Neo-developmentalism: transformation in practice or capitalism rebranded?

A Discourse Analysis of Mexico's 2025–2030 National Development Plan

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Communication for Development
One-year master
15 Credits
Spring Semester 2025
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Abstract

The project analyzes how ideas of development are constructed in Mexico's National Development Plan 2025–2030 (PND) under President Claudia Sheinbaum's government, framed as the "Second Floor" of the Fourth Transformation (4T). Using frame and critical discourse analysis, it identifies the main frames, and myths shaping the Mexican government's post-neoliberal development narrative. A textual and visual research diary supports the analysis by documenting the researcher's positionality and the iterative nature of the research process.

Existing studies of the Fourth Transformation largely centre on the López Obrador period; this project fills a gap by analysing Sheinbaum's discourse during her first year to trace continuities and changes in the 4T's development narrative. Drawing on dependency theory, the study explores whether neo-developmentalism offers an alternative to neoliberalism or reproduces its premises. It argues that the PND's vision operates through the myths of progress, interclass alliance, sovereignty, and green extractivism, articulated through a populist rhetoric.

The analysis shows that neo-developmentalism reformulates rather than replaces neoliberalism, building legitimacy by aligning popular demands for welfare and sustainability with the interests of capital. This understanding of development rests on beliefs in unlimited growth, technological determinism, and consumerism. It promotes a new social pact based on the partnership between the state and capital, with the state performing a mediating role through welfare policies. It promises to achieve economic sovereignty through a mix of export-oriented growth and import-substitution industrialization as a path to global integration, while promoting the idea of sustainable development as a response to climate change.

Ultimately, the project concludes that the 4T's post-neoliberal agenda constitutes neither a genuine alternative to neoliberalism nor its straightforward continuation, but instead a rearticulated form of capitalist development. These findings lay the groundwork for future studies on Sheinbaum's government and its evolving development discourse, as well as adding to literature on post-neoliberalism in Latin America.

Note on Translation and Language

The discourse analysis for this degree project was conducted in Spanish and later translated into English. I intentionally retain Spanish excerpts without full translation, inspired by the tradition of code-switching popularized by U.S. Latinx writers since the 1980s, beginning with Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Code-switching is a political choice that privileges the bi- or multilingual over the monolingual experience. With this project, I aim to inhabit the utopia of a multilingual academia and invite others to do the same, contributing to resisting the Anglocentric norms that dominate academic practice. This position acknowledges the many scholars in Anglophone academia for whom English is not a first language and whose knowledge in other languages is often undervalued.

Although the main arguments appear in English and the text remains comprehensible without Spanish, I want to make explicit that the analysis was carried out in the original language. As a native Italian speaker who has spent the last eight years in Anglophone academia across Germany, Austria, and now Sweden, English has become my working language, while English and Spanish (often blended rather than neatly separated) have shaped my close relationships. This mix is not the same as the one used by Anzaldúa or other Latinx writers, but it reflects my own communities, migration experience, and linguistic landscape. I believe that, with different language combinations, it also resonates with many non-native English speakers who work in English while inhabiting the world through other languages.

In this sense, Spanish is not a language in which I am native or an insider; however, because the analysis was done in my learned Spanish, I want that process to remain visible. Retaining Spanish excerpts also invites Spanish-speaking readers to critique or correct my interpretations if my limited proficiency led to misreadings.

Finally, given that my research invites the reader to think of topics of decolonization and epistemic decolonization, from my situated position as a white, middle-class, Southern European, I join others who have invited us to challenge the hegemony of Anglophone academia (Chilisa, 2012: 154). I offer a text that does not fully cater to an English monolingual reader and that embraces two languages, in which I may make mistakes but also through which I think, relate, and produce knowledge.

Table of content

1. Introduction

After six years of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's presidency, founder of Morena[1], his successor of the same party, Claudia Sheinbaum, was elected in 2024. As Mexico's first female president, Sheinbaum took office in October and, in April 2025, presented her administration's six-year National Development Plan. Sheinbaum has emphasized that her government represents continuity with López Obrador's "Fourth Transformation" (4T), the national project of the Morena party. The 4T project involves the historical-political and moral transformation of Mexico, understood as a non-violent revolution, towards a new social pact based on justice, democracy, national sovereignty and transparency (Vázquez Salazar, 2023).

This study aims to provide a preliminary analysis of the changes and continuities in Morena's development discourse under Sheinbaum's presidency through an in-depth examination of the National Development Plan 2025-2030 (PND 2025-2030).

Like many Latin American countries, Mexico's colonial history shaped its development trajectory. Between 1982 and 1988, under Presidents José López Portillo and Miguel de la Madrid, Mexico shifted from a state-led developmental model to a neoliberal economic framework. The turning point came with the 1982 debt crisis, when López Portillo nationalized the country's banks and declared Mexico unable to pay its foreign debt (Emmelhainz, 2021: 24). De la Madrid then implemented IMF-backed structural adjustment policies (including austerity, privatization, and trade liberalization) to stabilize the economy and open it to global markets. These reforms marked the end of the protectionist era of the "Mexican Miracle" and laid the groundwork for Carlos Salinas de Gortari's deepening of neoliberal policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, culminating with the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 (*ibid*.: 25). Since the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, global capitalism has faced a structural crisis with social, economic, and environmental dimensions (Alonso & Rodríguez Wallenius, 2021: 9-10; Robinson, 2024). After the global financial crisis of 2008, Mexico faced a deep recession that exposed the limits of its neoliberal model. Subsequent

[1]Formerly known as the National Regeneration Movement, Morena is a splinter faction of the PRD, itself a breakaway from the PRI, which split from the party in response to the neoliberal reforms led by figures such as Carlos Salinas de Gortari. According to Centeno (2023: 114), Morena's ideological orientation is the product of a revival of the Mexican popular tradition rooted in "revolutionary nationalism" (the ideological orientation that shaped the Mexican Revolution between 1910 and 1982). Morena's national project, the "Fourth Transformation," stems from this nationalist, popular, and anti-neoliberal tendency. However, its populist form is a product of the deradicalization and loss of coherence of Mexico's socialist left after the neoliberalization process (Centeno 2023: 114).

governments maintained structural reforms and fiscal orthodoxy, while social inequality and insecurity intensified.

While opposition to neoliberal policies in Mexico has existed since the 1970s, becoming most vocal with the 1994 Zapatista uprising, it has always been associated with a radical left ideology. Since the late 2010s the rise of progressive governments across Latin America, including López Obrador's election in 2018, have aimed at inverting neoliberal politics and the country's dependence and subordinate position in the world order. The resurgence of progressive governments that have sought to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism generated what academics describe as the "post-neoliberal turn" (Yates & Bakker, 2014).

This paper builds on Yates and Bakker's (2014) proposal to move beyond a binary understanding of post-neoliberalism as either failing to challenge neoliberalism or not. Instead, post-neoliberalism is better understood as a multifaceted blend of discourse and practice "that may displace market orthodoxy, but cannot be defined simply in opposition to, nor as wholly distinct from, neoliberalism" (Brand & Sekler, 2009a; Peck et al., 2010; Sader, 2011, cited in Yates & Bakker, 2014: 69). This project analyzes Sheinbaum's "Second Floor" of the 4T as an example of post-neoliberal discourse, which scholars have referred to as "neo-developmentalism" (Alonso & Rodríguez Wallenius, 2021: 15; Vidal et al., 2019). By looking at public policy through a triangulation of frame, discourse analysis and critical personal narrative (Swadener & Mutua, 2004 referenced in Denzin et al. 2008), the aim of this project is to assess in which ways post-neoliberal and specifically neo-developmentalist discourse construct the idea of development, as well as assessing the relation between rhetoric and policy effectiveness. As an ideology, development shapes a wide range of political and economic projects, whether or not they are explicitly developmentalist. Studying development as a concept is important because debates over its meaning and its connections to the past, present, and future, give rise to different political agendas (Correa Prado, 2021: 145).

Through the concepts of dependency theory, neo-developmentalism, neo-extractivism and populism, this study shows how public policies proposed in the National Development Plan 2025-2030 (PND) of the current Morena's administration are constructed rhetorically. The outcome of the analysis of the PND shows how a specific post-neoliberal understanding of development is constructed by the current Mexican government. First, open coding was used to map out the main themes of the PND. Next, by examining its relationship to broader discursive fields and applying frame analysis, the construction of problems and proposed

solutions to development issues was analyzed. This process led to the identification of a set of narratives or myths, which serve as the building blocks of the development discourse. Finally, these were compared with findings from scientific literature to evaluate the potential outcomes of different economic strategies.

2. Background

Yates and Bakker (2014) describe neoliberalism as a project to reorganize global capitalism in ways that strengthen elite power and facilitate capital accumulation. In Latin America, neoliberal reforms took shape from the 1980s through free trade agreements, the privatization of public goods, the expansion of property rights, and the erosion of labor and environmental protections (Harvey, 2005: 19; Peck, 2010a, cited in Yates & Bakker, 2014: 63–64; Ruckert et al., 2017: 1585). This neoliberalization did not unfold in a political vacuum; rather, countries such as Chile served as testing grounds for the economic model developed by the Chicago School. The implementation of this model relied on authoritarian regimes backed by the United States (Klein, 2006). Dependence on natural resource extraction, reinforced by structural adjustment programs since the 1970s, has also become central to Mexico's development strategy (Osorio, 2016, referenced in Alonso & Rodríguez Wallenius, 2021: 11).

Post-neoliberalism emerged as a response to this reality, promoting political projects that aim to transcend neoliberalism. Its two central goals are to reconcile market economies with social concerns and to foster new forms of political participation and alliances across diverse social groups (Yates & Bakker, 2014; Ruckert et al. 2017: 1595). As the debate on the topic demonstrates, scholars do not agree on a single definition of post-neoliberalism (Ruckert et al., 2017). For the purposes of this project, a broad definition is adopted, encompassing regimes that have discursively broken with neoliberalism and aligning with literature that comparatively assesses the extent of policy change while situating such changes within specific local contexts (*ibid.*). In this sense, I follow authors who advocate for studying the post-neoliberal turn by understanding the prefix 'post' in post-neoliberal in a manner akin to 'postcolonial': not necessarily as a complete rupture with the neoliberal era, but as a lens through which the reconfiguration of this relationship interrogates the past, its legacies, and its continued relevance (Custodio, 2021, p. 181).

In practice, and in line with Yates & Bakker, post-neoliberalism seeks to ground economic principles in social values through redistribution, while deepening democracy by promoting autonomy and self-governance via processes of cultural self-determination (Yates & Bakker,

2014). Yet, as both a discourse and a set of public policies, post-neoliberalism has produced contradictory outcomes: while it challenges neoliberalization in some areas, it simultaneously reproduces neoliberal tendencies in others.

For this reason, this study focuses on the relationship between political rhetoric and concrete policies in order to evaluate how post-neoliberal projects diagnose social realities, what solutions they propose, and to what extent empirical evidence supports their promise of transforming the relationship between society and the market.

This research also engages with critical literature on the so-called 'pink tide', the left-wing turn in Latin America of the last two decades. The pink tide has been interpreted as a form of passive revolution[2], defined as "limited structural transformations that have a top-down conservative background and use demobilizing and subalternizing political practices" (Modonesi, 2015, as cited in Durán Matute & Felíz, 2022: 203). Popular movements are coopted by the state and struggles are incorporated into political discourse in ways that de-radicalize mobilization and allow elite and neoliberal interests to maintain control over left-wing agendas (Yates & Bakker, 2014:70; Durán Matute & Felíz, 2022: 203; Centeno, 2023: 113). Although some authors argue that Mexico's case is too limited in its radicalism to be considered part of a leftward turn, instead framing it as an instance of failed progressivism (Centeno, 2023, p. 125; Emmelhainz, 2021), I adopt a more exploratory stance and examine the extent to which the 4T can nonetheless be understood as part of the pink tide.

In Mexico, post-neoliberalism is associated to Morena, a party that advances a neo-developmentalist discourse and, now in its second mandate, continues to enjoy both a strong legislative majority and broad popular support. This case illustrates the broader dynamics of post-neoliberalism, which achieves limited transformation by aligning with dominant capital interests while simultaneously legitimizing itself through the incorporation of subordinate class demands, thereby consolidating as a hegemonic discourse (Treacy, 2022: 224).

In Mexico, development has been framed as a central axis of post-neoliberal transformation.

[2] Passive revolution is a term used by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to describe radical political, economic, and social changes in which the "subordinate classes" do not participate in the process. Thus, according to Gramsci, we encounter a "passive revolution" or "revolution without revolution" when an uprising of the "subordinate classes" is "blocked" or "appeased" by the ruling classes through the acceptance of some of their demands, with the aim of achieving their passivity. Retana Yarto (2025) defines passive revolution as "a category of analysis that refers to processes of change and transformation carried out by those in power, with social support and interpreting the sentiments of the popular social structure, which opens up a process of transition in accordance with a programmatic line of change in an evolutionary, gradual manner, where there may be junctures marked by a partial, limited rupture, where limits are set on the depth of the changes."

Since the beginning of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (AMLO) Fourth Transformation, the government has presented its project as "a 'post-neoliberal' alternative where authoritarianism will be eradicated, modernization forged from below, and development built with social justice" (Presidencia de México, 2019a, as cited in Durán Matute & Felíz, 2022: 209).

Developmentalism first emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a strategy to transform the structural conditions of so-called 'underdeveloped' countries through state intervention, aiming to reduce dependence on 'developed' nations. In a similar vein, neo-developmentalism seeks to restore the central role of the state by promoting the export of raw materials, primary goods, and commodities. Its orientation remains tied to global markets, relying on labor, productive capacity, and infrastructure to drive extraction, transformation, and commodification (Araníbar & Rodríguez, 2013, as cited in Rodríguez & Azamar, 2024: 127).

Building on this context, the present study examines Mexico's National Development Plan 2025–2030 to identify how neo-developmentalist discourse shapes public policies and reveals their limitations. Drawing on dependency theory, the analysis focuses particularly on industrial, income and energy policies, exploring how these policies are articulated through a populist discourse.

3. Literature Review

This research seeks to contribute to the emerging analysis of Mexico's Fourth Transformation (4T) under the new Morena administration, often referred to as the "Second Floor" of the project initiated by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. While the current administration's National Development Plan has been published only within the past six months and five years remain in its mandate, scholarly analysis of its discourse and policy direction is still scarce. This study therefore offers a preliminary, critical examination of the Plan as a foundational step toward understanding the evolving ideological and developmental trajectory of the Fourth Transformation. In doing so, it fills a gap in existing literature, which has extensively examined previous stages of Mexico's development, particularly the neoliberal and post-neoliberal transitions, but has yet to engage systematically with the new administration's discursive and policy framework.

This chapter reviews current literature on the core features of Mexico's 4T: the redefinition of the social pact, a development model centered on resource extraction and dispossession, and a populist approach characterized by universal welfare programs, contentious public

consultations, and the monopolization of political discourse.

3.1 A new social pact: the State as mediator between market forces and social demands

Drawing on Polanyi's framework, Coughlin (2023) defines the 4T as a countermovement to neoliberalism, where populist leadership seeks to restore a sense of "lost or suppressed national greatness" through a direct bond between the leader and the people. Rather than rejecting neoliberalism outright, the 4T engages in what Coughlin terms a "nationalist recoding" of neoliberalism, rearticulating its principles in nationalist language (2023: 23). Similarly, Ruckert et al. (2017:1586) note that, for most scholars of post-neoliberalism, the recovery of "the centrality of the state in economic processes and the quest for economic development" is a defining feature of post-neoliberal regimes, distinguishing them from neoliberal ones

According to Coughlin (2023: 24), the central ideological task of the 4T is to redefine the relationship between the nation and the state. As a political project, it employs various ideological tools to present itself as a concrete program of transformation, most notably through a selective retelling of Mexican history structured around four "great transformations." First articulated in 2018 and carried forward by the current administration, this narrative is reinforced by foundational documents such as the 2018–2024 National Development Plan. The PND openly criticized neoliberalism and committed to addressing corruption, economic stagnation, and insecurity, positioning the state as the main driver of renewal through measures such as raising the minimum wage, expanding infrastructure, and strengthening social programs (Heredia & Gómez, 2021, as cited in Rodríguez & Azamar, 2024: 125).

