

shown above is a stunning visualization of how deeply the drug war has seeped into the American consciousness.

Mexico's image problem is clearly a function of bad news -- among the more than half who said they had heard, read or seen something about Mexico in the past month, 81% said it was related to drug problems and cartel violence. Others cited the death of a U.S. border patrol agent, border issues in general and illegal immigration.

Given the above results, it's not surprising that 59% of Americans see Mexico more as a source of problems for the U.S., compared to only 14% who say the country is a good partner and neighbor (this result is especially lopsided among self-identified conservatives, with almost 80% seeing Mexico as a source of problems).

Peña Nieto is clearly facing a big challenge as he seeks to reaffirm and grow Mexico's critical partnership with the United States and expand it beyond a security focus to include economic, trade and energy issues that could greatly benefit both nations.

The results of the survey suggest he and his team must move quickly to begin restoring Mexico's image in the United States and beyond. The good news is that there is a surprisingly positive story to tell about Mexico, which has been underreported by the U.S. media and largely untold by the outgoing administration.

Despite the tragic drug fight, the country, by many measures, is thriving economically. It has a growing and majority middle class of 60 million, stronger GDP growth the United States, and rising rates of education. It also has a vibrant set of homegrown multinational companies who employ more than 50,000 workers here in the U.S.

Furthermore, drug violence and deaths, while gruesome and steady, are largely confined to specific geographies. In our poll, Americans seemed to understand this distinction, with pluralities rating places like Cabo San Lucas, Cancun and Puerto Vallarta as safe for travel. This may be a result of an aggressive campaign by the Mexico Tourism Board during the past two years.

But Mexico clearly needs more than a tourism campaign -- restoring its international brand will require a systematic, coordinated effort by government, business, and civic leaders that reframes the current narrative and delivers a consistent message through a wide set of champions and channels. And of course -- and most important -- this effort will need to be backed by substance, policy and progress.

In Peña Nieto, Mexico has a savvy new chief executive who has the vision, team and communications skills necessary to champion the effort. His swearing in on December 1 will open up a strategic window to reset Mexico's relationship with the U.S. and begin restoring its image both here and abroad.

Peña Nieto's visit to the U.S. comes at an opportune time -the recent presidential election here reaffirmed the growing importance of Latino voters (who are largely of Mexican descent), causing many conservatives to signal they are ready to speak and act differently about immigration, which could considerably change the tone of U.S. political and media discourse toward Mexico.

Our hope is that next week's meeting will be the beginning of this much-needed change in tone and serve as a foundation for a much-needed turnaround of Mexico's brand in the United States.

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