biden administration or Donald Trump administration.

But before I do that, let me make a few reflections on two related dimensions, which is the U.S.-Mexico border, the wall, and security issues, crime issues in Mexico. Just like migrant mara, the wall was something that President Trump, Candidate Trump campaigned on and made it a centerpiece of his policy, promising to fence off the entire area between the United States and Mexico, to line the border with a wall.

In fact, this project has been stumped by many funding issues. Nonetheless, in this past several months, as we are heading into the 2020 elections, the Trump administration has made a major push to, in fact, build a wall that's mostly a bollard fence, a very tall bollard fence.

So, as of now, 341 miles of new fencing have been constructed. And the tempo has significantly increased with about two miles being added a day. The Trump administration is promising that by the end of this year it will get at least to 450 miles.

This massive push to increase the wall is often taking place at immense environment cost, as well as cost to Native American communities and for the Mexican-American communities. Whether this is draining aquifers and water sources in national protected areas, such as the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, or violent suppression of protests of Native American tribes that are opposed to the destruction of native lands, protected areas, and their homelands, or whether this is dynamiting large parts of mountainous terrain in Arizona, in particular, where often protected species and highly sensitive areas exist.

Now, in order to do so, the Trump administration has waived all kinds of environmental, cultural, and other protections and protections for Native American communities. The situation is particularly dire in Arizona, in the Southwest, more so than in South Texas, where most border land is privately held. And so the Trump administration has not had the same freedom to push with creation of the border wall as it needs to negotiate deals with private owners of lands.

Nonetheless, some of the new wall being built cost about \$40 million per mile. Let me repeat that, \$40 million per mile. This is in some of the most difficult terrain. That's just the initial layout for the construction. Maintenance costs will be very high.

Overall, in my view, as I have documented in my research, the wall is an egregious waste of money that will not stop the flows of drugs or migrants, that will simply divert them to other channels while it exacts enormous environmental, cultural, human damage on communities on both sides of the border and our two countries overall.

Already we are seeing that both those trying to smuggle contraband are figuring ways to do it, as well as those who try to smuggle migrants. We have seen increasing flows of migrants by boats landing on beaches of California. Most drugs are smuggled through legal ports of entry or tunnels dug underneath the border, flown by drones. But we are also increasingly seeing holes being cut through the new fence. Even that is not obviously effective in holding the flow of contraband.

Nonetheless, as this has sucked really much of the focus of the Trump administration with respect to our southern neighbor, cooperation with Mexican authorities with respect to enormously violent, out of control crime in Mexico has weakened. Now, there are two sides to that weakening. One is the Trump administration, but the second is also the interest and focus of the López Obrador administration that came in rejecting U.S.-Mexico cooperation, rejecting on security issues, rejecting what it defined as policies of the previous administration as a war on cartels the President, López Obrador, and key cabinet officials of his administration have denounced, promising instead to focus on socioeconomic, anti-crime policy.

The reality, however, is that while those socioeconomic, anti-crime policies are an

important component of anti-crime strategy, they should not be the sole component. And law enforcement strategies are inevitable. And here is a massive gap in the effort.

Last year was the most violent year in Mexico in terms of homicide. Very many other dimensions of violence continue intensely high. There's been no slowing down of the violence this year. Just like Steve told us about how maras and pandillas in Central America are taking advantage of COVID by building their political capitals through handouts of goods, stipend, and control of territories on all the population. We are seeing exactly the same behavior by criminal groups in Mexico. For a while in April and May, there was almost a contest in Mexican drug trafficking groups as to which one will get their logo on handouts of supplies to local populations affected by COVID.

And of course COVID has had enormous impact on Mexico's economy with the GDP contraction between 5 and perhaps as much as 9 percent. Ambassador Sarukhan already alerted us to some of the economic dimensions when he talked about the disruption of integrated chains between the United States and Mexico. Indeed, the crisis is massive and Mexico is heading to a worse economic recession in decades, significantly impacting many dimensions of what we have been talking about: flows of migrants, the rise of unemployment, the ability to create any kind of economic opportunities for Central American migrants in Mexico, and resources for law enforcement institutions or the anti-crime socioeconomic programs that the López Obrador administration has emphasized so much.