Following the 2018 elections, Mexico experienced a resurgence of presidential power, marking the strongest phase of presidentialism since the country's democratic transition (Centeno, 2023). By the end of AMLO's mandate in 2024, Morena's coalition controlled a supermajority in the Chamber of Deputies and was only one seat short of a supermajority in the Senate, giving the party unprecedented capacity to shape legislation and influence national policy. This political dominance is further reinforced by Sheinbaum's high approval rating of 79% as of August 2025 (Cruz 2025, September 1). Despite this consolidation of executive authority, the administration's relationship with major economic actors has remained notably conciliatory. This cooperative stance toward big capital has limited the government's ability to pursue a genuine post-neoliberal transformation (Centeno, 2023)

3.2 A development model based on resource extraction and dispossession

> "*Fortunately, a voice emerged from a corner of the village that began to question the true intentions of those people who came along with the mine, promising better "development" for the people and their town. Among the promises made by those well-dressed men who seemed to come from the city was that, thanks to the mine, there would be more and better jobs for everyone, that people would live better, that there would be more stores, buildings, and things like that, that people would have more money and better services. In short, they promised a life of abundance and wealth. [...] The mine was going to be in the same place where the water that supplies all the inhabitants of the region originates, which meant that there would no longer be clean water to drink and that there would not be any more water, which would be a catastrophe for the community because water is a vital resource for life. [...] It is impossible to think that the government is on the side of the people when it is they who grant concessions and permits for large transnational companies to enter rural and indigenous communities and take all their resources without anyone or anything being able to do anything to prevent it*."
>
> "We are here and we will continue to be here... in case they return" Silvia Cabrera Galindo[3]

A central pillar of the 4T is its development model, which combines the extraction and processing of oil and strategic minerals with large-scale infrastructural projects that facilitate the movement of commodities (north to south, as with the Mayan Train; and east to west, as with the Transoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec[4]), framed under the concept of "energy sovereignty." This model prioritizes attracting investment to generate employment through industry and tourism, while promoting regional development and "shared prosperity" (PND, 2025: 18, 14-18), particularly in the historically marginalized South and Southeast[5]. Many of these initiatives build on earlier plans, such as the Puebla-Panama Plan, reflecting continuity with previous neoliberal development strategies for the region (Coughlin, 2023; Emmelhainz, 2021, 27-28). Flagship projects like the Mayan Train exemplify this approach: although presented as engines of regional development, they have faced criticism for forest destruction, community displacement, and the intensification of socio-environmental conflicts

[3]My translation of "Aquí estamos y seguiremos estando... por si vuelven,", short story by Silvia Cabrera Galindo on socio-environmental conflicts, read aloud during the Third Regional Encounter of Land and Territory (San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, September 14–15).

[4]For an overview on the Mayan Train, see for example *Impactos sociales y territoriales del Tren Maya* (2019) or Gasparello y Núñez Rodríguez (2021).

[5]There is no space here to discuss the relevance of this region as a migration container and its relationship with global migration control connected to making of this region US's southern border (Emmelhainz, 2021: 19). See for example CoLibres's report on migration (2025).

(Santamaría, 2025, May 12; Casanova Casañas, 2021).

Civil society organizations and land defenders highlight that, despite expectations that the 4T would counter extractive practices, concessions to transnational companies have not been revoked. In meetings such as the Regional Encounter of Land and Territory, activists from Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guerrero have mapped ongoing conflicts over water scarcity, mining (including lithium and other strategic minerals), hydroelectric dams, highways, and touristification. They also highlight links between rising violence, the presence of organized crime connected to transnational companies, and the government's inability to address the situation, while social programs are used to divide communities and pressure them into accepting extractive projects that ultimately displace them due to water scarcity or excessive violence (RD: 331-334).

Scholars interpret this model as a form of "internal colonialism" or "accumulation through dispossession" (Coughlin, 2023), in which peasant and Indigenous communities are displaced to make room for megaprojects and Special Economic Zones, now 'rebranded' as "Polos de Bienestar" (welfare hubs). Although the administration distinguishes discursively between megaprojects and resource extraction, in practice the two are closely interconnected, for example, in the railway system that facilitates access to resource-rich territories for transnational companies. These projects have advanced despite socio-environmental resistance, often justified in the name of national security (Rodríguez & Azamar, 2024).

3.3 Welfare programs and citizen participation: eroding democracy?

Another defining feature of the 4T is its emphasis on democratization and redistribution. Slogans such as López Obrador's "*para el bien de todos, primero los pobres*" ("For the good of all, the poor must come first,") and Sheinbaum's "*llegamos todas*" (we [fem. plur.] all arrived) illustrate a post-neoliberal ambition to rebuild the political community by incorporating historically marginalized groups, including women and Indigenous peoples (Yates & Bakker, 2014). This has been pursued primarily through inclusive welfare policies and through changes in political and judicial institutions[6].

A central welfare measure has been, since 2018, the introduction of unconditional cash transfers. Critics argue these policies are largely assistentialist, short-term compensatory

[6]It is not possible here to explore in detail the changes to the judicial system (2025) or the reforms affecting Indigenous peoples' rights following the 2024 constitutional amendment on indigenous matters. For further discussion, see Research Diary (235–239), López Bárcenas (2025) on the constitutional reform, and news coverage on the judicial reform such as BBC News Mundo (2025, May 30) and Ruiz (2025, June 2).

measures that fail to address structural inequalities, particularly in areas such as housing (Aguilar Astorga, 2024: 40). These programs also raise concerns about corruption and the reproduction of clientelistic relationships between welfare distribution and electoral support (Casar, 2019).

Participatory mechanisms such as public consultations have likewise been criticized as symbolic rather than substantive. Since 2019, consultations have often been used to legitimize predetermined decisions rather than to deliberate on them (Gasparello, 2020:126). The consultation mechanisms promoted by AMLO, such as the national consultation in 2018 and the citizen consultation in 2019, were designed primarily to display public approval of certain projects. However, these processes lacked any legal foundation and were non-binding (Gasparello, 2020: 127). By contrast, popular consultation is a constitutionally recognized tool that can be initiated by citizens themselves and becomes binding if 40% of the electorate participates. Yet, in 2019, a presidential decree restricted its use for infrastructure projects, effectively removing this avenue of direct democratic decision-making.

The consultations permitted under the 4T align with what Santos (2005, cited in Gasparello, 2020: 128) calls the "paradigm of governance", a hallmark of neoliberal globalization. These mechanisms address citizens symbolically without challenging the monopoly of representative institutions over public decision-making, and they serve to displace the reivindicative actions of collective actors (Gasparello, 2020: 128). Moreover, these consultations have frequently occurred after projects had already begun, undermining their legitimacy. Gasparello (2020: 127-128) also notes procedural flaws, including the lack of sufficient information, limited deliberation time, state violence against land defenders, and the imposition of formats that disregard traditional community practices. Rituals such as ceremonial blessings or "first stone" ceremonies reinforce an indigenist discourse but often mask the coercive and extractive nature of the projects. Participation levels have also been unrepresentative, and in some cases the processes were not genuinely free: communities were encouraged to vote in exchange for access to basic services or welfare programmes (Gasparello, 2020). Moreover, while other post-neoliberal regimes undertook constitutional rewriting through constituent assemblies (Ruckert et al. 2017: 1591), Mexico's constitutional reforms, including that concerning Indigenous rights, followed a different trajectory. This is because the outcomes of the constitutional consultation remained non-binding (RD: 228).

The government's strategy for shaping public opinion and construct consensus extends beyond

welfare and consultations to its daily press conferences (*mañaneras*). These events, amplified by social media, have institutionalized the administration's narrative, framing politics in binary terms and monopolizing public debate (López Moreno, 2024: 6; Zapata Celestino, 2022: 4). While framed as exercises in transparency, they often reinforce polarization and hinder accountability (Zapata Celestino, 2022; Samaniego Sánchez, 2023). Although much research has examined López Obrador's use of this format, little attention has yet to be given to Sheinbaum's approach to the morning conferences.

Taken together, the literature shows how the 4T combines a nationalist recoding of neoliberalism with a neo-developmentalist agenda centered on resource extraction and megaprojects, while legitimizing itself through welfare programs, symbolic participatory mechanisms, and populist practices. These dynamics raise questions about whether the 4T represents a transformative post-neoliberal project or whether it reproduces older patterns of inequality, extractivism, and limited democracy under a new guise.

4. Research Questions

Main Research Questions:

How does the Mexico's National Development Plan 2025–2030 (PND) define development, and does it reproduce or challenge existing discourses in development policy?

This question is about exploring the PND's understanding of development and its connection to wider economic and political discourses (mainly, the specificity of its post-neoliberal discourse in relation to neoliberalism).

Sub-Research Questions:

a. How are development problems and proposed solutions constructed through the PND's discourse, and what underlying myths shape this construction?

This question examines how the PND frames development challenges and legitimizes its policy choices through discursive tropes.

b. How do these myths compare with academic and grey literature on the outcomes of different economic strategies?

This question critically evaluates the PND's assumptions and proposed strategies in light of existing research.

5. Theoretical framework

After outlining the main features of the 4T, this section situates the thesis within its broader

theoretical framework. The analysis draws on dependency theory, a school of thought developed by Latin American Marxist intellectuals in the 1960s to explain the expansion of capitalism in the region and to challenge classical developmentalism. Following Kvangraven (2023), I treat dependency theory less as a single theory and more as a research program composed of diverse strands and ongoing internal and external debates. Its core value lies in explaining persistent uneven global development and the tendency toward deepening inequality of the system. In this sense, this project uses the concept while being aware of its weaknesses, especially its general lack of an intersectional framework (however there are exceptions, see for example feminist analysis of dependency theory as Costantino & Laterra, 2018).

Dependency theory's renewed prominence in recent debates, seen in Kvangraven's work (2023) and in *Latin American Perspectives* (Issue 242, 2022), also underscores its relevance to discussions of neo-developmentalism. As Antunes de Oliveira (2022: 37) argues, neo-developmentalism originates in Cardoso's reformist reading of dependency theory, which makes the revolutionary-Marxist strand, especially Marini's work, an important critique to more reformist strands within dependency theory. Therefore, Marini's concept of the superexploitation of labor is used in this work as it offers a critique of development centered on the valorization of labor and life over capital (*ibid*.)

5.1 Dependency theory

Dependency theory highlights two central mechanisms that reproduce dependency in peripheral economies: the superexploitation of labor and extractivism. Its main tenet is that development and underdevelopment are not separate phenomena but complementary parts of an unequal world system. From a Marxist perspective, dependency is rooted in the structural incorporation of peripheral economies into global capitalism in subordinate positions, beginning with European colonialism (Martins, 2022: 19). However, unlike decolonial thought which emphasizes colonial matrix and colonial relations, dependency theory stresses the materialist dynamics of global capitalist accumulation that perpetuate subordination beyond formal colonialism (*ibid*.).

Dependency theory emerged in dialogue with and in opposition to Latin American structuralism, the dominant approach between 1948 and 1975. Structuralism promoted import-substitution industrialization (ISI), a protectionist strategy aimed at replacing imports with domestic production (Treacy, 2022: 231). In the 1990s, dependency theory converged with

world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974), producing a Marxist account of the global capitalist system. This perspective emphasizes the sixteenth-century origins of the modern world-system, its asymmetrical international division of labor, the ongoing transfer of surpluses from periphery to core, the complicity of both core and peripheral elites, and the cyclical dynamics of rise and decline that shape accumulation patterns (Martins, 2022: 21).

Dependency theorists challenged both the optimistic vision of developmentalism and the structuralist assumption that peripheral countries could replicate the developmental path of the core. They argued instead that the evolution of capitalism in the periphery is fundamentally different and that state-led industrialization in these countries cannot achieve autonomous capitalist development. By questioning that development and underdevelopment are independent phenomena, dependency theorists demonstrated that "peripheral capitalism did not follow an evolutionary line parallel to that of metropolitan capitalism and consolidated a Latin Americanist and antistagist analytical line" (Treacy, 2022: 219). Emerging alongside the political discourse of decolonization at the heyday of decolonization of several countries in Asia and Africa during 1960s, dependency theorists criticized ISI and the penetration of foreign capital in local economic structures as perpetuating dependency (Treacy, 2022: 220). According to these theorists, surplus produced in the periphery is systematically appropriated by the core, making ISI ineffective in breaking the dependency cycle (Beigel, 2008, cited in Treacy 2022: 221).

5.2 Superexploitation of labor

Ruy Mauro Marini (2008 [1973]: 158, referenced in Treacy, 2022: 222, 231) defined superexploitation as the defining feature of peripheral capitalism: workers are paid below the value of their labor, not through higher productivity but by overextending their physical capacities. Unlike in the core countries with a self-centered accumulation cycle, where rising wages sustain domestic markets, peripheral economies rely on exports, keeping local consumption irrelevant to accumulation. These dynamics produce what Treacy (2022: 231) terms "blocked Fordism," in which low wages prevent the rise of a robust middle class, limit domestic markets, and force reliance on exports.

Dependency is thus reproduced through a fragile and externally oriented cycle of accumulation. The neo-developmentalist pattern of accumulation further entrenches this dependent model: productive specialization geared toward the export of primary products with little technological content and value-added, the defense of large transnational corporations, private property

(often foreign owned) in strategic sectors of the economy, and a fragmented, precarious, and outsourced labor market (Treacy, 2022: 231). In this model foreign direct investment deepens dependency by installing foreign capital, which creates industrial growth and technological diversity, but it has the undesired effect of generating balance-of-payments problems and reinforcing alliances between foreign capital and local elites (Treacy, 2022: 223).

Marxist dependency theory therefore concludes that capitalist development in the periphery deepens dependency, externally, because of the focus on export and of the value transfer due to foreign direct investment, and internally, through the superexploitatoin of workers (Treacy, 2022: 223).

5.3 Extractivism

Alongside labor exploitation, dependency is reinforced by extractivism, the export-oriented extraction of raw materials, minerals, and energy. This model leaves economies vulnerable to volatile commodity prices and technological stagnation. Gudynas (2009; 2021, cited in Rodríguez & Azamar, 2024: 116-117) argues that extractivism should be seen not merely as resource exploitation but as a development model in itself. Svampa (2019, cited in Rodríguez & Azamar, 2024: 117) highlights the contradictions of discourse and practice in neo-extractivism, where governments frame commodity exports as tools for social justice while in practice reinforcing dependency. Similarly, literature on post-neoliberalism highlights the link between the state's central role in mediating the relationship between the economy and nature as post-neoliberal regimes' rely on extraction to secure surplus for redistribution (Ruckert et al., 2017: 1586).

Harvey's (2003) concept of "accumulation by dispossession" helps illuminate this process: capitalism perpetually resolves crises of overaccumulation by appropriating pre-capitalist spaces, be it in other countries or within the borders of the nation-state by appropriating and commodifying "non-proletarized spaces within developed capitalist societies" (Gil Sánchez, 2019: 838). Through the fictitious commodification of land, labor and money, the state inscribes market relations into societal spaces where non-market relationships had been prevalent (Polanyi, 1944).

In this framework, the energy sovereignty promoted by the 4T is not simply about national control over resources. Rather, it involves the appropriation of non-market spaces, particularly Indigenous territories in the South and Southeast. Megaprojects such as the Tren Maya or Ruta

de Las Culturas Mayas[7] exemplify this logic by dispossessing *ejido* lands, traditionally used for subsistence and small-scale commerce, to transform local populations into labor force for the tourism industry[8]. Neo-developmentalist narratives that present development as a utopian horizon are therefore directly tied to capitalist projects of dispossession and the extraction of natural and cultural resources[9] in regions that had partly resisted capitalist predation.

Within a neo-developmentalist framework, economic growth in the periphery is inseparable from extractivism and the dispossession of local populations. Although presented under the rhetoric of equity, the model entrenches dependency by transforming land and labor into commodities. This commodification of land and resources not only drives a development pattern favouring capital accumulation but also undermines and conflicts with the understanding of nature of Indigenous and peasant communities, giving rise to counter-movements that challenge it[10].

5.4 Sustainable development

Scales (2017: 1) defines green capitalism as a form of environmentalism that stresses the economic value of ecosystems and biodiversity, seeking to mitigate human impacts by ensuring that markets internalize the value of environmental services. In this framework, neither private property nor economic growth are questioned as drivers of environmental harm (*ibid*.). Instead, as in classical market economies, markets are assumed to be the most efficient mechanism for allocating scarce resources, with nature and ecosystems reframed as commodifiable services

[7] The highway project connecting San Cristóbal de las Casas with the tourist area of Palenque, whose construction began on June 8, 2025, has been strongly opposed by grassroots organizations of land defenders and indigenous communities in the region (Modevite, March 31, 2025). Civil society groups have denounced violations of human and collective indigenous rights, as well as serious environmental impacts (Slamalil Kinal, July 7, 2025).

