



# Will Mexico Pay For The Wall? Experts Pick Sides

Feb 16, 2017 | John S Kiernan

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When President Donald Trump first floated the idea of a southern border wall, way back in June 2015 while announcing his candidacy, man-made barricades and natural barriers guarded more than 82% of the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico divide, according to [data](#) from the Government Accountability Office.

Meanwhile, [nearly 6 million](#) Mexican immigrants illegally resided in the United States, equaling less than 2% of the citizenship. Research had shown that immigrants commit [far fewer crimes](#) than native-born individuals. And economists from Trump's own alma mater, the Wharton School of Finance, [concluded](#), "The experience of the last few decades suggests that immigration may actually have significant long-term benefits for the native-born, pushing them into higher-paying occupations and raising the overall pace of innovation and productivity growth."

Now, fast-forward to present day, and President Trump has mentioned the wall dozens more times. He's promised heights in excess of 50 feet and quoted costs of up to \$12 billion, though the Department of Homeland Security estimates a \$21.6 billion price tag. And the force with which he has done so seems to suggest that the question isn't whether the wall should or will be built, because that appears inevitable. Rather, will Mexico really pay for it? And how, exactly, will they do so?

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wall: You can check out their responses and bios below.

## Mexico Will Pay for the Wall

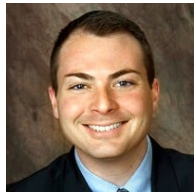
### Highlights:

- “What makes President Trump’s claim that ‘Mexico will pay for the wall’ so effective easily happen. NAFTA is due for renegotiation and it will be a useful vehicle for President Trump’s demands. The original NAFTA was expected to generate a modest 6 billion dollars a year in new trade flows; a renegotiation could affect billions more. With billions of dollars on the line, President Trump could characterize any concession in negotiations as a wall-payment, and inflate the expected economic gains to make them match the cost of his reinforced concrete monument to nationalism.”

- Robert Gulotty // Assistant Professor of Political Science, The University of Chicago Committee in International Relations

- “While Mexico is unlikely to cut the U.S. a check, the Trump White House will find a way to explain how Mexico is paying for the program—most likely through changes in trade policy.”

- Artemus Ward // Professor - Department of Political Science & Faculty Associate - College of Law, Northern Illinois University



### Artemus Ward

Professor in the Department of Political Science and Faculty Associate in the College of Law at Northern Illinois University



### Robert Gulotty

Assistant Professor of Political Science at The University of Chicago Committee in International Relations

## Mexico Will Not Pay for the Wall

### Highlights:

- “Mexico will not pay for the wall, either directly or indirectly. ... Mexicans view their relationship with the US through the lens of a long history of US interference in Mexican affairs. This has been muted over the last two decades, but Trump’s insistence on sending Mexico the bill for a “wall” has re-awakened nationalist sentiment. The Trump administration could impose tariffs on Mexican

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Trump's fantasy wall.

- Michael Jones-Correa // Presidential Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

- “In the President’s words, the process may happen ‘in a complicated form.’ What are the different ways? Suggestions raised—and at times retracted—by the President and his administration include import taxes, impounding or taxing remittances, visa fees, or border tariffs. Cost-benefit analyses of these strategies—in terms of their impact on regional economic health, their legality, their impact on U.S. consumers, or their political costs—are equally numerous. Ultimately, convincing the U.S. public that Mexico is paying for the wall may come down to a complicated ‘Trust me’ on the Administration’s part.”

- Eva A. Millona // Executive Director, MIRA Coalition, Boston

- “The Trump administration may impose a charge on Mexican imports and try to raise the funds that way. But a tariff directed at Mexican imports alone would be a blunt instrument, calling forth a response in kind and perhaps triggering a trade war. More importantly, prices in the United States would rise, American businesses and customers would have to pay more for parts and products, and in this sense Americans, rather than Mexicans, would end up paying for the wall. The tariff would quickly become unpopular politically. It is unlikely, therefore, to be implemented.”

- Kevin Kenny // Chair, Department of History, Boston College

- “For decades, the American policy has been to spend billions of dollars on the border, and then welcome the lucky few who make it (or overstay their visas) with job offers. With one hand, we say “no entry,” and with the other, we say, “welcome.” Given the lack of sense in our policy regarding undocumented workers, Mexico would be foolish to contribute anything for any border barrier. And America would be foolish to build it.”

- John D. Skrentny // Professor of Sociology, University of California-San Diego & Co-Director, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies

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### John D. Skrentny

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Professor of Sociology at University of California-San Diego and Co-Director of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies



Mexico would be foolish to pay for the wall, and the U.S. would be foolish to build it.

While I cannot predict what Mexico will do when presented with the demand to pay for a border wall, I can say that Mexico would be foolish to do so. The reason is simple: For decades, through its actions, the U.S. has welcomed undocumented immigrants. Migrants from Mexico, and many other countries, have simply taken what American employers have offered them: jobs. These migrants did not “steal” them—they took what was freely given. Employers clearly want undocumented immigrants.