In recent weeks, we have seen the López Obrador administration emphasizing anti-corruption measures and anti-money-laundering measures as the centerpiece of its anti-crime policy and with the hope those would also generate resources for the functioning of various government agencies and for underpinning the redistribution programs that the López Obrador administration wants to adopt.

But I would emphasize that this is a hope. The immediate reality is that the López Obrador administration is starving a budget, institution after institution in Mexico, whether these are institutions devoted to migration or they are institutions devoted to environmental protection.

I would also point out as my last remark really the deafening silence that the López Obrador administration, like the predecessor, Enrique Peña Nieto, administration adopted toward the wall

and toward the immense destruction that the wall, the bollard fence, is causing. Mexico has, of course, refused to pay for it as was inevitable that it would happen despite President Trump's false claims that Mexico would pay for the wall. The money has been sapped from vital U.S. national security policies, whether it's the Coast Guard that's vital for the protection of U.S. ports against terrorism or really the number one priority national security issues such as early warning against weapons of mass destruction attacks. That's where the Trump administration commandeered the vast majority of the money, more than \$10 billion, toward the construction of the wall.

But nonetheless, while Mexico has not paid, the Mexican administration has also been deafening silent. And one reason perhaps might be the priority that the López Obrador administration gave to a negotiation of NAFTA, what became the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. That drove its leaning backward on anything from devoting the National Guard, to stopping migrants, perhaps to issues of the wall. But that agreement is now done.

And so, Arturo, I am turning back to you. Given that UMCA is done, what do you expect the López Obrador administration to focus on in relations with Mexico in the next administration? Whether it is a Joe Biden administration, you spoke very eloquently and at length about Vice President Biden's expertise and knowledge intimately of the U.S.-Mexico, U.S.-Central America relationship, or whether it is a second Trump administration. What do you expect will be the three core issues?

And perhaps I can ask you to focus on it from the perspective of the López Obrador administration. Will they become more vocal on the wall? Will they become more -- less susceptible to an anti-immigration policy of the Trump administration? What are the three core issues and approaches you expect in the next administration?

Ambassador Sarukhan, over to you for three minutes, please.

AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN: First of all, it's very hard to respond to that question in three minutes. I will try.

But just for clarity's sake, and like in any presidential debate, can I have awarded the time back to me? But I'm just clarifying this. The question is what do I expect Mexico's approach to an either

Trump or Biden administration would be? Or what would a Biden or Trump administration approach to Mexico be? It wasn't very clear.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: It's what would a López Obrador administration likely policy be? You already gave us, I think, a very good flavor of what you may expect would be the Vice President Biden policy administration. And if you want to take a few -- part of your time to speak about if it's Trump, too, what would the relationship look like that's great? But I'm also really looking forward to hearing from you how the López Obrador administration will try to interact with the next U.S. administration, what it is likely to make its key priority now that USMCA is signed and passed by both legislatures.

AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN: Yeah. That was clearly probably López Obrador's most important objective in the relationship with the United States: get the USMCA finalized and across the finish line on Capitol Hill in the U.S. And we need to underscore and we need to recognize how important that change in López Obrador's position has been if you compare to how he campaigned in 2006 and how he campaigned in 2012 against NAFTA.

We should not minimize the very important change that President López Obrador -- it's almost like a Damascene moment of the proverbial road to Damascus moment for López Obrador because it is a very important shift in his understanding of the role that trade plays in Mexico's economic wellbeing in regards to the U.S. And we need to recognize the very important decision by López Obrador from the outset of his campaign to throw his full weight behind ensuring the successful termination of the negotiations for USMCA. It's not a minor thing.