[8]Regarding indigenous peoples and their relationship to territory, one of the main criticisms of the recent constitutional reform is its failure to address a central demand of indigenous movements: that the nation-state renounce territorial rights over indigenous lands. Authors argue that land control is the foundation of autonomy and self-determination. Without it, the reform once again leaves indigenous communities struggling to defend their territories against capitalist exploitation (A. Gil, September 1, 2024).

[9]Although a full discussion of cultural extractivism is beyond the scope here, ongoing debates highlight the appropriation of traditional textiles and footwear from indigenous, in this case Zapoteca, communities by multinational companies such as Adidas and Shein (Espinosa, August 11, 2025; Manzo, 2025, September 1). Notably, the Mexican state often positions itself as the protector of indigenous peoples, yet the Zapoteca community of Villa Hidalgo de Yalalag, for example, rejected any attempts to politicize and misrepresent their collective decisions by either the Oaxaca government or the president, citing their autonomous governance structures (A. Gil, 2025, August 10). These debates raise broader questions about increasingly popular indigenous rituals that, taken out of context and standardized, are displayed as part of the inauguration ceremonies of state leaders: whether they genuinely increase visibility for cultural diversity or constitute cultural appropriation (see also A. Gil, 2025, August 30).

[10] However, see Fraser (2014) for a critique of this reading as it does not account for domination and exploitation that is present in non-market societies, such as patriarchy. In her reading, one must be careful with the romanticization of resistance and update Polanyian structural critique of fictitious commodification with a critique of domination.

for human use ranging from provisioning services like water, food, and energy to cultural ones (*ibid*: 2).

From a Green Marxist perspective, however, environmental degradation arises from the structural imperatives of capitalism itself: relentless competition, the pursuit of unlimited growth, and deeply unequal social relations of wealth, property, and power (*ibid*: 5). Green capitalism, in contrast, is closely tied to the discourse of sustainable development, which displaced earlier, more radical environmental approaches advocating limits to growth (*ibid*.: 4).

Sustainable development has been defined as a process of change in which resource exploitation, investment priorities, technological progress, and institutional transformation are aligned to enhance both present and future capacities to meet human needs (WCED, 1987: 46 referenced in Krueger, 2017: 4). Rather than recognizing ecological limits, this paradigm rests on the belief that continued growth, coupled with technological substitution, efficiency gains, and recycling, can overcome environmental crises (Krueger, 2017: 2; 5-6). Discursively, it offers a vision in which capitalism can be reconciled with ecological sustainability, promising a future where environmental protection and economic expansion coexist. In doing so, both green capitalism and sustainable development reproduce myths of technological determinism and perpetuate faith in innovation and optimization as pathways to ever-higher growth. The contradictions between reliance on natural resource extraction and primary commodity exports as a development strategy and the goal of sustainability have been highlighted across post-neoliberal regimes (Ruckert et al. 2017: 1592).

5.5 Populism

The political dimension of dependency is inseparable from populism. Martins (2022: 28) argues that the superexploitation of labor in dependent economies makes a sustainable democracy impossible, since extreme inequality undermines working-class organization and multiparty competition. Drawing on Dos Santos (1978b, cited in Martins, 2022: 28), he contends that this often results in states of exception, where conservative alliances defend private property and big capital, breaking only politically with liberalism while remaining economically tied to it.

Populism can be understood as both ideology and communication style (Flores-González et al., 2021). Its core features are appeals to “the people,” anti-elitism, and the exclusion of out-groups. When such discourse relies primarily on references to “the people,” Jagers and

Walgrave (2007, cited in Flores-González et al. 2021: 334) describe it as "thin populism." In Europe, left-wing populism tends to emphasize anti-elitism, whereas right-wing populism is more strongly associated with the exclusion of out-groups. However, recent literature on right-wing populism in Latin America suggests that left- and right-wing populisms share more similarities than differences, with their main point of divergence lying in the discourses through which they articulate their relationship to the market (Montero, 2025). Consequently, the distinction between post-neoliberal and neoliberal orientations may offer a more analytically precise way of capturing the differences between left- and right-wing populist discourse (*ibid.*)[11].

In Latin America, "inclusionary populism" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, cited in Flores-González et al., 2021: 335) emphasizes a direct leader-mass relationship. While mobilizing support, this dynamic often weakens institutional checks and balances and the rooting of European forms of democracy. The reliance on a vague, moral discourse simplifies demands and legitimizes personalistic measures that bypass democratic procedures. AMLO's rhetoric exemplifies left populism through the exaltation of "the people," anti-elitism, the use of historical narratives to legitimize current policies, and criticism of institutions and the media (*ibid.*).

In policy terms, populist rhetoric often translates into welfare measures that prioritize clientelism and personalistic power over structural redistribution (Dodlovaa et al., 2017). Recent reforms in Mexico, including the judicial reform, the reform of the National Guard[12] and the elimination of certain checks and balances organs (specifically the Coneval and the INAI[13]), illustrate the institutional risks of Morena's governance model, as mechanisms of accountability and transparency are progressively eroded through the anti-corruption and austerity discourse (Prodh, 2025: 10).

In summary, dependency theory explains how colonial legacies are reinforced by contemporary

[11] For a more extensive discussion see for example Pereira (2023).

[12]The UN Office for Human Rights in Mexico expressed concern about President Claudia Sheinbaum's proposals for a new National Guard Law and reforms to the General Law on the National Public Security System and the Law on the National Public Security Investigation and Intelligence System, which "would jeopardize the right to privacy and other human rights." (Desinformémonos, 2025, June 27).

[13]National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval) and the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information, and Protection of Personal Data (INAI). The first organ was crucial for the technical evaluation of public policies on social rights, enabling an independent assessment of whether such policies effectively reduce poverty. The second concerns guaranteeing access to public information and safeguarding personal data. By removing these autonomous bodies, responsibility for evaluating poverty reduction and granting access to public information shifts back to government agencies, fostering greater opacity and reducing accountability.

dynamics of superexploitation and extractivism. While labor exploitation ensures that surplus value is siphoned from the periphery, extractivism ties state revenues to volatile primary commodities and generates new forms of dispossession. Within this context, the discourse of sustainable development operates within a capitalist framework, while alternative or anti-capitalist ways of life are structurally marginalized. Politically, these power dynamics foster populist discourses and policies that, despite promising equity, often reproduce dependency on transnational capital and undermine democratic institutions.

6. Research design

This study employs textual analysis to examine the official development strategy of Sheinbaum's administration through a close reading of the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2025-2030 (PND)[14]. The aim is to understand how development policies are framed, justified, and connected to the broader discursive field of neo-developmentalism as a post-neoliberal economic discourse. The analysis has three parts to it: (1) identifying key policy content, (2) analyzing how policies are framed as solutions to problems, and (3) situating these narratives within wider debates on development (see Figure 1).

The research design draws primarily on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), complemented by critical personal narrative (Swadener & Mutua, 2004 referenced in Denzin et al. 2008) and frame analysis (Snow & Benford, 1988 referenced in Lindekilde, 2014). This multi-method approach enables both a linguistic analysis of the PND's language and a contextual examination of the order of discourse, which I understand, in CDA terms, as the relation between the discourse of the PND and hegemonic economic discourses (neoliberalism, post-neoliberalism), and, in frame-analytic terms, as the mobilization of consensus for specific policies.

While the PND constitutes the primary source, the study uses methodological triangulation (Chilisa, 2012: 167) to enhance credibility and confirmability (*ibid*.: 165, 171; this point is discussed further in Section 6.2) by incorporating secondary materials such as grey and academic literature, media coverage, and official government communications, including the *mañaneras del pueblo* (daily morning press conferences given by the Mexican president). The textual analysis is grounded in a six-month field immersion through my professional engagement in the communication department of the Human Rights Center Fray Bartolomé de

[14]Published on the official webpage of the Government of Mexico on February 28, 2025.

Las Casas (CDH Frayba) in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas. This experience generated a critical personal narrative in the form of a research diary, containing reflections on conferences, meetings, informal conversations and contextual observations (see Appendix).

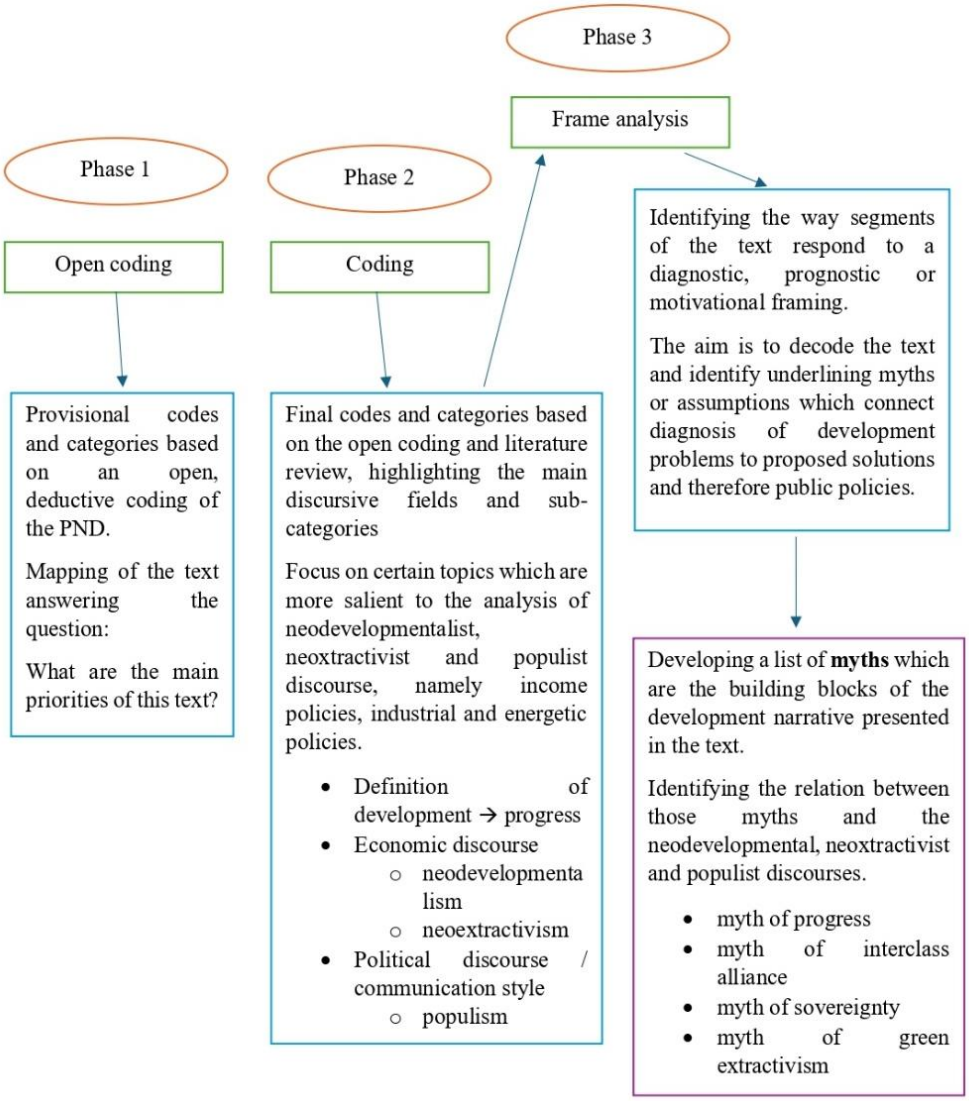

Figure 1

6.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the main analytical lens for this work. Discourse, understood as "an interrelated set of texts and practices […] which brings an object into being" (Lindekilde, 2014: 198), is the central vehicle through which social realities, in this case development narratives, are constructed (Weninger, 2008: 145). Following Lindekilde, I chose CDA because it is well suited to studying political actors' communication as "signifying agents" who construct grievances, goals, and collective identities (Lindekilde, 2014: 196). CDA allows researchers to analyse how discourse shapes mobilization and policy outcomes

and how ideological and cultural elements legitimize political projects, while maintaining a critical stance toward power structures (*ibid.*). Focusing on the official narrative is justified by the centrality of presidential discourse in Mexico, where government frames heavily shape media coverage (Rodelo & Muñiz, 2019).

Following Fairclough's approach, the analysis moves across three interconnected levels (Weninger, 2008: 146). Within this framework, texts function as the "discursive unit," which, through "discursive practices" encompassing production, dissemination, and reception, either reinforce or challenge the macro-level "order of discourse" (Fairclough, 1992). At the micro level, I pay attention to vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical devices (Weninger, 2008: 147; Lindekilde, 2014; Statham, 2022). At the meso level, I analyse discursive practices and interdiscursivity, considering how pre-existing economic and political discourses shape the formulation of the PND (Lindekilde, 2014: 217-218) and comparing it with existing scholarship on post-neoliberalism. Here, I also assess how the text naturalizes meanings through specific framings of problems and solutions, and how these resonate with hegemonic ideas about development (referred to as 'myths' or 'discursive tropes'; see Sections 6.4 and 7.2). At the macro level, I compare the proposed policy solutions with literature on policy effectiveness. The PND is particularly relevant in this regard as a document explicitly designed to shape public policy.

CDA combines a critical perspective, examining how language sustains power, with a social-constructivist stance (Saukko, 2003, cited in Lockyer, 2008: 865), exploring how meanings are both enabled and constrained by social structures (Weninger, 2008: 146). Lindekilde argues for the similarity between CDA and frame analysis, noting that their main difference lies in the types of analytical questions they can answer. He proposes viewing "frame analysis [...] as a particular causal-oriented and focused version of discourse analysis" (Lindekilde, 2014: 222). While CDA allows for more descriptive questions and micro-linguistic analysis, frame analysis, by providing a clear framework for coding segments (namely, prognostic, diagnostic, motivational), helps highlight resonance with pre-existing narratives and makes it possible to identify common categories in the justification of certain ideas at the meso level of discourse.

For these reasons, I use a blend of the two approaches: for micro-linguistic analysis I draw primarily on Statham (2022), while at the meso level I employ frame analysis as described by Lindekilde (2014), focusing on how the text frames problems and solutions and what does it imply in terms of resonance with existing frames or 'myths' about the economy. The advantage

of this research design is that the results of the frame analysis (the myths), extracted from a programmatic document such as the PND, can be used as a framework for analysing other discursive units (e.g. other politicians or policy documents) to evaluate whether they employ similar frames.

6.2 Research diary

Before describing how I applied CDA, I will first discuss the research diary. Given the interpretive and subjective nature of discourse analysis, the questions of validity and reliability arise. However, Chilisa (2012: 165) suggests that qualitative research should instead be assessed according to different criteria, namely credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility, defined as the equivalent of internal validity, is achieved when research accurately represents multiple realities and truths (*ibid*.). One way to ensure this is through what Chilisa calls 'progressive subjectivity' (2012: 166): monitoring the research process and documenting the development of the constructions that emerge from it. A second strategy, 'reflexivity', ensures that the researcher's involvement in the study does not threaten credibility by assessing "the influence of the researcher's background and ways of perceiving realities" (*ibid*.: 168). To strengthen credibility and ground my interpretation, I therefore maintained a textual and visual research diary that tracked the research process, systematizing it as a reflexive and iterative endeavour[15].

Drawing on feminist (Haraway, 1988; Mohanty, 2003; Clarke, 2012) and decolonial approaches to academic practice and identity (cf. Chilisa, 2012; Denzin et al., 2008; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013), the research diary serves two purposes, both epistemological and methodological. Epistemologically, it incorporates diverse sources beyond academic texts, broadening the spectrum of what can be considered valid knowledge. Methodologically, it uses triangulation to enhance the study's credibility and confirmability and applies reflexivity by foregrounding the researcher's situatedness (Haraway, 1988) as an integral part of the research process.

