

Book Review: Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, The United States and the Road Ahead

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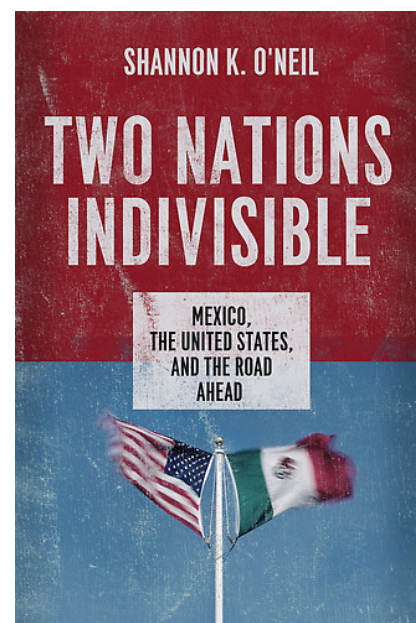
Over three decades Mexico has gone from a poor to a middle class nation, a closed to an open economy, an authoritarian to a vibrant (if at times messy) democracy, and a local to an increasingly binational society. **Two Nations Indivisible** aims to tell the story of the making of modern Mexico, and what it means for the United States. Recounting the economic, political, social, and security changes of the last thirty years, it provides a roadmap for one of the most overlooked foreign policy challenges of recent times. A recommended read for those looking for an overview of contemporary U.S.-Mexico affairs, writes **Alexei Anisin**.



Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, The United States and the Road Ahead. Shannon K. O’Neil. Oxford University Press. May 2013.

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[Shannon K. O’Neil](#), in her new book, *Two Nations Indivisible*, sets out to tackle one of the most important and popular issues facing the United States today, that of its relation with its Southern neighbour, Mexico. O’Neil, a one-time investment banker, academic and now a member of the Council on Foreign relations, offers distinct insights from her own experiences while working and travelling throughout Mexico. Utilizing a wide array of sources, surveys, and economic data, O’Neil’s central argument in this book states that the U.S. over the last decades has miscalculated and overlooked the economic and social potential of Mexico as a newly formed democracy. These miscalculations have resulted in unproductive and degenerative policy implications towards the U.S. and Mexico, their migrants, and security forces. O’Neil argues America must wake up and realize it needs to reconceptualise its partnership with Mexico via diverse economic liberalization. By revisiting several chapters from this work, I will put on display the practical and policy relevant suggestions that O’Neil provides. At the same time, the shortcomings of *Two Nations Indivisible* will become evident as O’Neil misses out on structural components underlying identity and ideology formation that take authority away from her argument.



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In the second chapter, “Reinvisioning U.S.-Mexico Diplomatic Relations”, O’Neil documents Mexico’s history and evolution from the times of the nineteenth century to the present. From its independence in 1821, Mexico has battled with the U.S., usually with guns and this has resulted in a common trend: that of loss. During such times, Mexico was ridden with land losses yet still modernized itself as a state through the bringing in of investments from American tycoons such as William Randolph Hearst, who O’Neil states, “probably saw the Mexican President more often than the U.S. Ambassador did.” O’Neil provides insights into such relations as she argues U.S. businessmen like Hearst often exploited the Mexican government for their own interests. The author paints an effective picture of how U.S. elites have maneuvered around Mexico for their own benefit, whether for their own financial gain, or for upkeep in the status quo in political power, as was the case when the U.S. funded the authoritarian Mexican ruling party “PRI” during 1968 in order to suppress anti-government street protests.

In the third chapter, “Immigration’s Binding Ties”, O’Neil disproves a significant portion of stereotypes and assumptions that underpin the immigration debate within U.S. political discourse. With the utilization of quantitative data analysis, O’Neil draws upon statistics and argues that the mass migration of Mexicans into the United States over the past century (currently there are thirty million Mexican-Americans), has actually been beneficial, produced more jobs, and lowered production costs. Mexicans have been migrating to the U.S. for over a century but O’Neil puts this into perspective through great historical examples. To illustrate, Mexicans were exempt from the immigration quotas set on Chinese and Eastern European immigrants in the 1920s. Further, O’Neil gives the reader good intuition about the rise of Mexico’s middle class through the presentation of survey data. The Mexican people as a nation approve of the U.S. and its foreign policy near the levels of both Britain and France. In addition, those Mexicans living in the United States are less violent on than other immigrants and citizens on average. Interestingly, O’Neil points out that the migration of Mexicans to the U.S. is scheduled to stall and even drop in the next ten years.

The sixth



Mexico City skyline. Credit: [kainet](#) CC BY-SA 2.0

chapter, “Mexico’s Rising Insecurity: a Real Illness with the Wrong Prescription”, highlights the horror of Mexico’s drug war and its disruptive role in Mexico’s democratization process. Beginning with opium, Mexican drug cartels and dealers brought the drug into the United States, followed by Marijuana in the 1960s, cocaine and crack in the eighties, and recently meth. Mexican drug cartels control entire regions and often are better equipped and trained than local police. O’Neil gives the reader great understanding into the Achilles heel of the Mexican government: that of corruption. The 1980s were filled with PRI government elites accepting back door deals with drug cartels to establish secure trade routes, resulting in an ongoing process of U.S. border security armament which has further resulted in an even greater surge in violence and more drugs crossing into America. Nonetheless, O’Neil does give the reader hope, noting the passing of a major piece of judicial reform that is set to come into play in 2016 that will “fundamentally transform Mexico’s judicial system.” Such newly formed institutions are the hope for the future of Mexico.

Two Nations Indivisible is a well thought out contribution to the current debate on U.S.-Mexico relations. O'Neil's own practical knowledge gives the reader a good idea of rising prospects in Mexico and at the same time, ongoing problems. O'Neil often highlights the failures of U.S. liberalization and state building in the contexts of Iraq and Afghanistan where a great deal of money was spent yet both states are arguably in a worse position than prior to U.S. occupancy. If the U.S. provides greater well planned economic and financial incentives to Mexico, Mexico can become a functioning democracy on the same level as Spain. While O'Neil provides a logically sound argument supporting this position, it is difficult for the reader to believe that more money will solve Mexico's problems given Mexico is a country that is experiencing a violent conflict (drug war) that over the last seven years has claimed over 100,000 lives. What will happen to the identities of lower class Mexicans once economic crises begins to loom again? A new drugs war? Such issues are missing from O'Neil's account.

A recommended read for all those interested in contemporary U.S.-Mexico affairs, however if one wants a deep historical account (including the roots of colonization), look elsewhere.

Alexei Anisin is a PhD student in the Department of Government at the University of Essex. His research focuses on the topic of nonviolent civil resistance and social transition through a discourse theoretic approach. In the past, Alexei has worked for tech start ups in Silicon Valley and is also a reviewer for the ESTRO (Essex University Student Journal). You can find Alexei on Twitter [@AlexeiAnisin](#). [Read more reviews by Alexei.](#)