It'll obviously depend on who wins the election, obviously. If the Trump administration gets reelected, I think you will see more or less a rehash of what we've seen so far. For whatever reasons, philosophical, political, López Obrador seems determined to avoid any type of confrontation with President Trump. So, if Trump is reelected I think you will see some of that playing forward in the sense of trying to diminish potential areas of contention and disagreement with the United States.

Regardless of who wins, whether it's a Trump administration 2.0 or a Biden administration, I think the opportunity is ripe for Mexico to rethink its immigration policy domestically. That

is, how does Mexico, show a joint responsibility with the United States in ensuring greater operation and control of its southern border with Guatemala and Belize? But, at the same time, develop its own paradigm of what Mexican immigration policy needs to look like, taking into account what I think was a very important piece of the López Obrador presidential campaign, which was understanding the structural causes of Central American migration and transmigration, which obviously with this U.S. administration, the current U.S. administration, have gone through -- have come in for one year and gone out the other side.

But this is something that Mexican government should continue to underscore because if we don't move the needle in terms of the structural, economic, and insecurity causes that have triggered Central American transmigration through Mexico to the United States, what we're going to see is what we're seeing right now. We saw a summer of decreased levels of transmigration. As soon as climatological patterns change in the fall, we immediately start seeing, as we just saw this week and we're probably going to see more, caravans picking up as they try again to make their way up north towards the United States.

So, the opportunities for Mexico developing its own migration paradigm, whether it's a Trump or a Biden administration putting pressure on Mexico to fully fund Mexico's immigration agency, INAMI, and Mexico's refugee agency, COMAR, which have been completely cannibalized and gutted by budget and personnel cuts. And then this is where there might be a nuance between whether there's a Trump reelection or a Biden victory. But I think the conditions are ripe because of what has happened with COVID and ag workers, because of the dynamics in rural ag states in the United States.

And because some sectors of U.S. labor have started to look at this issue in a different way than they had historically and traditionally, there might be a window of opportunity for Mexico and the United States to agree to a temporary worker program for ag workers that allows circular, legal, orderly, transparent, safe, circular labor mobility between Mexico and the United States for the ag sector in the United States. Whether it's a Trump administration, it may be more complex for a number of reasons that have to do with democratic labor politics. But I think that opportunity, regardless of whether it's a Trump

or a Biden administration is there and Mexico should try and push this issue going forward.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you much, Arturo. I know that you will need to leave at 4:15. We have on till 4:30 for the event, so let me take two questions from the audience or bunch several questions from the audience that I think you'll be best suited to answer.

One is, what's the difference between NAFTA and USMCA? What really has been accomplished with all the effort that it took during the negotiation? What are the most fundamental differences?

And related to that and the discussion that you just started, one of the questions from the audience is, as U.S. and Mexico are trying to rebuild integrated chains and adopt them, both to the reality and shock of COVID and a new pandemic may easily come in three or five years, as well as to the new parameters of USMCA, should there be an effort to integrate Central America? Is Central America positioned equally to be integrated into these integrated economic chains? Would it help address issues of migration?

AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN: Let me start with the second question. And the short answer would be, yes, it would, it would help. Anything that creates sustainable economic growth and social wellbeing in the three Northern Triangle countries will have an impact in mitigating the push factors.

Now, remember that the push factors in Honduras and El Salvador are different from the push factors in Guatemala. Guatemalan migration to the United States via Mexico tends to be more rural and more economic and now climate change driven, where as migration from El Salvador and Honduras tends to be more urban and more driven by conditions of public insecurity. So, there isn't a one-size-fits-all for the three Northern Triangle countries, but certainly anything that helps build economic resilience and strength will have long-term impact in anchoring labor in the Northern Triangle countries.

Now, having said that, what you just posted or the question that is being asked is easier posted than done. Integrating Central American countries to North American supply chains, in part those supply chains exist because there's a free trade agreement between the three North American countries that has allowed those integrated supply chains and joint production platforms to evolve over the 20

years-plus of NAFTA. So, it's harder to think of something as wholistic as that, but maybe in certain specific sectors you can create nearshoring, maybe Mexican nearshoring, offshoring, in the Central American republics linked to Mexican production, but then that gets linked into the North American market.