I began the diary in January 2025. Between April and October 2025, I worked at the CDH Frayba. My time in Chiapas, one of Mexico's most marginalized states and a major focus of government development efforts, shaped my research by allowing me to observe both the

[15] Qualitative content analysis is an iterative process that can contribute to the development of new theories. Grounded theory, which inspires my research, often incorporates triangulation and a mixed-method approach (see the "Grounded Theory" entry in the SAGE Encyclopedia; for a general introduction, see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; for a feminist perspective, see Clarke, 2012; for applications in social movement research, see Mattoni, 2014).

impacts of development projects and the socio-environmental conflicts they generate. Through my work with CDH Frayba, including participation in a regional gathering of land defenders from Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas, I engaged with Indigenous and peasant critiques of official development policies. Although my research design had been established beforehand, these experiences provided essential insights that informed and enriched my understanding of the contradictions inherent in development policies. For security and length reasons, the full diary is not included in this work; however, a table summarizing the entries in chronological order, along with the main insights and their influence on my research process, is provided in the Appendix.

6.3 Coding

Between January and May 2025, I began listening regularly to Sheinbaum's morning conferences to familiarize myself with her rhetoric and the main priorities of her administration. After the release of the PND in April 2025, I mapped its general topics and conducted an initial round of open coding (RD: 371). Using NVivo and Sketch Engine, I identified recurring terms and their relationships (RD: 372-376). During this stage, I coded segments of the text and applied descriptive labels, distinguishing between content and discourse (for example, separating categories such as 'income', 'education', or 'criticism of neoliberalism'). This first coding phase was inductive, with categories emerging directly from the text.

A second, deductive stage refined these categories by incorporating academic debates on post-neoliberalism and the discursive and policy features associated with it (neo-developmentalism, neo-extractivism, and populism). The framework proposed by Milanez & Santos (2015) was particularly relevant, as it identifies three assumptions common to both neo-developmentalist and neo-extractivist regimes: a belief in economic growth, the prioritization of international insertion, and a state-market partnership. Drawing also on Ruckert et al. (2017), I considered the set of recurring features and contradictions that characterize many post-neoliberal regimes. Of the six areas they propose, I selected the three that align with the Milanez & Santos framework: economic policies, social policy, and environmentalism.

Combining insights from the inductive coding and the categories derived from the literature review, I narrowed my focus to categories that were both prominent in the PND and central to the scholarly debates. These included energy (transition, energy sovereignty, sustainability, infrastructure), income (welfare/well-being policies, labour, state–market partnerships), and

industrial policy (exports, investment, internal market, political sovereignty), as well as populism as a meta-category (critique of neoliberalism, democracy, moral values, participation, people/nation).

6.4 Frame Analysis

Building on the previous coding, frame analysis was used to uncover the interpretive structures that connect problems to solutions in the government's discourse, decode the data, and identify underlying frames (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Frames, as Goffman (1974: 21, cited in Lindekilde, 2014: 201) describes them, are schemata that organize perception and guide action. In policy discourse, 'collective action frames' (Snow et al., 1986; Snow & Benford, 1988) constitute strategic efforts to activate specific discourses and interpretive repertoires to mobilize consensus (Lindekilde, 2014: 201).

Scholars such as Lewis et al. (2008; 2014; 2022) have emphasized that development functions as a narrative form, where storytelling frames problems and legitimizes interventions. Policy texts, in this sense, are not neutral but constitutive of reality, framing development issues in ways that justify proposed solutions (Lewis et al., 2008: 203). Framing is therefore intended to generate 'resonance'. "Resonance occurs when frames successfully 'speak to' individuals' existing perceptions and situation, and make them responsive to the content of the message" (Snow et al., 1986: 464, cited in Lindekilde, 2014: 207). Emmelhainz (2021: 38) describes the hegemony of neoliberalism in Mexico not just as socio-economical process, but also in terms of a cognitive process that produces a certain 'sensibility', "a sensibility that works upon our most intimate desires, colonizing our dreams, cannibalizing our ideals of freedom, and spitting them out as strategies of social control."

Using the previously coded segments, I analysed each segment step by step to determine how it answered the questions "What is the problem?", "What is the solution?", and "What is the overarching goal?" (RD: 245–287). As an example, the PND frames neoliberalism as the cause of underdevelopment and presents the moral government as the solution, with 'development' as the goal. I combined this level of analysis with microlinguistic analysis: identifying who is responsible for neoliberalism (corrupt policymakers rather than an unequal global order), how the moral government is characterized (honest, frugal, etc., with honesty functioning as the mechanism for funding austerity), and what the end goal represents (development is defined as greater well-being through strengthened consumption capacity). The results are presented in

Section 7.2.

6.5 Ethical considerations and alternative methods

My 'situatedness' (Haraway, 1988) as a white, middle-class Southern European researcher inevitably shapes the way I produce knowledge and cannot be considered neutral. As an outsider to the Mexican context and a product of European academic traditions, I am aware of the potential to reproduce Eurocentric biases in both research design and analysis. To mitigate this, I have engaged primarily with Spanish-language sources, particularly works by Latin American leftist thinkers, and collaborated closely with CDH Frayba, which allowed me to incorporate perspectives from human rights professionals as well as Indigenous and peasant land defenders, civil society groups often critical of government development policies.

As an activist-researcher sympathetic to critiques of global capitalism, I acknowledge the possibility of partiality in my interpretations. This thesis was only possible through relationships with CDH Frayba, other NGOs, and grassroots groups opposing megaprojects, who generously shared their knowledge with me. My aim is to amplify, rather than replace, their voices and to legitimize grassroots knowledge within the field of Communication for Development. This thesis therefore rejects claims of neutrality, positioning itself instead in support of Indigenous struggles against dispossession and extractivism by contributing to the defense of human rights and challenging capitalist development models.

This explicit positioning is both a strength and a limitation. It limits the generalizability of the findings but situates the research firmly within debates on Communication for Development, where acknowledging the situatedness of knowledge is an ethical commitment. The decision to rely mainly on textual rather than ethnographic methods reflect both the constraints of time and my position as an outsider. A more ethnographic or visual research design could have added further depth, but given the scope of this project, unobtrusive textual analysis provided the most practical and appropriate approach.

Nevertheless, alternative methodologies remain important for future research. Ethnographic approaches (such as focus groups or interviews) could provide valuable insights into public perceptions of Sheinbaum's discourse and development policies. Likewise, visual research methods and multi-modal CDA could complement textual analysis by offering a deeper understanding of political communication through visual media. While beyond the scope of this thesis, these methods present promising avenues for future work on the topic.

7. Analysis

The Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2025–2030 (PND) extends over 213 pages and is divided into several sections: Presentation, One Hundred Commitments for the Second Floor of Transformation, Diagnosis of the Nation - organized around seven axes[16], Towards the future: Objectives and strategies, Measuring progress: Monitoring indicators, Long-term vision: Plan México, and two appendices. For the purposes of this research, attention is concentrated on the most discursive components, the introduction and diagnosis, while the more technical parts devoted to indexes and formulas for measuring progress are left aside. This exclusion is necessary given the scope of the project, but it is worth noting that one of the main differences with the previous administration's PND is precisely the inclusion of mathematical formulas to measure development. The expansion is substantial: from 75 pages in the 2019–2024 PND to 213 in the current Plan.

> *El PND* ***orienta los objetivos de la nación*** *y define las acciones en el corto, mediano y largo plazo; instrumentos necesarios al Estado y a la sociedad para cumplir los compromisos.* (PND, 13/18-20)
>
> *Con este PND, el Estado* ***garantizará*** *derechos,* ***fortalecerá*** *la democracia y hará de la justicia social el principio rector de la vida pública.* (PND, 5/12-14)

The PND is presented as *orienting the objectives of the nation,* which are necessary for the state and society. The state appears prominently as the main actor of the text: it is the state who, through the tools offered by the PND, will meet objectives, guarantee rights, strengthen democracy and make of social justice the guiding principle of public life. The repetition of certain lexical items throughout the text, particularly the verbs *guarantee* and *strengthen* functions as a cohesive device that helps construct a coherent narrative about the PND's objectives and the role of the state.

> *El primer gobierno de la Cuarta Transformación inició un cambio profundo en la vida del país. [...] Ahora,* ***nuestra*** *misión es consolidar estos avances,* ***garantizar*** *su permanencia y profundizar aquellos cambios que siguen siendo urgentes. Esto significa* ***fortalecer*** *el Estado de* ***bienestar, la seguridad con justicia, el desarrollo económico con igualdad, la innovación pública al servicio del pueblo y la sostenibilidad como base del futuro****.* (PND, 6/4-13)

The stated mission of the second government of the 4T, expressed through the phrase *our*

[16]The seven axes are: Governance with justice and citizen participation, Development with well-being/welfare and humanism, Moral economy and work, Sustainable development, Substantive equality and women's rights, Public innovation for national technological development, Rights of indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities.

mission, which aims at including the reader and showing the efforts of the administration as collective ones, is to *consolidate* and *guarantee* the permanence of change, while deepening the transformation. These changes are described through emotionally charged language and a structure of parallel elements which need to be *strengthened*: a welfare state, security *with* justice, economic development *with* equality, public innovation *for* the people, and sustainability *as* the foundation for the future.

By calling her government the "Second Floor", Sheinbaum invokes the achievements of the previous administration to establish her authority and then introduces a set of concepts (such as security, economic development, and public innovation) which are often associated with neoliberal discourse. However, she redefines these terms by linking them to more progressive notions, such as justice, equality, service to the people, and sustainability. In doing so, the text begins to build a lexical chain around the concept of development, employing abstract and morally charged language that emphasizes ideals and direction rather than concrete strategies.

7.1 A definition of development

Through the Diagnosis and Objectives chapters, the PND presents an explanation for the causes of underdevelopment and proposes solutions in the form of public policies. The PND 2019-2024 was widely criticized for being more of a programmatic declaration than a development plan in the strict sense, falling short of the legal requirements set by the Ley de Planeación (Martínez Espinosa, 2021: 133). That plan attributed Mexico's recurrent crises and the persistence of poverty to the "neoliberal model," which, according to its narrative, had eroded the State's capacity to guarantee fundamental rights (Martínez Espinosa, 2021: 133-134). This represented a clear departure from earlier plans that generally provided pragmatic diagnoses tied to strategies and programs rather than broad ideological critiques. (*ibid*.).

The PND 2025-2030 continues along similar ideological lines. It presents neoliberalism as the primary source of Mexico's development problems, describing it as a system that produced economic growth but in a highly unequal manner. By weakening the State's role, reducing social spending, and fragmenting welfare programs, neoliberalism deepened poverty, especially among Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples, the elderly, children, and youth. The consequences extended beyond material deprivation to greater inequality, institutional distrust, corruption, social fragmentation, and rising violence (PND, 10/15; 32/25; 59/1).

> *A lo largo del periodo neoliberal* ***que*** *tanto le costó al pueblo de México, se decía que el Estado debía diluirse o subordinarse a las fuerzas del mercado;* ***que si*** *la economía*

> *se regaba desde arriba, la riqueza iba a llegar a los de abajo;* ***que si*** *aumentaba el salario se provocaría inflación;* ***que*** *lo privado era mejor que lo público;* ***que si*** *el Estado participaba en la economía iba a haber crisis económica y devaluación;* ***que*** *la corrupción era inherente al gobierno;* ***que*** *la libertad sólo existía en el mercado,* ***que*** *la educación, la salud, la vivienda y el salario justo no eran derechos, sino sujetos a quien pudiera comprarlos.* ***Todo esto cambió.*** (PND, 10/25-31, 11/1-2)

At a microlinguistic level, we can observe in this passage the use of emotionally charged language through parallelism. The repetition of similar grammatical structures (*que si la economía, que si aumentaba el salario, que lo privado, que si el Estado participaba, que la corrupción, que la libertad*) amplifies the emotional impact on the audience. This sequence culminates in the conclusive statement, *all of that changed*, where once again, emotional appeal substitutes for logical argumentation.

> *Durante varias décadas del periodo neoliberal, el Estado mexicano* ***descuidó la atención*** *de legítimas demandas* ***sociales y abandonó*** *su papel como promotor del desarrollo económico y* ***garante*** *del interés público.* (PND, 32/24-30)
>
> *Este modelo también dio lugar a la creación de programas sociales focalizados que, lejos de maximizar el uso de los recursos y facilitar la movilidad de las personas, excluyeron a amplios sectores de la población, fragmentando la estructura de bienestar e impidiendo el acceso a mejores oportunidades. Este modelo de protección social* ***resultó insuficiente*** *para reducir la pobreza. Su enfoque asistencialista, temporal, geográfico y condicionado* ***limitó cualquier impacto positivo*** *a largo plazo.* (PND, 43/40-45)

In these two passages, we also find that the same vocabulary later employed to describe development are initially used to characterize neoliberalism but in a negative way: during the neoliberal period, the Mexican state *disattended* legitimate social demands, *abandoned* its role in promoting economic development, and ceased to act as *guarantor* of the public interest. This rhetorical strategy serves to delegitimize neoliberal governance, while already suggesting an alternative and more legitimate vision of a state that actively attends to social demands, promotes economic development, and guarantees public interest. However, this delegitimization remains partial. For instance, the neoliberal social protection model is not portrayed as inherently flawed, harmful, or dependency-inducing, but rather as *insufficient* to achieve the stated objective (*reducing poverty*) and producing only a *limited positive impact* on the long-term basis (PND, 43/14-19).

Scholars have pointed out that this framing reflects an endogenous interpretation of underdevelopment, one that identifies neoliberal policymakers as responsible while

downplaying dynamics of dependency, unequal global structures, and the systemic exploitation of labor (Ríos Vera, 2019; Katz, 2014). Such an interpretation is consistent with an ideological framework centered on sovereignty and nationalism, which positions the nation-state as the main actor of transformation (Katz, 2014)[17]. This view differs from world-systems approaches, which stress the primacy of global order and emphasize the center-periphery relationship in the reproduction of structural inequality (*ibid*.).

> *Estos objetivos consisten en consolidar la transformación del país bajo* ***un modelo de desarrollo con bienestar, justicia social y sustentabilidad****.* (PND, 4/2-4)
>
> *México vive un momento clave en su historia, pues hoy estamos poniendo el Segundo Piso de esta Cuarta Transformación, consolidando* ***un modelo de desarrollo basado en el Humanismo Mexicano****.* (PND, 5/7-9)
>
> *Así, la Cuarta Transformación ha cambiado el* ***modelo de desarrollo****, inspirada en la fecunda historia de México, el* ***amor al pueblo y la honestidad, que nutren al Humanismo Mexicano****, regenerando la vida pública.* (PND, 9/6-8)

If the problem is neoliberalism and the inability of neoliberal policymakers, the solution is to construct a post-neoliberal development model. The PND 2018-2024 already envisioned such a model as one where development and social justice were not in contradiction but mutually reinforcing (Martínez Espinosa, 2021: 134). The 2025–2030 PND builds on this and frames its proposal within the principles of "Mexican Humanism" and "moral economy". At its core is the consolidation of a national transformation, a *regeneration of public life*, through a model of development based on *bienestar*[18], social justice and sustainability (PND, 4/3; 5/9; 41/10; 57/7).

Throughout the text, the term "development" (*desarrollo*) is characterized by a range of modifiers[19] that reveal its dominant framings. *Economic development* appears most frequently (19 instances), followed by *national development* (12 instances) and *technological development* (8 instances). Other recurring collocations include *regional*, *sustainable*, and *industrial development* (each occurring 6 times), while terms such as *integral*, *social*, and *inclusive development* appear less often. Overall, this lexical patterning reflects a traditional narrative in which development is conceptualized primarily as an economic and national

[17]While dependency theory and world-system theory prioritize a global perspective, endogenist explications for underdevelopment are a result of methodological nationalism (cf. Wimmer & Schiller, 2002).
[18]The Spanish word "bienestar" can be translated in English both as 'well-being' and 'welfare'.
[19]For the micro-level analysis, I have used Sketch Engine, which has helped to do both a quantitative analysis of how many times certain words appear, as well as analyzing the collocation and usage of the words.

project of improvement, and only secondarily as a social one.