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Second, there are some businesses that depend on undocumented labor—one could even say the whole business model depends on undocumented or otherwise exploitable immigrant labor. A tragic example here is meat and poultry processing. This industry was highly paid, safe, dominated by American workers, and unionized until the early 1980s. Around that time, massive new firms dominated the industry, building huge plants in rural areas where there were no American workers at all. These firms (e.g., Tyson, Cargill, ConAgra) broke the unions, slashed wages, increased line speeds, and made the industry unsafe, poorly paid and plagued by constant turnover. Only immigrants were willing to move to these rural areas and take these jobs, and estimates place the undocumented contribution as high as 50 percent. The business model here is based on the exploitation of mostly Latino documented and undocumented immigrants.

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Other examples include agriculture, which for decades has utterly depended on migrant workers, especially to pick fruit, vegetables and nuts. One farmer recently told the [New York Times](#), “If you only have legal labor, certain parts of this industry and this region will not exist.”

A particularly dramatic example comes from New Orleans, which was only 3 percent Latino in 2000. After Hurricane Katrina decimated the city, a construction and clean-up crew got to work that was nearly 50 percent Latino, many undocumented. The George W. Bush administration even suspended rules limiting the hiring of undocumented workers to allow this to occur.

Third, the U.S. does laughably little to prevent the hiring of undocumented workers. Congress’s laws prohibiting hiring undocumented immigrants dictate that employers are only in trouble if they knowingly hire undocumented workers—something easily evaded with fake papers and a wink. On top of weak laws are weak enforcement efforts. Political scientist Wayne Cornelius, a leading expert on migration, has provided statistics showing that the probability of an employer being audited by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is only 0.03 percent—far lower than the chance of an individual taxpayer being audited by the IRS (0.84 percent).

Notably, unlike Obama, President Trump has focused his internal enforcement of immigration laws on the migrants themselves, and not the employers who provide the draw for undocumented migration. [DHS raids](#) have focused on apartment buildings, grocery stores, and even schools. When worksites are targeted, the point is to go after the workers, not the employers.

For decades, the American policy has been to spend billions of dollars on the border, and then welcome the lucky few who make it (or overstay their visas) with job offers. With one hand, we say “no entry,” and with the other, we say, “welcome.” Given the lack of sense in our policy regarding undocumented workers, Mexico would be foolish to contribute anything for any border barrier. And America would be foolish to build it.

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## The U.S. & Mexico Will Both Pay for the Wall

### Highlights:

- “Mexico is never going to pay for a border wall and the American people shouldn’t either. President Trump’s \$25 billion border wall is a foolish proposition that will most likely never be built. The president’s scheme to raise tariffs on Mexican goods would only boomerang back around and hurt American consumers.”  
  
*- Bob Duff // Majority Leader, Connecticut State Senate*
- “The wall will end up being paid by all the parties involved because it symbolizes a bad and old-fashioned approach to economic relations between neighbors. Instead of building trade and migration relationships that benefit the flow of goods and factors, thereby increasing the total economic gains, it symbolizes a policy of unilateral rejection of this relationship. Particularly at a time when net migration from Mexico is minimal, trade integration is intense and beneficial for both countries, and security cooperation at the border is essential.”  
  
*- Esteban Rossi-Hansberg // Theodore A. Wells '29 Professor of Economics, Princeton University*
- “Yes, Mexico will pay for the wall but only indirectly and not in full. It would be political suicide for President Peña Nieto to contribute even a peso of Mexico’s budget to what is viewed by many Mexicans as an affront to their dignity. So, U.S. taxpayers will be on the hook for the direct cost, which is now estimated at between \$20 and \$40 billion. But both Mexico and the United States will pay in other ways if the wall becomes a reality.”  
  
*- Katrina Burgess // Associate Professor of Political Economy, Fletcher School, Tufts University*
- “Although there are ways in which Mexico will seemingly pay for President Trump’s proposed wall, the cost will ultimately be borne as well by the United States. Taxes on Mexican imports would

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reducing these companies' ability to do business and hurting their bottom line.

- *Gustavo A. Flores-Macías // Associate Professor of Government, Cornell University*

- "Are we discussing a "wall," or really a series of different kinds of barriers? And don't some already exist, in part? If the completion of additional barriers is to be a new involuntary venture with Mexico, what, exactly, is the basis for asking them to help pay for the d United States' Southern border? Should El Salvador, and other Central American countries be asked to help pay for any wall since they are responsible for recent border surges of illegal aliens?"

- *Stanley Renshon // Professor of Political Science at the City University of New York and Certified Psychoanalyst*

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**Carlos E. Cortes**  
 Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at the University of California, Riverside



**Charles Derber**  
 Professor of Sociology at Boston College & the Author of Bully Nation



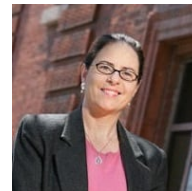
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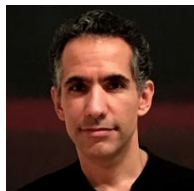
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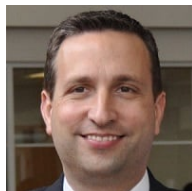
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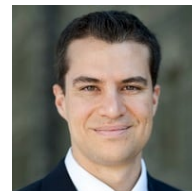
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**Senator Bob Duff**  
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