On the first question of USMCA-NAFTA differences, first of all, I think we have to recognize that USMCA's most important achievement was that it allowed North American trade to survive to fight another day. The possibility that we could have been left without a North American framework could have morphed. And the fact that today we have, give or take, more or less an updated, modernized version of NAFTA is no small feat. And we have to recognize the enormous work of Canadian, U.S., and Mexican officials in ensuring that North American regional trade did not fall over the side as a result of the political pressures and this U.S. administration's mercantilist view of trade. So, having NAFTA survive in the form of USMCA is in and of itself a very important achievement.

The second issue which is very important for USMCA is that in many ways, with one exception, it has modernized the edifice of North American trade. When I was ambassador, I would say that if you looked at -- I was fond of saying that if you looked at NAFTA, NAFTA -- if you looked at trade flows between the three North American countries, NAFTA was a 21st century agreement. That is, these integrated supply chains, joint production platforms had triggered a model which was unique and which heralded in the type of regional-subregional integration which now with COVID probably is going to become ever more present.

If you looked at the regulatory framework for NAFTA, NAFTA was a 20th century agreement. Why? Because it was negotiated back in 1993, when things like e-commerce and Amazon and eBay -- I'm not selling any product here -- when sort of digital e-commerce platforms did not exist. And the fact that you have those disciplines now in the current USMCA is a very important achievement because when NAFTA was negotiated it was the gold standard of free trade agreements at the time, but the economy changed. And if you looked at the regulatory framework of NAFTA with side agreements on labor and on the environment, which were part of the core text of the agreement and the disciplines, it

was a 20th century agreement dealing with 21st century flows.

But if you looked at infrastructure, NAFTA was a 19th century agreement. When I was ambassador, we inaugurated the first railroad crossing on the U.S.-Mexico border to be built since the Mexican Revolution of 1910. And if you look at those \$1.4 billion of trade that go across our border every day, if you look at the challenges that have arisen as a result of the disruption of COVID, it is clear that our border infrastructure, both on the Canadian-U.S. border and on the Mexico-U.S. border, is woefully inadequate and outdated. But we really have to invest in modernizing our border infrastructure not only in terms of connectivity of electricity grids on either side of the border, but in terms of Customs clearance facilities, ports of entry. We really need to ratchet up that border infrastructure so that it now matches a 21st century framework and the type of 21st century flows that we need to take into account.

Where I think USMCA has fallen short, if not even gone backwards, is in the auto parts, automotive sector whereby increasing rules of origin for North American content. What we're really doing is hampering the automotive and auto parts industries in North America from competing in the region where sales of cars are increasing, and it's not North America, it's in Asia, South Asia. And if we want to compete there, these new thresholds for rules of origin may come back to bite us down the road in terms of our ability, North America's ability, to remain competitive in those key Asian markets for cars.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you so much, Ambassador Sarukhan. Enormously enlightening comments. As always, we are delighted that you could join our event and we can learn from your views. I hope to have a chance to come back to you with more questions, but if it doesn't happen, as I will now go to Steve and Alexandra, knowing that you need to leave at 4:15, my enormous thanks to you, and also for your work on behalf of the U.S.-Mexican relationship.

AMBASSADOR SARUKHAN: Thank you. And I'll be on until 4:15. So, if anything morphs us, there's a question, I'm here.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Fantastic. Steve, let me turn to you. The issue of Central America will be large for whoever the next administration is, whether it is Vice President Biden or a Donald Trump Administration 2. What should be the U.S. policy? What should be the policy toward the

maras in the region and in the United States?

The Obama administration, of course, built a lot of the focus on policy, on the Alliance for Prosperity plan in the Northern Triangle that sought to address the structural issues that Ambassador Sarukhan spoke about by economic development. But it's no mean undertaking in the region that's plagued by weak institutions, enormous marginalizations of large segments of population, enormous inequality, highly exclusive political systems, and corruption and relations between state powers and organized crime.