> ***El fortalecimiento del Sistema Educativo Nacional*** *es clave para garantizar la justicia social e impulsar el desarrollo del país.* (PND, 45/45-48)
>
> ***El fortalecimiento de esta educación*** *debe ir de la mano con proyectos estratégicos que impulsen el desarrollo social, la soberanía tecnológica y la seguridad alimentaria.* (PND, 47/52-57)
>
> *El objetivo es contribuir al bienestar y al humanismo, mediante el apoyo a las personas e instituciones que* ***fomentan*** *el desarrollo de las artes y la cultura.* (PND, 49/18-22)
>
> *Esto también* ***implica fortalecer su identidad cultural*** *y* ***fomentar su desarrollo*** *social, económico y político bajo los principios de justicia e inclusión.* (PND, 91/16-18)
>
> *En este marco, destaca la conformación del Plan México, una iniciativa que contempla la* ***colaboración entre el Gobierno de México y el sector privado****, cuyo objetivo es* ***fomentar*** *un* ***desarrollo económico equitativo y sustentable*** *a largo plazo* (PND, 17/1-3)

The verbs associated with development consistently convey a sense of dynamism: to *drive*, *propel*, *encourage*, or *promote*. In these constructions, development functions as the object, while the subject tends to involve abstract entities such as *the strengthening* of education, cultural identity, or cooperation between the government and the public sector. On the surface, these verbs imply material processes and concrete actions; however, they remain vague, since the agent and the specific actions are never clearly defined. For instance, strengthening education must accompany *strategic projects that drive development*; people who *drive art and cultural development* must be supported; and the strengthening of indigenous cultural identity must be paired with efforts to *drive their development under the principles of justice and inclusion*, while the cooperation between the government and the private sector has the objective of driving an *equitable and sustainable long-term economic development.*

> *Para* ***fortalecer*** *el proyecto histórico de los mexicanos, de ser un país soberano, independiente y democrático* ***se requiere fortalecer*** *la economía nacional, impulsar una* ***política industrial integral*** *que ayude a* ***disminuir nuestra dependencia del exterior****, que* ***incentive la inversión*** *nacional y extranjera* ***responsable****, y que además permita a las empresas nacionales* ***participar de las cadenas globales de producción y de valor.*** (PND, 57/1-6)

The main tenets of the development model are "Mexican Humanism" and "moral economy"[20] . The former emphasizes that welfare policies should be guided by the principles of universality,

[20]Both concepts form part of the political-philosophical model promoted by López Obrador as the basis for the Fourth Transformation (Flores, 2023).

equality, and inclusion, with particular attention to the well-being of workers. The latter constitutes the core economic framework of neo-developmentalism: a comprehensive industrial strategy designed to *strengthen* national sovereignty and domestic markets, reducing dependency on *unnecessary* import (PND, 17/4-5), and promote economic policies oriented toward import-substitution industrialization (ISI). At the same time, it seeks to attract *responsible* investment and enhance global competitiveness, thereby fostering a mixed approach between ISI and export-oriented growth (EOG).

> ***La economía moral representa un modelo de desarrollo económico del país a partir de fortalecer la capacidad de consumo de la mayoría*** *que está en la base de la pirámide a través de los programas sociales, creando más empleos y mejorando los salarios, alcanzando a duplicar el salario mínimo en términos reales.* (PND, 57/7-11)

The notion of a moral economy is articulated as an economic development model grounded in *strengthening* consumption among the majority through social programs, job creation, and wage increases (PND, 5/2; 11/3). Once again, the central lexical choice repeats the idea of a government who *strengthens* and promotes, while it constructs a vision of development premised on consumerism as both driver and measure of progress. The proposed strategies prioritize, first, social programs, universal welfare mechanisms based on cash redistribution, and second, the creation of jobs with improved wages. This discursive configuration, however, reveals as much through its omissions as through what it proposes. It delineates a specific model of economic participation, wage labor within a consumption-based economy, while marginalizing other forms of productive and social organization.

> *El propósito de estas acciones es construir* ***un México más justo y productivo****, donde el fruto del trabajo alcance para el bienestar familiar y* ***se valore la contribución de todas las personas al desarrollo económico*** *del país (PND, 58/19-21).*

The plan highlights goals such as a *fairer and more competitive economy prepared for future challenges* (PND, 202/27), with emphasis on workers, work-life balance (PND, 57/27; 58/4), and strategic infrastructure for commerce within and outside of the country, which will result in more efficiency and therefore more economic development (PND, 58/13). Productivity lies at the heart of the narrative of *a more just and productive Mexico* (PND, 58/19). Work is central to provide the wellbeing of the family and *people are valued on the basis of their contribution to economic national development* (PND, 58/20), while the state, in turn, commits to valuing each contribution and guaranteeing the *full development* of every person (PND, 58/23).

The case of rural communities and especially *pueblos originarios*[21], which represent approximately 19% of Mexico's population (around 23.2 million people, the largest population in the Americas according to INEGI, 2020), is illustrative. For example, in Oaxaca collective labor (*tequio*) constitutes a central economic and cultural practice. This form of non-wage work, undertaken for collective benefit rather than individual remuneration, encompasses a range of activities, from building infrastructure and schools to organizing communal events. Beyond its material outcomes, such labor carries ideological, social, and spiritual significance, reinforcing community cohesion, shared decision-making, and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Educa, 2020: 70).

As Anastacio Cardoso Jiménez of Santa María Tlahuitoltepec observes, "*In the modern era, the state has imposed certain rules and criteria for the use of the economic resources allocated to each municipality [...] Now it is local and outside companies that carry out construction work in the municipality, and the money received by the municipality includes a budget for paying its workers*."[22] (Educa, 2020: 73). Through this shift, collective and community labor is rearticulated as wage labor, signaling a broader process of discursive and structural transformation towards the dispossession of non-capitalist ways of living.

In sum, while the PND articulates a critique of neoliberalism, it ultimately reaffirms many of its core assumptions. By prioritizing economic growth, consumerism, wage labor, and productivity, it reproduces a developmental logic that marginalizes other forms of organizing life and normalizes capitalist modes of production as the unquestioned foundation of progress.

7.2 Myths

As I coded across categories, I began to observe patterns that cut across multiple policy areas, showing recurring frames, e.g. the idea of progress equated with modernization appeared in all policy areas. I therefore reorganized my data to highlight how the PND's framing of problems and solutions aligns with pre-existing discourses (belief in growth, neo-developmentalism, neo-extractivism, populism) and how the combination of these discourses corresponded to particular narratives or myths (Figure 2). I argue that the framing of the 4T is effective because it draws on a neoliberal sensibility (Emmelhainz, 2021) and that its understanding of

[21]Rather than the term indigenous I choose to use the phrase *pueblos originarios* ("native peoples"). The term indigenous is an exogenous term used to define others, especially in statistics, and its use among the affected people is controversial, with some reclaiming it and others refusing to define themselves through this colonial term.
[22] My translation from Spanish.

development is grounded in hegemonic post-neoliberal narratives. Finally, by analysing the categories and the myths underlying them alongside academic and grey literature on policy effectiveness, I identified the main contradictions that emerge; these are summarized in the table below.

Myths → **Categories ↓**	**Progress**	**Interclass alliance**	**Sovereignty/dependency**	**Green extractivism**
Belief in growth (income, industrial and energy policies)	Modernization according to Western standards Commodification of labor	Progressively extending democracy and development to everyone	Export oriented growth Internal market development through more consumption	Unlimited growth in a world with finite resources
Neo-developmentalism (income and industrial policies)	Economic development equals more well-being	Shared prosperity through a shared developmental mission	Import substitution industrialization Food and energy sovereignty	Discursive nationalization of natural resources vs actual privatization
Neo-extractivism (energy and industrial policies)	Commodification of nature	State as neutral mediator between private and public interests	Dependency on export of primary commodities	Continued extraction of fossil fuels and minerals
Populism (income policies)	Consumption to be extended to "the people"	Unity of the nation, austerity and state as Great Benefactor	Discursive political sovereignty Attracting foreign investment and relocalization of US companies	Symbolic consultations
Contradictions	Reproduces a colonial understanding of development	No change in the tax scheme Compensatory welfare	Deepens dependent insertion in the global market	Tension between energy sovereignty and energy transition

Figure 2

In the sections that follow, I provide a detailed discussion of each myth.

7.2.1 The myth of progress and the belief in unlimited growth

Más que crecimiento económico, el modelo procura desarrollo económico. (PND, 5/11-12)

According to Statham, the lexicon of a text forms a network of meaning as "words can bring with them 'related clusters of concepts'" (Machin and Mayr, 2012:39 referenced in Statham, 2022: 28). Within the PND, the concept of economic development is ostensibly presented in opposition to economic growth; however, a closer discursive reading reveals that this distinction is largely rhetorical rather than semantic.

> *El desarrollo económico debe elevar* ***el nivel de bienestar*** *de los mexicanos que a su vez* ***pone en marcha la economía interna y regional****, así como la inversión pública y privada.* (PND, 11/6-8)
>
> *El desarrollo económico con trabajo digno y economía moral reafirma que* ***México puede crecer*** *con igualdad y soberanía.* (PND, 16/9-10)

At the micro-linguistic level, the plan constructs economic development as the primary vehicle for elevating the *welfare level*, thereby stimulating the internal and regional economy and attracting investment, that is, through consumption. Framed within the *moral economy* and *dignified labor*, economic development, grammatically the agent of the sentence, emerges as the central driver through which the nation may attain *equality and sovereignty*. In this discursive configuration, welfare operates dually as both the end and the means of progress: consumption-driven growth is expected to generate well-being, while welfare itself is reduced to the capacity to consume. Thus, the text reproduces a circular logic in which economic development naturalizes itself as the sole pathway to social well-being, equality and sovereignty.

> *México debe adoptar políticas de* ***fomento industrial, comercial y de competencia****, que devuelvan al Estado su papel activo en la planeación económica [...]. Esto debe ir de la mano con un impulso a la banca de desarrollo y la* ***innovación tecnológica****, para crear un* ***sector productivo nacional robusto y competitivo****.* (PND, 64/58-64, 65/1-6)
>
> ***La ciencia, la tecnología y la educación superior serán palancas para el desarrollo industrial*** *y la reconfiguración de nuestras cadenas productivas. La* ***modernización*** *del gobierno permitirá que la ciudadanía acceda a servicios públicos de forma* ***rápida, eficiente y segura****.* (PND, 20/18-24)
>
> *Con el fin de contribuir al desarrollo económico y social de México, este Eje tiene como objetivo dotar al Estado mexicano de capacidades físicas, tecnológicas y humanas para* ***modernizar*** *las funciones del Gobierno en sus tres niveles. Esto implica una* ***transformación digital*** *que simplifique y* ***optimice*** *los trámites gubernamentales,* [...] *La digitalización permitirá no solo* ***una mejora en la eficiencia*** *y accesibilidad de los*

> *servicios públicos, sino también un* ***ahorro significativo de tiempo y recursos****, todo ello en un marco de transparencia y* ***eficacia en la gestión pública****.* (PND, 86/1-9)

In these passages, the narrative of digital transformation and industrial development is sustained by a technocratic lexicon (*technological innovation*, *industrialization*, *modernization*, *optimization*, and *competitiveness*) that naturalizes technological determinism. A more modern and technological Mexico is thus equated with greater productivity, efficiency, and security, reinforcing a linear and depoliticized conception of progress.

Although the text explicitly differentiates between economic development and economic growth, a critical linguistic analysis demonstrates that both are associated with the same verbs and semantic fields (*strengthening*, *promoting*), indicating that they are, in practice, deployed as virtual synonyms. The PND thus articulates national progress through a hegemonic lexicon of unlimited growth, consumerism, scientific and technological progress, productivity, efficiency, and optimization. This semantic constellation reflects a modernist ideology wherein development is construed as a linear and cumulative process of institutional improvement, technological advancement, and the expansion of welfare (da Silva, 2021: 125).

From a critical perspective, such discourse reproduces the logic of capitalist modernity, which prioritizes productivity maximization, efficiency, and wealth accumulation, while subordinating labor to wage relations, consumerism, and the commodification of nature. Progress, as a discursive construct rooted in colonial epistemologies, legitimizes the subordination of societies to market logic and technological imperatives, functioning as a rationale for both Western domination and the reproduction of global hierarchies. Through this discourse, certain territories and populations are discursively positioned as backward or peripheral (da Silva, 2021: 125).

This coloniality of development manifests in processes of dispossession, internal colonization, and the erasure of alternative life-worlds, reflecting enduring patterns of capitalist accumulation. Non-wage forms of labor, non-commodified relations with nature, and collective modes of living not organized around consumerism are often discursively marginalized, labeled as “underdeveloped” or in need of transformation. As Mariátegui (2017, cited in da Silva, 2021: 126) notes, the dispossession of communal property and suppression of indigenous socialism historically enabled the establishment of liberal-democratic institutions and capitalist rationalities within unequal systems. In September 2025 more than 50 people, including both members of the Zapatista organization and other peasants, have been

dispossessed of the agricultural lands they were working communally in the municipality of Ocosingo, Chiapas (Caracol Dolores Hidalgo, according to the Zapatista mapping). The dispossession was carried out by the government in violation of both national and international law on human rights and the collective rights of Indigenous people, showing the continuity of processes of internal colonization aimed at destroying non-capitalist collective and autonomous organization (CDH Frayba 2025, September 30).

Despite attempts to redefine progress around well-being, sustainability, and redistribution, the idea of economic development remains bound to capitalist logics (Correa Prado, 2021). The 2015 SDG agenda integrates sustainability into growth-oriented frameworks (da Silva, 2021: 130), while ongoing conflicts over land and the repression of environmental defenders[23] reveal the dominance of productivist imperatives over participation and justice. Through the reproduction of a modernist-colonial ideology of economic development and the pursuit of capitalist well-being through consumption, whether explicitly defined as economic growth or not, erodes local lifeworlds and autonomy, generating precarity and environmental degradation (Acosta, 2016, cited in da Silva, 2021: 131). Neo-developmentalism, though invoking sustainability and inclusion (Leite, 2019, cited in da Silva, 2021: 130), ultimately reproduces the hegemonic myth of progress as universal and inevitable, dispossessing alternative epistemologies and ways of life.

7.2.2 Above class divisions? The contradictions of Mexican Humanism's social pact

This chapter examines the Mexican government's narrative of a new social pact between the state, the market, and "the people." It explores how the ideology of Mexican Humanism positions the state as a benefactor above class divisions, legitimizing itself as mediator of social and economic interests. While this discourse promotes national unity and "shared prosperity", it obscures contradictions around investment, redistribution, austerity, and the absence of structural tax reform, ultimately reinforcing inequality even as it expands welfare programs.

> *El Proyecto de Nación del Gobierno de la Transformación tiene como eje principal el* ***Humanismo Mexicano que, en esencia, significa "Por el bien de todos, primero los pobres"****.* (PND, 29/1-3)
>
> ***Nunca*** *ha habido en la realidad* ***ninguna*** *contradicción entre el bienestar de la mayoría*

[23] According to Educa, between 2018 and 2024, 252 attacks on the lives of human rights defenders were recorded (Sipaz, 2024, November 2). Cemda recorded 236 aggressions in 2024 only (Cemda, 2024).

*cuando también les va bien a los **empresarios y bancos**. Igualmente, con el récord de inversión extranjera directa y el aumento de salarios. Esto es porque los paradigmas de la época neoliberal eran falsos y además porque nosotros emprendemos estos cambios como una obra colectiva.* (PND, 9/1-5)

The myth of interclass alliance, or "pluriclasismo" (Ríos Vera, 2019), constructs a vision of national unity in which the interests of the poorer majority and those of business elites, metonymically referenced as *businesspeople and banks*, are portrayed as complementary rather than antagonistic. While the plan ostensibly places the interests of the poor first, it simultaneously employs modalization of frequency (Statham, 2022: 68), asserting that there was never a contradiction, to unequivocally evaluate neoliberal paradigms as false or deceptive. This rhetorical move positions the 4T as a moral and epistemic rupture with neoliberalism, while delegitimizing it through judgements of propriety (ethics) and veracity (truthfulness) (Statham, 2022: 69). These social sanctions function as moral condemnations (*ibid*.), enabling the PND to articulate a narrative of collective effort that symbolically unites the body of the nation under a shared developmental mission and anti-neoliberal narrative.

*El primer acto republicano que hizo el entonces presidente López Obrador fue declarar la **separación del poder político del poder económico**, abandonar la subordinación del gobierno frente a los grandes intereses económicos nacionales y extranjeros, **sirviendo auténticamente a los mexicanos**.* (PND, 10/20-23)

Se trata de un cambio de régimen político, al separar el poder político del poder económico; [...] *Asimismo, el establecimiento de un gobierno democrático al servicio del pueblo y del interés público, **recuperando la rectoría del Estado** y la procuración del **progreso** general, cambiando la subordinación al exterior con la defensa firme de la **soberanía** nacional, sin descartar el diálogo y la coordinación internacional.* (PND, 4/15-21)

*En la República democrática, justa, honesta, libre, participativa y responsable que construimos, el Gobierno de México actuará con la obligada separación entre el poder económico y el poder político, tal como hizo Benito Juárez cuando separó los intereses de la Iglesia y los del Estado hace más de 150 años. Nunca nos someteremos a intereses económicos, políticos o extranjeros; **se trabaja siempre por el interés supremo del pueblo y de la nación**.* (PND, 29/16-21)

The PND constructs the role of the state as the authentic guarantor of rights and the protector of the Mexican people, acting in the *supreme interest* of the nation. By invoking the historical figure of Benito Juárez, it historicizes and legitimizes the authority of the current government. This self-portrayal of *a democratic administration in service of the people* reinforces the image of a government positioned above social classes (Ríos Vera, 2019), mediating between popular

demands and private interests while maintaining their discursive separation (*separation of the economic and political powers*) yet uniting them under the shared objectives of progress and sovereignty. The PND thus promotes an interclass compromise (Bresser-Pereira, 2008, cited in Milanez & Santos, 2015: 15), consolidating a narrative of national unity (Treacy, 2022: 224). However, this discursive harmony obscures class antagonisms: by lexicalizing the state as a neutral *arbiter*, it conceals the relations of production and power asymmetries it embodies.

> *La inversión pública* ***estimula*** *la economía en las regiones y genera empleos, mientras que la confianza en el país y su modelo* ***estimula*** *la inversión extranjera por encima de la tendencia histórica.* ***Hay prosperidad compartida****.* (PND, 5/1-2)

The PND's assertion of *the separation of political and economic power* exemplifies this contradiction. While the phrase suggests the autonomy of the political power, the surrounding co-text assumes harmony between public, private, and foreign investment, through the leadership of the state implying shared goals of *shared prosperity*: public investment stimulates the economy, while trust in the country stimulates foreign investment.

> ***El fortalecimiento de la industria nacional no solo es una estrategia económica, sino una política social****. Una economía más integrada y diversificada permite distribuir los beneficios del crecimiento en todo el país*, [...] *se creará un* ***círculo virtuoso*** *en el que la industria nacional* ***impulse el crecimiento interno y refuerce el mercado laboral.*** (PND, 201/5-11)

The strengthening of national industry is presented as a *social policy*, as a more integrated economy allows to *distribute the benefits of growth to the whole country*, and presupposing a virtuous circle in which national industry *drives* internal growth and *strengthens* the labor market. The association of economic growth with inherently positive outcomes is an example of misrepresentation, mystifying the contradictory dynamics of capital. As Ríos Vera (2019) observes, capital accumulation operates through competition, dispossession, and monopolization, not through social cohesion or shared goals. The text's euphemistic framing of class relations thus reproduces a hegemonic capitalist rationality, normalizing exploitation as cooperation.

> *A través de un enfoque integral, se pretende* ***fortalecer la industria local, aprovechar más nuestra situación geográfica*** *y obtener* ***ingresos remunerativos para los trabajadores.*** (PND, 199/18-20)
>
> *El Gobierno ha implementado incentivos fiscales y* ***políticas de relocalización que facilitan la inversión en sectores estratégicos****.* (PND, 201/12-14)
>
> *La inversión pública seguirá siendo un motor del desarrollo nacional, impulsando*

> ***proyectos estratégicos*** *que fomenten el crecimiento regional y la industrialización con alto contenido nacional.* ***La relocalización de inversiones representa una oportunidad única para fortalecer nuestra soberanía productiva y tecnológica****, asegurando que el país avance hacia una industria con mayor valor agregado.* (PND, 16/26-30)

Within the same discursive logic, relocalization is framed as a developmental opportunity, a pathway for Mexico's integration into global value chains which allows to exploit its geographic location, industrialize and drive *strategic* projects. The lexical coupling of relocalization with *facilitating* and *strengthening* industrial and technological sovereignty invokes the language of autonomy yet obscures the contradictory consequences of private and foreign investment on labor condition and social welfare objectives (Ríos Vera, 2019).

> *También se ha avanzado en la justicia fiscal, eliminando la condonación de impuestos a grandes empresarios y* ***garantizando que todos contribuyan al desarrollo*** *del país.* (PND, 35/37-42)
>
> *Finalmente, la estabilidad de las finanzas públicas depende de una política fiscal responsable.* ***La prioridad es mantener una recaudación progresiva, evitando el incremento de impuestos o la creación de nuevas cargas fiscales para la ciudadanía****.* (PND, 36/25-32)

Moreover, the ideological coherence of this discourse unravels at the level of fiscal policy. While the plan emphasizes redistribution and *that everybody contributes to the development of the country*, austerity measures, defined as *responsible fiscal policy*, and the absence of progressive tax reform severely limit the state's capacity to finance social programs and guarantee rights (Benumea et al., 2024; Villanueva Ulfgard & Villanueva, 2020). A lexical frequency analysis reveals the word "taxes" appears only four times in the whole text, while "fiscal reform" is entirely absent, an instance of discursive omission that signals ideological avoidance. As Ruckert et al. (2017: 1588) note, the tendency of post-neoliberal regimes to increase royalties and taxation on resource exports while not adopting more progressive income tax rates reflects the capacity of local elites to block further reform and is part of the post-neoliberal incapacity to address inequality.

> ***Se consolidará el nuevo modelo de gobernanza, basado en la austeridad republicana,*** *la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas.* ***Mantendremos la disciplina financiera y fiscal****; continuará un gobierno sin lujos y sin privilegios.* (PND, 32/3-5)
>
> ***La corrupción se debe combatir por ética y por principios, pero, además, como lo hemos visto, para obtener los recursos necesarios para el bienestar del pueblo y el desarrollo de la nación****. En pocas palabras, la honestidad da resultados. Además,* ***la autoridad moral es lo más importante, y esa no se compra en la esquina****. Se construye*

> *con mística, la de luchar con honradez todos los días por un México con justicia, democracia y libertad.* (PND, 11/25-30)

Republican austerity and the fight against corruption are recontextualized as mechanisms for social funding. By asserting that *honesty gives results* and *the most important thing is moral authority, and you cannot buy it at the corner shop*, the plan substitutes moral legitimation for economic argumentation, mystifying fiscal realities through evaluative language and euphemisms.

This discursive configuration aligns with the central paradox of the 4T: implementing redistributive policies without transforming the tax regime (Villanueva Ulfgard & Villanueva, 2020: 9). As Ríos Vera (2019) argues, this results in "neoliberal welfarism", a form of neo-developmentalism that reconciles expansive welfare with transnational capitalist accumulation. The 2025 federal budget exemplifies this tension: while funding for social programs and passenger rail increases, allocations for security, healthcare, and defense are sharply reduced, and over $6 billion is directed toward Pemex debt servicing (Murray, 2024, November 16). With tax revenues remaining low relative to GDP, redistributive initiatives rely on fiscal consolidation, austerity, and targeted transfers rather than structural redistribution.

According to Fundar (Benumea et al., 2024), the Plan's fiscal approach undermines the state's capacity to fulfill its human rights obligations, while austerity disproportionately harms vulnerable groups. The report warns that, without tax reform, the only options are improved tax collection or greater indebtedness (Benumea et al., 2024: 13). The administration's commitment to reducing debt by 1.8% compared to 2024 introduces a policy contradiction, as resource cuts undermine rights implementation. The consequences include reduced funding for gender violence prevention, environmental protection, health, culture, and the dismantling of INAI, whose functions are to be absorbed by the executive branch, which weakens institutional checks and transparency (Benumea et al., 2024: 14). Despite expanded social protection, limited access to quality services shifts care burdens especially onto women, exacerbating social inequities (*ibid*.).

> *Finalmente, el fortalecimiento de un sistema de inteligencia e investigación permitirá prevenir e identificar amenazas y generadores de violencia, para sancionar oportunamente,* ***asegurando que las fuerzas de seguridad actúen con eficacia y pleno respeto a los derechos humanos****. Se fortalecerá la Guardia Nacional. La construcción de una sociedad segura y en paz es una tarea colectiva que requiere la participación ciudadana y un Estado comprometido con el bienestar de todas y todos.* (PND, 32/13-19)

Additionally, to cuts that vulnerate the protection of human rights, we see how the PND frames the strengthening of intelligence and investigative systems as a necessary measure, positioning the state and its security forces as neutral, rational actors whose primary concern is public safety. The text employs euphemistic language, particularly in phrases like *construction of a safe and peaceful society* while talking about *strengthening the National Guard*, meaning an increase in militarization of civilian life. These strategies mask the potentially coercive or controversial nature of the policies being justified, such as expanded surveillance, intelligence operations, or militarized policing. The repetition of terms like *strengthen* and *ensuring* constructs the state as proactive and competent, while the invocation of collective responsibility and citizen participation functions rhetorically to legitimize state authority and align public perception with governmental objectives.

Importantly, the text downplays potential conflict or rights violations: while claiming that security forces will act with *full respect to human rights*, it omits the broader context, where such policies have faced criticism from international organizations is left unaddressed (Desinformémonos, 2025, June 27). This aligns with a common discursive strategy in security policy: framing contested interventions as morally and socially necessary while obscuring dissent, social impact, or accountability issues. The paragraph works to normalize a securitized view of society, presenting intensive intelligence and law enforcement measures as inherently beneficial, inevitable, and uncontroversial.

> *Bajo esta visión, el* ***gobierno austero y honesto*** *ha* ***fortalecido*** *el papel del Estado en* ***la promoción de la justicia social, la redistribución de la riqueza*** *y el acceso equitativo a derechos fundamentales como la educación, la salud y el empleo digno.* (PND, 33/6-13)
>
> *Somos un gobierno sensible, cercano a la gente;* ***gobernamos desde el territorio, no desde el escritorio****.* (PND, 29/22-23)
>
> *Este gobierno será* ***honesto, honrado, sin influyentismos, ni nepotismos, corrupción o impunidad****. Es clave el combate a la corrupción y al nepotismo, para restaurar la confianza en las instituciones y* ***garantizar*** *que los derechos y la justicia lleguen a todas las personas sin distinción.* (PND, 31/26-29)

All these fragments employ classic features of populist discourse, emphasizing a moralized, dichotomous portrayal of "the government" versus corrupt actors who are not directly mentioned. The state is described as having the role of promoting social justice and redistributing wealth. The government is repeatedly described as *honest*, *austere*, *close to the people*, and morally superior, using evaluative adjectives such as *honored*, *free from nepotism*

to construct a virtuous, almost heroic image of state actors. Phrases like *we govern from the field, not from behind a desk* create an embodied, accessible image of the government, presenting it as physically and emotionally proximate to citizens, a key feature of populist legitimacy that emphasizes intimacy and responsiveness. Similarly, expressions such as *the future belongs to those who fight and work hard* mobilize collective identity and struggle, portraying the people as heroic agents of the nation aligned with the government's transformative project.

> *La consolidación del Segundo Piso de la Cuarta Transformación* ***exige*** *un* ***gobierno honesto, cercano y eficiente****, que* ***garantice*** *la seguridad, los derechos y la justicia.* [...]. *La transformación sigue y* ***el futuro es de quienes luchan y trabajan*** *por un país con justicia, democracia y dignidad.* (PND, 21/20-25)

> *La consolidación de* ***un gobierno transparente, austero y honesto*** *requiere un combate frontal a la corrupción en todos los niveles de gobierno.* ***No puede haber un gobierno rico con un pueblo pobre****.* (PND, 35/25-30)

The discourse also repeatedly links moral virtue with policy legitimacy, particularly regarding anti-corruption and austerity measures. Statements like *there cannot be a rich government with a poor people* connect ethical governance with socioeconomic outcomes, reinforcing the idea that through austerity measures that cut public spending the government can improve the economic situation of the people. This strategy naturalizes the government's initiatives as inherently just, framing reforms and consolidation of the Fourth Transformation as the continuation of a moral imperative, not merely political policy: it is the 4T itself, as a personified concept, that *demands* a an *honest, friendly and efficient government*. Overall, the fragments use emotive, moralized, and intimate language to construct a populist narrative: a morally superior, people-centered government, legitimizing state actions while fostering identification and loyalty among citizens.

In terms of political discourse, according to Vilaboa Arroniz et al. "the economic characteristic of populism is increased public spending on social programs, which causes an imbalance in the budget and, consequently, a fiscal deficit that ultimately leads to high inflation and economic stagnation." (Vilaboa Arroniz et al., 2022: 36). Through this example we see how populism is both a communication strategy and an economic strategy, as it is both a discursive device (focus on national unity, emotionally charged language) and an economic strategy that invests heavily on compensatory welfare programs rather than redistribution through structural transformation.

Through euphemism, omissions and an emotionally charged language based on national unity,

the PND reproduces the trope of interclass alliance and reinforces the state authority. This myth responds to two objectives: on one hand it creates national unity by proposing the idea that business class and the majority of people have the same objectives, on the other hand it aims at ascribing to the state the role of mediator between people and market through the distribution of benefits which positions it as a "Great Benefactor". The main problem with this new social pact is that the lack of tax reform benefits the richer, with the cut to services and austerity measures mainly affecting vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, the myth of interclass alliance is based on the construction of a new social pact through making the interests of the dominant and the subordinate class supposedly converge. It legitimizes a state that mediates between classes while avoiding structural redistribution. Thus, welfare becomes a technology of governance and a legitimizing device, binding popular constituencies to a narrative of recovery but restricting transformative potential as welfare policies remain permanently circumscribed and monitored by the hegemony of neoliberal fiscal discipline (Ríos Vera, 2019).

7.2.3 Moral Economy or Market Dependency? Rethinking Sovereignty in the 4T

This chapter analyses how the 4T conceives sovereignty. Through the rhetoric of "moral economy" the government presents relocalization, industrialization, and income redistribution as strategies to reduce dependency and guarantee autonomy. Yet behind this narrative of self-sufficiency lies a contradictory model: while policies promote nearshoring, export competitiveness, and foreign direct investment, they also reproduce dependence on external capital and deepen labor superexploitation and extractivism. Similarly, cash transfers and minimum wage hikes improve short-term consumption but coexist with austerity, social deprivation, and the persistence of neoliberal fiscal orthodoxy.

> *Nos corresponde* ***siempre defender la grandeza de México y promover relaciones de respeto, nunca de subordinación****. Somos un* ***país libre, democrático, soberano, independiente****; somos un gran país con un pueblo maravilloso, honesto y trabajador.* (PND, 30/15-17)

Even though political sovereignty is articulated, such as in the emotional paragraph above, where Mexico is pictured as a great country that seeks to establish non subordinated relations with other countries, as well as a country with *wonderful, honest and hardworking people*, sovereignty in the PND is primarily articulated through an economic and productive lens.

Achieving sovereignty is equated with reducing dependency (PND, 201/1), relocalizing productive chains within Mexico, strengthening national industry (PND, 16/27; 57/1), and securing energy and food self-sufficiency (PND, 17/24; 18/19; 58/10; 63/13; 68/32). Within this framework, sovereignty emerges less as political autonomy and more as productive capacity.

> *Este Plan busca impulsar la inversión privada, generar empleos formales y de calidad, aumentar el contenido nacional en los procesos productivos, simplificar los trámites administrativos y combatir la pobreza y la desigualdad.* (PND, 17/5-10)

The PND's rhetoric privileges private investment, labor policies, increasing domestic content in production processes, and bureaucratic simplification as steps that will consolidate productive and technological sovereignty. Notably, the PND places these economic priorities (investment, labor policies, and productive integration), above redistributive or anti-poverty measures. This sequencing underscores a tension between the PND's discursive commitment to social justice and its practical prioritization of investment-led growth. Sovereignty is thus narrated as a function of competitiveness rather than emancipation.

The 4T presents neoliberal development as insufficient for productivity, competition, and innovation. Integration into global value chains during that period did not produce technological advancement or high value-added production (PND, 199/1; 200/17; 57/3). The plan identifies a *lag* in Mexico's industrial sector, attributing vulnerability to its dependence on imports (PND, 64/35). Because many of the resources for domestic production come from abroad, the economy is highly exposed to global fluctuations. This backwardness is framed as a national weakness, requiring correction (PND, 199/17) for Mexico to achieve an improved position in the global value chain, rather than as a structurally unequal system that needs to be addressed.