So, how easy is it to mount such structural programs? Should they be mounted? What other dimensions of U.S. policy should be in Central America and the U.S.?

And an element to that is the Trump administration often seemed to have made the tradeoff of sacrificing democracy for anti-immigration policies, so embracing political leaders tainted by either allegations of authoritarian approaches and behaviors or corruption allegations, as long as they appear to promise to stop the flows of migrants. Is that a wise tradeoff?

MR. DUDLEY: Yeah, I guess this is, again, a huge question and goes a little bit out of my purview. But what I will say about the United States policy as it relates to gangs is that this is something that was born really when the gangs were born, in the '80s in Los Angeles. And it was, in essence, what we know today as 'Mano Dura,' or hardline policy. And the emphasis is on creation of special units, creation of an entire police force, and legal framework around it so that you can pretty much try and jail your way out of the problem. That was in 1980 in Los Angeles, in the late 1980s in Los Angeles.

That began a sort of construct, a model, that was then exported through all of the United States, to various parts of the United States. This included, also, the creation of gang databases and other forms of fighting gangs.

That was then exported to Central America. And all the time throughout that period, we've had a pretty steady expansion of these various gangs, not just the MS-13, but the 18th Street, which, by the way, although you wouldn't know it from listening to the Trump administration, is actually

five times larger than the MS-13. But you never hear anything about the 18th Street because they don't have these really graphic, horrific killings that happen. And that are very useful, that have become a very useful political trope, mostly on the right, to vilify entire communities, vilify entire migrant communities.

That said, that progress or maybe lack thereof in the fight against gangs and the emphasis that we've had on creation of law and order or these sort of law and order based policies have been Democratic, Republican, Democratic, Republican all the way through.

There have been other elements of this, which are related to the way that migration or policy around migration has also been steadily linked or fused with policing. And that has to do with the mass deportation of ex-convicts and we're talking about numbers in the thousands. Now, of course, these sort of categories, so what happened was they expanded the number of categories, and that was under Clinton, for which ex-convicts could be deported.

And they were deported in massive numbers to the Central American nations where we have the gang problem now, starting a sort of cyclical nature. So the refugees from the wars of Central America in the '80s, deportation of ex-convicts in the '90s, and now we have the sort of full completion of the circle because you get these push factors that are related to gangs. And as Ambassador Sarukhan pointed out, there are slightly different elements or push factors in Guatemala, but certainly Honduras and El Salvador some of the main push factors are related to violence and gangs, many of whom their leaders were deported from the United States.

So that was fused with policing in a way. And eventually that policing model has even expanded into the United States school system whereby you have police, literally members of the police who are known as school resource officers, who are collecting really raw intelligence of what's happening inside of the schools and then passing that information on to the local police, which is then passed on to ICE agents, who then start knocking on doors of suspected members of MS-13 or other gangs in order to deport them. So, this is where all of the emphasis has been, whether it's been Republican or Democrats.

Now, of course, we have the very crude manifestation of the worst part of xenophobic politics on display with the Trump administration. But the policies leading up to this moment have all

been very similar. I would not expect any change at all from a Biden administration because this is the policy that we've had for the last 40 years, especially as it relates to the gang that I studied very closely in my book, the MS-13.

So, as it relates to the gang, I don't expect any different policy as it relates -- whether it's Trump or whether it's Biden. Now, we might hope to expect that there will be more emphasis on, you know, creation of a stronger social safety net or enhancing English as a second language programs or all of these sort of ancillary social, educational, and economic projects that make it so these kids who are falling into the hands of the gangs because there is no social safety net and they are living in very difficult circumstances, that they don't fall into the hands of the gangs. So, hopefully, we can get some resources pushed in that direction.

As it relates to the United States' relationship with these various nations in Central America, you said it perfectly, Vanda. I mean, they have, in essence, you know, made the tradeoff. Their number one overriding concern is migration and they're willing to trade anything. They're willing to trade an election in Honduras, which by the international observer's own report was stolen, or massive levels of corruption. And what is, in essence, the taking away of some of the most important anti-corruption tools in these countries, which were receiving huge amounts of support from the United States Government, both political support and financial support, and those entities have, in essence -- they've been removed.

So, you don't have any anti-corruption efforts on the part of the United States Government and they largely turned a blind eye when it comes to this issue of migration. Secondly, when it comes to this issue of gangs. So, if there is a regular interactions, sharing of intel, those sorts of things that will lead to big gang arrests and things of that sort, that's certainly looked upon favorably.

And then the third thing that has become a sort of slight factor, although I think it's ancillary, is moving an embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, which Honduras and Guatemala have done, in essence, to sort of curry favor on the part of the Trump administration. But that's, I think, a very specific thing related to the Trump administration. The other two things, migration and gangs, will remain the central issues.

And if it's a Biden administration, I would expect them to reimplement or re-up on the anti-corruption efforts. That I see as a strong possibility. They were strong supporters of the efforts, which were led by multilateral institutions: on the one hand the United Nations, on the other hand the Organization for American States. And I would expect a Biden administration to beef up those efforts again.

And that is the kind of thing that I think, you know, in my own personal view, is this sort of trickle-down effect. Like for me, change is from the top-down. And so if you are going to go after these governments and you're going to sort of create the infrastructure of have the infrastructure or institutional-type building projects that you were referring to earlier, Vanda, you have to simultaneously hold the elites accountable.

And so I would hope that both of those things do happen and that they both happen hand-in-hand.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Steve. I'm certainly hopeful that that would indeed be a core thrust of the Biden administration, as well as much smarter policies, law enforcement policies. Certainly the Obama administration in Central America tried to do a very comprehensive approach to dealing with gangs demobilization or at least of gang members or at least allowing them so-called to go home, but also on the U.S. domestic side, moving away from really troubled policies such as you mentioned hunting for members – or alleged members of maras at U.S. schools, an enormously problematic policy.

Professor Délano, let me turn to you with what are sort of the key three most important migration policy issues that the next administration could do. But allow me to bring a bunch of questions from the audience.

One related to that asks what are sustainable migration policies? And another one asks what about the caravan? What if the caravans start coming in during the Biden administration? What kind of policies are we likely to see?

My own view is that at minimum we would never see the egregiousness and horror of

children in cages and separating young children from parents. But I welcome your views on what the policies should look like, how to make it sustainable.

And one more question, specific question, from the audience for you. What will likely be the effect of the proposed changes to requirements for Mexican students on Mexico and on the bilateral relationship?

MS. DÉLANO ALONSO: Thank you. Well, let me start by talking about if Trump were reelected, obviously we can't expect that the current approach is going to change. But where can potential change come from or what else or what else can be done in the fact of a restrictionist and anti-immigrant agenda that will just be exacerbated? And I think here we have to think a lot about the local and state level and what kind of resistance can be articulated from that perspective. And also, if there is a shift in Congress and the balance of power, how that will allow for some of these policies to shift in a certain direction.

I think here it's very important to think about community organizations and resistance that has been built up from the ground up and how that can be strengthened. And I think that whether or not if Trump were reelected, there is a space there and an opportunity for both the Democrats and also the Mexican government to be more proactive in strengthening these alliances at the local level and at the state level to resist and to promote a different kind of approach to migration issues there.

So, even if Trump wins, we shouldn't lose perspective on the possibility for building a different kind of agenda and a different approach at this level. And as Ambassador Sarukhan was saying, it's really essential for Mexico to provide that alternative approach. Otherwise, it's very unlikely that anything will shift. And Mexico has a history of investing in its immigrant communities through programs, counselor programs, that precisely try to build these tools for civic participation that may eventually help shift in a different direction and make them a political and economic constituency that has more power.