> *Si México logra aumentar su integración productiva,* ***reducirá su dependencia de importaciones y fortalecerá su soberanía industrial****. Esto* ***también beneficiará*** *a la población trabajadora, ya que la producción con mayor contenido nacional genera empleos mejor remunerados y con mayor estabilidad.* (PND, 201/1-4)

Here, modality and logical argumentation play a central discursive role. Conditional constructions *if Mexico improves productive integration, then dependency will be reduced*, naturalize integration as both a solution and a precondition for sovereignty, not an option. These types of structures create inevitability, framing policy as a logical conclusion. This causal logic naturalizes a particular development path, legitimizing a narrative in which

sovereignty depends on deeper integration into global productive chains. Sovereignty, in this framing, is both a means and an end: while presented as a national goal, it simultaneously promises secondary benefits for workers (*this will also benefit workers*), implying that domestic production will generate stable and better-paid jobs or that industrialization will benefit workers.

> *La inversión pública **seguirá siendo** un motor del desarrollo nacional, impulsando proyectos estratégicos que **fomenten** el crecimiento regional y la industrialización con alto contenido nacional.* (PND, 16/24-26)
>
> *El **fortalecimiento** de la industria nacional no solo es una estrategia económica, sino una política social.* [...] *Con una mayor presencia de empresas mexicanas en la cadena de proveeduría, se **creará** un círculo virtuoso en el que la industria nacional **impulse** el crecimiento interno y refuerce el mercado laboral.* (PND, 201/5-11)

The solution presented is a new industrialization strategy aimed at reducing import dependence (ISI) and strengthening industrial sovereignty. Public investment is depicted as essential to national development, channelling resources into strategic projects that foster growth and industrialization (PND, 4/29; 16/24). Strengthening national industry is framed not only as an economic strategy but also as a social policy, with the explicit goal of linking industrial development to workers' well-being and *strengthening* of the labor market, even if, linguistically, workers' benefits are always secondary to the sovereignty objective (PND, 201/1). The creation of the virtuous cycle that benefits the whole nation is presented as a reality through the future indicative of *it will create*.

> *Su propósito es aprovechar **nuestro** mercado interno para la producción que tenga lugar en México y emplee a **nuestros** trabajadores. Al mismo tiempo, contribuir a equilibrar balances de comercio exterior con otros países en bien de la convivencia y bienestar de todos.* (PND, 199/7-10)
>
> *En este marco, destaca la conformación del Plan México, una iniciativa que contempla la colaboración entre el Gobierno de México y el sector privado, cuyo objetivo es **fomentar** un desarrollo económico equitativo y sustentable a largo plazo basado en el aprovechamiento de **nuestro** mercado interno para **nuestra** propia industria, reduciendo con ello las importaciones **innecesarias**.* (PND, 17/1-5)

A central motif is the call to harness the internal market, referred repeatedly as *our* market, *our* industry, *our* workers. Imports deemed *unnecessary* should be replaced by domestic production, while maintaining external trade balance to ensure *everyone's wellbeing* (PND, 199/7). Such phrasing constructs an organic link between the nation and its economy, invoking unity while erasing class divisions. This is in line with post-neoliberal literature which argues

that unity building at a national level is often paired with a focus on independent foreign relations (Ruckert et al. 2017: 1587). However, compared to other post-neoliberal discourses, the PND does not seem to advance alternative forms of regional trade policies apart from the classic integration with the US (*ibid*.). This discourse reflects one of the central contradictions of post-neoliberal regimes, in which appeals to nationalization and the notion that resources belong to "the people" coexist with the promotion of privatization and the continued presence of foreign capital in resource management (Ruckert et al., 2017: 1586).

> *La economía mexicana comenzó a depender de un número reducido de sectores, principalmente el automotriz, la manufactura de exportación y la electrónica, mientras que* ***otros sectores industriales quedaron rezagados*** (PND, 200/7-11)

Mexico's economic model reflects a hybrid of export-oriented growth and selective import substitution industrialization. On the one hand, the economy is deeply tied to global markets through USMCA, CPTPP, and multiple bilateral trade agreements. Strategic sectors such as automotive and electronics remain heavily export-driven and dependent on foreign capital (Emmelhainz, 2021: 26). On the other hand, policies echo ISI logics by subsidizing domestic production in energy and food, promoting national self-sufficiency while heavily focusing on foreign direct investment and nearshoring. This selective borrowing of ISI rhetoric situates sovereignty within a framework that is still market-oriented and externally dependent.

> *La* ***inversión extranjera directa*** *en 2024 alcanzó 35 mil 700 millones de dólares y en seis años más de 200 mil millones de dólares;* ***la mayor de la historia****. Por su parte,* ***las exportaciones alcanzaron cifras históricas*** *al superar 565 mil millones de dólares en 2024, en un entorno en el que México se consolidó como el principal socio comercial de los Estados Unidos de América.* (PND, 7/7-11)

Relocalization is thus presented as the cornerstone of reindustrialization, simultaneously fostering export competitiveness and stimulating domestic consumption. The PND highlights foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, the *highest in history*, as a key indicator of success (Milanez & Santos, 2015: 17), implying that a bigger flow of FDI is positive. Infrastructure development, via public investment or public-private partnerships, appears as the enabling condition for market access and global integration (*ibid*.; PND, 17/11). Infrastructure projects such as ports, airports, railways are justified as mechanisms for connectivity, as much as for *development with welfare* and to *boost investment* (PND, 18/14).

> ***Los trenes de pasajeros significan desarrollo regional, empleos, turismo y prosperidad compartida****. Seguiremos con caminos artesanales para conectar comunidades y con la construcción de puertos, aeropuertos y carreteras que generen*

> ***desarrollo con bienestar y al mismo tiempo fortalezcan la infraestructura y conectividad en nuestro país y potencien la inversión***. (PND, 18/14-18)

Infrastructure projects are discursively equated with development: trains literally *mean* regional development, jobs, tourism, and shared prosperity. Yet empirical data shows that, for example, between January and March of this year, the Maya Train company revenues covered only 8% of its operating expenses, shedding doubt on whether this megaproject is cost-effective (Nogueda Romero, 2025, July 17). Yet, as Ríos Vera (2019) notes, by making investment the central mechanism of accumulation, neo-developmentalism reproduces dependence on dominant classes and foreign capital, including the global tourism industry. Transnational corporations impose conditions of low wages, weak labor protections, tax breaks, and control over strategic sectors like energy and infrastructure. This undermines sovereignty while constraining innovation and locking Mexico into a model of precarious labor and technological dependence. This cycle of superexploitation reduces the purchasing power of most of the population, concentrates investment in sectors serving the wealthy or external markets, and, through agreements like the USMCA, deepens trade dependence (Rios Vera 2019).

The current situation in the tourist area of Tulum, Quintana Roo, illustrates this vicious cycle. The increase in sargassum (a type of algae that occurs naturally but has proliferated due to ecological pollution and gave rise to extreme events called “sargassum inundations” since 2011) is among several possible factors, contributing to a dramatic decline in tourism in the region (17.5% less than in the same month last year). Given that more than 67% of all visitors are international luxury tourists, this situation highlights the region’s dependency on global value chains and the negative consequences of environmental contamination (Alín, 2025, October 18).

Income policies form the other pillar of the 4T’s economic strategy. The main objectives of these policies have been the *well-being of the workers*, stimulate domestic consumption and promote resource redistribution. The central instruments for achieving these goals are cash transfers and increases in the real minimum wage.

Cash transfers, especially unconditional ones, are designed to boost short-term consumption (PND, 6/22-26), while conditional transfers (CCTs), though costlier to implement, tend to yield higher long-term returns in health and education (Dodlovaa et al., 2017). Strategically, unconditional transfers can also fulfill political functions by rewarding supporters and mitigating social unrest. According to Gudynas (2012a; 2012b, cited in Milanez & Santos,

2015: 18), these policies are characteristic of the "compensating state," which pursues anti-poverty strategies through the redistribution of fiscal resources, while using extractivism to fund it. While most post-neoliberal regimes have focused on CCTs (Ruckert et al. 2017: 1589), Mexico seem to be an exception in this regard. However, there is a general understanding that, whether coming from a neoliberal or genuinely post-neoliberal idea, welfare politics without changes in redistributive structure have limited results (*ibid*: 1590).

During Andrés Manuel López Obrador's term (2018–2024), moderate poverty fell by 10.7%, while extreme poverty declined only 1.7%. Meanwhile, vulnerability due to social deprivation rose from 26.4% to 32.2%. INEGI estimates that without social transfers (scholarships and welfare pensions), poverty would have increased from 29.6% to 32.8%, and extreme poverty from 5.3% to 6.9%. However, the main deprivation remains lack of social security (48.2%), followed by limited access to health services (34.2%) and educational lag (18.6%). (San Juan Flores, 2025, August 13). These indicators highlight both the achievements and limitations of redistribution without structural reform. While the fall in moderate poverty represents progress compared to classic extractive states, where resource rents largely benefited local elites, cash transfers remain contested as long-term anti-poverty or development tools.

Minimum wage policies complement redistribution. Official discourse emphasizes a historic increase, claiming the real wage has more than doubled since 2018 (PND, 4/25; Sheinbaum, 2025, July 29 referenced in Esquerra 2025, July 30). Between 2018 and 2025, the base salary for Social Security contributions (IMSS) rose from 486 to 628 pesos per day in real terms, a 29% increase. According to the PND, the minimum wage more than doubled in real terms, climbing from 123 pesos in 2018 to 287 pesos in 2025 (a 133% increase) (PND, 7/26). However, official data show real wage and income growth of at most 31% between 2018 and 2024, below claims of doubling (Esquerra, 2025, July 30). However, even when overstated, wage hikes have strengthened the internal market and improved workers' purchasing power. Yet contradictions persist: focusing on wage labor reinforces capitalist models of development while marginalizing communitarian and rural economies, while official claims often diverge from lived realities, as labor conflicts demonstrate[24]. Ruckert et al. (2017: 1589) also observe

[24]The plan claims that "the work of teachers has been dignified, respecting their labor rights and improving their income through ongoing dialogue" (PND, 42/4). However, in May 2025 the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) has been striking for several weeks demanding for a change in the pension law, as promised by Sheinbaum during the electoral campaign. At the time of writing, it is doubtful whether Sheinabaum is interested in a permanent dialogue with the organization. By offering compensatory measures to the pension problems instead of reforming the system, Sheinbaum reinforces the refusal to rethink neoliberal policies (Nogueda Romero, 2025).

that pink tide governments have largely succeeded in containing organized labour movements, while labour-market regulation remains relatively overlooked within the post-neoliberal literature.

As we will see in the next chapter, infrastructure development reflects this tension in economic policy. Expanding transport networks is less about improving citizens' quality of life than about reducing production costs and enabling competitiveness. Innovation in areas like electromobility, energy, and security is framed as a tool of sovereignty, even as these sectors remain shaped by external capital and technological dependence. Infrastructure thus serves the broader goal of reindustrialization and positioning Mexico as economically sovereign and globally competitive.

The 4T's moral economy thus combines nationalist rhetoric with market integration. Sovereignty is presented as self-sufficiency, but it depends heavily on foreign investment, global trade, and labor exploitation. Redistribution through transfers and wage hikes alleviates poverty and bolsters legitimacy, yet without fiscal reform and social investment, deprivation in health, education, and security persists. Far from breaking with neoliberalism, the model selectively incorporates its logic, producing a neo-developmentalist blend of export orientation, selective protectionism, and compensatory welfare.

7.2.4 Between sustainability and sovereignty: the paradox of green extractivism in the 4T

This chapter examines how the 4T articulates the myth of green extractivism, presenting large-scale infrastructure and energy projects as compatible with sustainability. Neo-extractivism, closely tied to neo-developmentalism, is rebranded as an engine of sovereignty, social justice, and environmental responsibility. Yet the plan's language of efficiency, balance, and *responsible management* masks the contradictions of relying on fossil fuels, privileging foreign and corporate investment, and subordinating ecological concerns to industrial and geopolitical imperatives. The tension between energetic sovereignty and energy transition reveals the deeper paradox of combining extractivist development with discourses of sustainability.

> ***A todas y todos*** *nos convienen empresas de energía pública del Estado fuertes, que* ***garanticen energía limpia, a precios bajos*** *para las actuales y las futuras generaciones. El objetivo fundamental de la producción de petróleo con PEMEX, la cual se establecerá en 1.8 millones de barriles diarios, seguirá siendo el consumo nacional.* (PND, 17/30-33, 18/1-3)

> *El desarrollo sustentable es un principio fundamental para garantizar el bienestar de las generaciones presentes y futuras.* ***La soberanía energética es un objetivo estratégico del país y la transición energética una prioridad****.* (PND, 17/16-18)

The discourse of the PND presents strong state-led public energy industries as beneficial for everyone: a collective *we* that includes the speaker and implicitly all citizens. This inclusive construction establishes the state as the guarantor of collective rights, promising clean and affordable energy for present and future generations. The appeal to *everybody* introduces the logic of national interest and public utility, which is reinforced through impersonal constructions that universalize the state's role. However, a central contradiction arises while the PND declares that the state must guarantee clean energy, it immediately references Pemex, the state oil company. By juxtaposing these statements, the PND suggests that national production, particularly fossil fuel extraction, remains the main objective, while clean energy serves more as rhetorical reference than a concrete commitment. Similarly, the primacy of energetic sovereignty (which is a *strategic objective*) over energetic transition (which is *a priority*) leaves clear which one is more an aspiration rather than a primary objective.

> *La soberanía energética es un objetivo estratégico del PND, pero debe hacerse con una visión de sustentabilidad ambiental; para ello* ***es fundamental consolidar*** *la* ***rectoría*** *del Estado en el sector energético mediante el fortalecimiento de PEMEX y de la CFE.* ***Esto permitirá*** *eliminar la dependencia del exterior, asegurar precios accesibles para la población y avanzar hacia la autosuficiencia energética.* (67/17-22)

This tension between energy sovereignty and environmental sustainability permeates the text. On one hand, energy self-sufficiency is framed as essential to national sovereignty, achievable through the *leadership* of the state and the strengthening of public companies such as Pemex and the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE). On the other hand, environmental sustainability is presented as a universal and unquestionable necessity. To bridge these opposing aims, the PND employs impersonal and declarative formulations such as *it is fundamental to consolidate*, which depoliticize the issue and construct environmental protection as compatible with expanded fossil fuel production. The final statement in this section affirms. again declaratively. that reinforcing national companies *will allow* the elimination of dependency, the maintenance of accessible prices, and the achievement of energetic sovereignty. Empirical evidence, however, contradicts this claim: according to figures from Pemex and the Ministry of Energy, domestic gasoline production in early 2025 met only 54% of national demand, leaving a deficit of 374,000 barrels per day (Esquerra & Nogueda, 2025).

> ***Recuperar*** *la* ***rectoría*** *del Estado en el sector energético* ***exige fortalecer*** *las empresas*

> *públicas del Estado como Pemex y la CFE mediante una mayor inversión, austeridad y combate a la corrupción, asegurando su solidez financiera.* (PND, 69/8-14)

The idea of state *leasdership* in the energy sector is central to neo-developmentalist and neo-extractivist discourse, where national ownership and production of energy resources form the backbone of economic sovereignty. Linguistically, this appears through nominalizations such as *recovering the leadership of the state*, which obscure agency and responsibility, and through impersonal constructions that present strengthening public companies, promoting austerity, and fighting corruption as inevitable and necessary measures. These rhetorical devices constrain interpretation, positioning state-led investment and financial control as the only path to development and promoting resource extraction, especially oil extraction, as inevitable. Yet this framing conceals material contradictions. Pemex's financial situation remains precarious, with debt at $101.1 billion in early 2025, a 3.5% increase since the previous year, and supplier debts at a 13-year high. Despite massive fiscal support, the company reported losses of 620 billion pesos in 2024 and 1.8 trillion over the previous administration (81% of total government aid), highlighting the structural fragility of the state's extractivist model (Nogueda Romero, 2025, July 2).

Neo-extractivism frames resource extraction, both natural and cultural, as a mechanism for wealth creation, job generation, and income redistribution to vulnerable groups (Gudynas 2012a, cited in Milanez & Santos, 2015: 16). By presenting extraction as inevitable, as well as defining extractive projects of "national interest" and "public utility" (Albavera 2004, cited in Milanez & Santos, 2015: 16), the state legitimizes policies centred on extraction and infrastructure expansion. Massive mining, energy, and transport megaprojects exemplify this model, reconfiguring territorial and social relations while bypassing environmental and health safeguards (López Moreno, 2024; Rodríguez & Azamar, 2024). These projects, some planned for decades (RD, 96-98), reveal the continuity between neoliberal and neoextractivist strategies, despite rhetorical claims of rupture.