If Biden were to win the election, I think so far his proposal has been to reduce -- sort of shift back to what the Obama era policies were and roll back the Trump agenda. But I think what the problem is with just reverting back to those Obama-Biden era with this 51 points that he has put forward

is that it shies away from a more wholistic perspective on the structural conditions that we've talked about, as well as a humane approach to migration that emphasizes equal opportunity, inclusion, family unity, diversity. And shifts away from this logic that the Obama administration created of putting some migrants ahead of others, the desirable migrant versus the undesirable, the good and the bad.

And that created a division within the immigrants rights movement, but also in the narrative of what kinds of immigrants should be allowed to stay, which ones should be deported. And that requires a complete shift in thinking about the distinctions that are made in the current immigration system of who is allowed and who isn't, and who is desirable and who isn't.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: If you can please explain to our audience what were these criteria?

MS. DÉLANO ALONSO: Yes.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Who qualified for access to U.S. and who did not?

MS. DÉLANO ALONSO: Exactly. So, I think we can see this very clearly in, for example, the priorities that were given for judges to decide who could be deported and who didn't based on whether they had a criminal record or not, whether they had a family or not, et cetera. And in the same way with DACA, prioritizing immigrants who had a good moral background, who had been living in the country for a certain number of years. And then a whole discourse around the economic contributions of migrants, which sort of creates a certain category of economic contribution as a main measure of desirability rather than thinking more humanitarian way about who deserves or not to be in the country considering, also, petitions for asylum, for example, and migrants who have been here for a very long time and perhaps their economic contributions can't be measured in the same way as someone who grew up in the country, like DACA recipients were.

But I think the main thing here is that perhaps, as Ambassador Sarukhan said, COVID can be an opportunity to emphasize the cost of precarity for immigrant families and essential workers and how it affects everyone. So, this idea of a mutual vulnerability when education, health, and other public systems benefit some over others, that it's not just affecting immigrant communities, it's affecting the

whole of society. When one person is not able to access equal opportunity in health or education, it has reverberations for the rest of society.

So, here is an opportunity to offer a more holistic, intersectional approach that addresses structural problems with access to health, education, housing, labor rights, discrimination, and the disproportionate effect of mass incarceration on people of color. This new system, of course, would have to address longstanding issues, like a path to citizenship and regularization, new systems for admitting agricultural workers and other workers, as well as a new system for admitting asylum seekers, reverting the low ceilings that were established for refugee admissions during the Trump administration.

And also, a commitment to addressing the causes of forced migration, including war, violence, and not just in Central America, also in Mexico, and climate change. And here I would emphasize that it's not just about more humanitarian aid as has been done in the past, but really a structural approach that brings in multisectoral alliances from the countries of origin. So, that includes partners, real partners in Mexico, Central America, and any other country that could be part of this given that the flows are not just coming from Central America. And think about sustainable approaches that are grounded in the communities where this aid is going to be targeting and bottom-up approaches that bring in civil society, which so far have been largely denied in many of these programs.

In the beginning of the López Obrador administration there was a proposal developed with CEPAL, with the U.N. Commission for Economic Development in Latin America and Central America. And this proposal already has the building blocks for what the agenda should be. Where are the sectors where investments should be made in order to curb the conditions that are creating more migration flows? But also, who are the actors in Central America that need to be partners in building an agenda that's going to be sustainable in the long term?

And finally, I would say that one of the things I wanted to focus on, I don't know if we're going to talk about this in a little bit or not, but the importance of the Latino vote and building a strong constituency that will not just be responding in an urgent emergency way, as has been happening in the last couple of years and maybe even before the Trump administration, just a defensive agenda, but rather

how to build a proactive agenda and political power that will shift.

In this election, there is a record 32 million Latinos that are projected to vote, which for the first time exceeds the number of Black eligible voters. These are 13 percent of eligible voters. And one of the greatest fears is that they will not come out to vote. One, because of the fear that exists of any kind of public action, but also in the context of COVID because the priorities have shifted and people are focused more on surviving and getting a job and feeding their families rather than political mobilization.

So, I think this is a great challenge of this election and beyond, how to mobilize politically, knowing that some of the key issues that concern Latinos are very similar to other constituencies. Right? The --

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I have to cut in here. We have five minutes. But could you just tell us very briefly, 30 seconds, what are key cleavages in the Latino communities? Are there any divisions and what are the key issues on which members of the Latino communities are deciding to vote?

MS. DÉLANO ALONSO: Right. So, 67 percent of Latino voters lean towards a Democratic vote in this election and 24 percent plan on voting for Donald Trump. So, it's clear that it's not a constituency that's fully Democratic. There are cleavages, there are issues that divide this group. For example, on abortion and other issues there is a conservative agenda on the Latino vote, as well.

But the main issues that are driving this vote on this election are the economy, jobs and wages, healthcare, the coronavirus, and I think one that has emerged as a really important item in this election is racial and ethnic inequality. Immigration is important, more important to the Latino vote than others, but it's not one of the five main issues that they are voting on. So, I think here's why I'm emphasizing the importance of building a wholistic agenda that brings together how issues of healthcare, the disproportionate effect of the coronavirus on immigrant communities and Latinos and Black communities specifically, how they are tied also to the question of immigration and how to build an agenda that leverages this interest and this power in order to shift conditions and structural -- you know, systemic changes that are necessary.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Excellent. Thank you very much. We are four minutes to

closing, so I will use those four minutes to just quickly tick off some of the policy recommendations on the law enforcement, crime, drug side that I'm speaking about.

Vice President Biden has already stated that his administration would not build one new foot of the wall. And instead, he wants to focus on smart border technologies, something that was also strongly emphasized in the Obama administration. And it was hoped it would allow the Obama administration to produce comprehensive immigration reform, including legalize the status of many undocumented workers. Ultimately, the congressional support was not there.

So, I think that's a very good emphasis. I would go beyond that and say that the wall should be brought down because it causes tremendous damage, but also because the upkeep costs will be enormous. It will continue being a drain on U.S. resources that could be spent far better in other ways.

Another recommendation of mine is really to focus on the rise of right-wing militias in the United States that have many causes and have latched on many issues, including racial inequality issues against protesters who are mobilized for police reform, but who have long been and continue to be a critical feature of the U.S.-Mexico border. They often take it upon themselves to capture undocumented migrants, but not just capture those who they believe are undocumented, but, frankly, harass Mexican communities or Latino communities in the United States. Clearly, that needs to become a primary focus on the Biden administration. Under the Trump administration they have been more or less given carte blanche; not quite. Obviously violent acts have not been sanctioned at least by U.S. institutions even if the President has remained silent or at times even tried to semi-endorse highly problematic acts by them.

But clearly, there also needs to be much new work with the López Obrador administration with focus on violence there. It's not good enough to diminish the significant toll that violence in Mexico causes in Mexico as the López Obrador administration has done. The criminal market is out of control. The brazenness of the violence is intolerable and very dangerous for Mexico. And there will be a need for a lot of new work between U.S. and Mexico to focus on that issue, as well as on at least the most dangerous of drugs that should be the priority: fentanyl smuggling through Mexico and preventing the production of fentanyl in Mexico.

With that, we are at 4:30, the time when we need to close. Our core approach at Brookings is a sound, nonpartisan research and policy recommendation based on in-depth of particular issues. A lot of our work is on our website with many more details about what anti-crime, anti-drug policies should be, what immigration policies should be, presented by Brookings' authors without any Brookings institutional position. Each scholar is subject to peer review and responsible for her or his own views and policy recommendations.

I am enormously thankful to Alexandra and Steve for joining, and thankful to them for their terrific work, excellent presentation, their own deep knowledge of the issues that they brought to our discussion together, and their very clear policy recommendation.

And I'm enormously grateful to all of you and want to thank you all for watching the event, participating in the event, sending us your questions that I tried to integrate as much as possible into our conversation, and for staying engaged.

Much more to come with respect to key policy issues from Brookings on our website in our events as we approach the elections and in post election. Thank you.

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