> *Con el fortalecimiento de la CFE y PEMEX en* ***un modelo de soberanía energética con sustentabilidad****, México tiene el potencial para ser líder en energías renovables y* ***deberá consolidar una infraestructura eléctrica moderna y eficiente****, impulsando la electrificación del transporte y el desarrollo de nuevas tecnologías.* (PND, 17/24-28)

A *modern* and *efficient* infrastructure is presented as essential for Mexico's development, grounded in the idea that energy sovereignty can coexist with sustainability. Infrastructural as well as mining and other extractive projects are thus closely linked to industrial and energy

policy. Modern transport corridors, ports, and water systems are justified as instruments of sustainable access to resources and industrial efficiency. The PND's reference to *efficient territorial order* (PND 72/9) suggests environmental responsibility, yet in practice it prioritizes large-scale production and export competitiveness, often at the expense of local autonomy (Almeida, 2025, April 24).

> *México alberga el 12% de la biodiversidad global en sus ecosistemas terrestres, marinos y costeros. Esta* ***riqueza natural ofrece importantes beneficios*** *en la producción agropecuaria y otros bienes, pero* ***también plantea retos*** *para su preservación y mitigación del cambio climático.* (PND, 70/45-53)

Natural wealth is viewed both as a source of benefit for agriculture and other industries and as a challenge due to the need to preserve resources and mitigate climate change. It is often valued primarily for its use-value, while climate change and related environmental challenges are increasingly addressed within the framework of eco-capitalism. This is further reinforced by a discourse, which aligns sustainability with market logic, assigning monetary value to nature and transforming pollution into a tradable cost (Scales, 2017). Yet market-based solutions involve the commodification of natural capital which on a social level will lead to individuals and groups being dispossessed of their land by more powerful state and corporate actors (Scales, 2017; see also RD, 331-334, and generally the demands of most social movements involved in socio-environmental conflicts with the state over the defense of Indigenous and communally owned land).

> *El desarrollo sustentable requiere un enfoque integral en la protección y* ***el uso responsable*** *de los recursos naturales.* (PND, 67/9-10)
>
> *un modelo de desarrollo basado en el Humanismo Mexicano. Éste reconoce que el crecimiento económico* ***debe ir de la mano*** *con el bienestar de las personas y la protección de* ***nuestros*** *recursos naturales* (PND, 5/8-11)

Sustainable development in the PND is defined as a balance between economic, social, and environmental dimensions that preserves resources for future generations (PND, 67/1). Economic development must go *hands in hands* with the well-being of the people and the protection of *our* national resources. Here the expression *hands in hands* sounds rather aspirational and the reference to *our national resources* reinforces the idea of possession of the state over nature.

> *La preservación del medio ambiente, la protección de los recursos naturales y la lucha contra el cambio climático requieren un compromiso de todos los sectores, incluyendo el* ***uso racional del agua*** *y la protección de los* ***ecosistemas estratégicos****.* (PND, 18/4-

7)

> *Otro de los pilares del plan es la seguridad hídrica, con 17 proyectos de infraestructura que asegurarán el acceso sostenible al agua a más de 31 millones de personas,* ***protegiendo así sectores productivos clave****. Estas acciones garantizan que el* ***desarrollo industrial no comprometa los recursos naturales*** **y** ***que la expansión de la producción se lleve a cabo de manera sustentable.*** (PND, 202/1-6)

Nature described using terms like *strategic ecosystems* and *responsible use*, is framed as a matter of national security and a resource to be managed, rather than as a living system with intrinsic value. The terms *rational* and *strategic* are not neutral: what the government considers rational and strategic often takes precedence over what may be rational or strategic for local communities, for example, prioritizing industrial water use over access to drinkable water, and it presents logical contradictions as it aims to protect strategic ecosystems while simultaneously constructing large infrastructure projects within them.

The plan identifies *water security* as a central pillar, to be achieved through infrastructure projects that ostensibly ensure sustainable water access. However, the focus is not on providing water for people, but on supplying industries and *protecting key productive sectors*, such as the example of Acapulco and the construction of radial wells which aims at capturing water from the Papagayo River and transfer it to the tourist area of the port, while inhabitants of rural areas still lack access to drinkable water (RD 330; de Dios Palma, 2025, October 25). The PND guarantees that industrial development does not compromise natural resources and frames the expansion of production as sustainable, adopting a green capitalist discourse in which infinite growth is deemed acceptable as long as it is considered sustainable.

> ***Es prioritario*** *implementar políticas para reducir y revertir el daño ambiental, proteger los* ***ecosistemas estratégicos*** *del país* [...] *y fomentar el aprovechamiento de residuos mediante la economía circular. Esto implica incentivar el reciclaje de materiales, el aprovechamiento energético de residuos orgánicos y la* ***gestión eficiente*** *de desechos para reducir la contaminación y* ***optimizar el uso de recursos****.* (PND, 67/10-16)

> *La* ***consolidación*** *de un modelo energético sustentable y* ***una gestión responsable*** *de los recursos naturales son claves para garantizar la viabilidad ambiental, económica y social del país a largo plazo.* (PND, 68/21-23)

> *El Proyecto de Nación de la Cuarta Transformación tiene como base el impulso de un desarrollo sustentable, es decir,* ***lograr un equilibrio*** *entre desarrollo económico, social y ambiental* ***que preserve el medio ambiente y evite un daño irreversible, al tiempo que busca evitar que se agoten los recursos naturales*** *y permitir su disfrute a las generaciones futuras.* (PND, 67/1-5)

Yet the *balance between economic, social and environmental development* is linguistically achieved through technocratic language. The PND relies heavily on aspirational and impersonal constructions to present sustainability as an objective truth, suggesting a single solution to how to achieve it, which is in line with an eco-capitalist understanding of natural resources. Through nominalization (*consolidation of a sustainable energetic model*) and phrases such as *responsible* or *efficient management* the question of sustainability is presented as beyond debate and without any reference to responsibility or who will be in charge of the management. In contrast, *seeking to avoid to deplete natural resources* seems very aspirational in comparison with the promises that are made in the PND. By employing impersonal constructions such as *it is a priority* or *sustainable development requires*, the PND naturalizes growth-oriented development while masking its contradictions.

> *El desarrollo y el bienestar del pueblo* ***sólo pueden fortalecerse*** *con el cuidado del medio ambiente y los recursos naturales. Por lo anterior,* ***será prioritario*** *promover una transición hacia las energías limpias, al tiempo que se protegen los ecosistemas naturales, se garantiza el derecho al agua y se* ***hace frente a los efectos*** *del cambio climático.* (PND, 12/13-17)
>
> *La justicia social debe ir acompañada de una justicia ambiental, de un modelo de* ***sociedad que disminuya su huella ecológica y respete los ciclos naturales de reproducción de la vida.*** (PND, 67/6-9)

The development and well-being of *the people* is presented as achievable only through caring for the environment and natural resources. The use of the adverb *only* emphasizes the inevitability of this claim, linking development and welfare directly to environmental transition. Again, the plan employs impersonal and passivizing constructions, stating generically that *it will be a priority* (rather than explicitly assigning responsibility to the government) to promote clean energy transition, protect the natural environment, guarantee access to water, and *confront the effect*s of climate change. Such phrasing frames climate change and its effects as inevitable, avoiding attribution of responsibility. Environmental and social justice are linked to a society that *reduces its ecological footprint* and *respects the natural cycles of reproduction of life*; however, no explanation is provided for what these terms entail, nor is there acknowledgment that communities living according to natural cycles are often the most affected by the state's extraction-focused development model. On October 27, 2025, members of the Maya U kúuchil ch'i'ibalo'on Community Center on the Yucatán Peninsula filed an official complaint before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, accusing the Mexican state of "ecocide" and "ethnocide" in connection with the imposition of

the Tren Maya megaproject. This complaint, supported by the resolutions of the Assembly of Judges of the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature and the ruling of the Tenth Local Tribunal for the Rights of Nature, underscores how such megaprojects reveal the deep interconnection between social, economic, and environmental harm to the well-being of Indigenous and peasant communities (Desinformémonos, 2025, October 27).

> *El Plan Nacional de Energía incluye nuevas inversiones en transmisión, generación y* ***un programa ambicioso*** *de transición energética hacia fuentes renovables de energía que contribuyan a* ***disminuir los gases de efecto invernadero que provocan el cambio climático.*** (PND, 17/18-22)
>
> *En la matriz energética del país* ***se impulsarán*** *fuentes de energía renovables y* ***se acelerará*** *la transición energética con el objetivo de reducir las emisiones contaminantes, cumplir con las metas nacionales de energías limpias y* ***honrar los compromisos internacionales en la lucha contra el cambio climático****.* (PND, 67/22-26)

The PND promises an energy transition toward renewables, supported by new investments and an ambitious transition program designed to reduce emissions of greenhouse gas which is guilty of *provoking climate change*. In this construction the responsibility for climate change is pushed towards an inanimate object, greenhouse gas, rather than to the people or industries responsible for its production. At the same time, a report by México Evalúa identifies several loopholes in the PND's energy planning (Moreno, 2025, April 25), highlighting Mexico's track record in failing to meet past emission-reduction commitments. National targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions were missed in the last administration, with levels remaining under 25% in 2023 and 2024, despite an official goal of 35% for 2023. Looking forward, the objective for 2030 is once again set at a 35% reduction, but México Evalúa considers this both distant and overly ambitious given current trends.

Another critique concerns the Index of Energetic Independence (IIE), the indicator used in the PND to measure progress in terms of energetic sovereignty. The IIE has been declining over the past six years, and the target set for 2030 reflects only a marginal improvement of 0.03 compared to 2023. Beyond the limited ambition of this goal, the report questions whether the IIE alone can adequately capture energetic sovereignty, since distribution problems and market pricing continue to shape real access to energy for the population (*ibid*.), revealing a contradiction in the promise of the PND to guarantee energy for all. Another weakness lies in how the PND measures renewable energy. By failing to define what counts as alternative energy, the plan continues to include wood and sugarcane as renewables, sources that

represented 33% of total renewable energy in 2023. According to international standards, however, solid biomass cannot be considered sustainable: it relies on burning, contributes to deforestation, and generates emissions, undermining the credibility of Mexico's energy transition targets (*ibid*.)

A complementary analysis by Fundar reaches similar conclusions. While the PND's discourse promotes energy transition, fiscal policies tell a different story: in 2024, tax benefits for the energy transition amounted to just a fraction, 3.6 times smaller, than those favouring fossil fuels, which totalled 60,442 million pesos. These tax expenditures disproportionately favor corporations and wealthier groups, exacerbating inequality and gender disparities. Fundar warns that relying on tax waivers entrenches corporate privilege and undermines human rights, contradicting the government's sustainability discourse (Benumea & Pedraza, 2024).

The PND sets a double objective of achieving energy sovereignty while also maintaining export capacity, with the discourse emphasizing accessible prices for the population but simultaneously leaving space for external markets. Sustainability and decarbonization are included in the PND yet always remain secondary to the strategic goal of energetic sovereignty, producing what has been defined an "energetic paradox": the desire for greater protectionism and sovereignty alongside cheaper prices and sustainability (México Evalúa, 2022). Similar tensions appear in water policy, where infrastructure projects primarily serve to protect key productive sectors, showing how natural resources are subordinated to industrial needs under a discourse of responsible management.

This reflects a model of green capitalism in which production expansion is treated as a necessity and environmental considerations are adjusted to fit economic imperatives. The state presents itself as the sole actor capable of guaranteeing environmental, economic, and social viability, using language such as *security*, *responsibility*, and *efficiency* to frame its role. Energy policy, positioned as both a tool of sustainability and a driver of economic development, relies on increased state leadership through public investment, austerity, and anti-corruption measures, while portraying technological and scientific innovation as an *ecosystem* that can deliver progress (PND, 48/28). In addition to the paradoxical tension between opposing objectives (Medel-Ramírez, 2024; 2025), energetic sovereignty and energy transition, the coexistence of fossil fuel extraction, large-scale infrastructure, and resource commodification under the label of sustainability underscores the central contradiction of the myth of green capitalism.

8. Conclusions

In sum, the Fourth Transformation (4T) articulates a neo-developmentalist vision that merges economic and political narratives yet remains marked by deep contradictions. Economically, it promotes a hegemonic model of development grounded in the myth of progress and unlimited growth, with liberal democracy and capitalist expansion as its horizon. As a national project, it advances a new social pact emphasizing cooperation between the state and the private sector, expressed through the trope of an interclass alliance, progressive rhetoric, and poverty reduction policies for "the people." By blending austerity with compensatory social programs that avoid structural tax reform and sidestep the issue of labor superexploitation, it leaves untouched policies that benefit entrenched oligarchic interests (Aguilar Astorga, 2024: 37). At the same time, by promoting both export-led growth and import substitution, the 4T sustains the illusion of sovereignty while maintaining neoliberal economic mandates.

While advocating energy sovereignty through the nationalization and financing of companies such as Pemex, it simultaneously prioritizes nearshoring and foreign direct investment, reproducing dependency by transferring value to core economies like the United States. Large-scale projects in energy, industry, and infrastructure deepen extractive dependency and fail to resolve contradictions between fossil fuel expansion, energy transition, and environmental protection. Green capitalism exposes further tension between sovereignty and market imperatives: the government frames the energy transition as achievable through infrastructure modernization, while intensifying extraction, thereby reinforcing dependency and harming vulnerable groups, particularly Indigenous and peasant communities.

This thesis has focused primarily on the question of development; consequently, it has not examined in depth other fundamental dimensions and contradictions of the 4T project, such as human rights and militarization, gender politics, or the relationship between Morena's nation-state project and the plurinational projects of Indigenous movements. The 4T perpetuates the myth of "the people," yet its consultation processes and constitutional amendments, particularly those involving *pueblos originarios*, often function as mechanisms of assimilation rather than genuine recognition of autonomy. These measures draw on indigenist discourse and symbolic appropriation (A. Gil, 2024, September 1; 2025, August 30) and reveal a broader contradiction between the government's reliance on extractivism and its stated commitment to including social sectors whose understandings of the human-nature relationship differ fundamentally from the dominant developmental model (Ruckert et al., 2017: 1592). Similarly,

the myth of a "moral government" that upholds human rights is contradicted by undemocratic practices and growing militarization, as persistent violations and criminalization of human rights defenders are justified in the name of "national interest projects." These contradictions have resulted in continued human rights abuses and the erosion of both civil society and international oversight, as illustrated by the situation of forced disappearance in the country[25].

The Plan Nacional de Desarrollo seeks to redefine the meaning of development, yet its vision remains anchored in the logic of capitalist progress. Through discourse analysis, this study examined three levels of operation: first, the micro-linguistic strategies used to legitimize neo-developmentalist policies; second, the interdiscursive connections linking these policies to the narratives of neo-developmentalism, neo-extractivism and populism through recurring myths and narratives; and third, the broader question of whether neo-developmentalism offers an alternative to neoliberalism or merely reproduces its hegemonic premises. The findings suggest that the 4T's post-neoliberal agenda represents neither a genuine alternative to neoliberalism nor its direct continuation, but rather a rearticulated form of capitalist development.

At its core, neo-developmentalism aligns popular demands for redistribution and sustainability with the interests of national and foreign capital. It sustains key neoliberal assumptions: faith in economic growth and progress, dependent integration into global markets reframed as sovereignty, and the promotion of state-private sector partnership, with the state acting as a Great Benefactor through compensatory welfare programs. At the same time, it conceals extractivism beneath the rhetoric of sustainable development and energy transition. Yet, in comparison to neoliberalism, the discourse of the 4T incorporates redistributive measures and a progressive tone, articulated through a populist communication style. In this sense, the "Second Floor" of the 4T continues this narrative, presenting transformation as what might be described in Gramscian terms as a passive revolution. As Centeno (2023: 126) notes, the 4T's post-neoliberalism is largely rhetorical, showing no substantive rupture with existing property relations or with prior social policies.

By criticizing neoliberalism as a rhetoric device, the 4T reproduces an endogenous view of underdevelopment, seen as a neoliberal failure rather than as a result of global inequality. However, according to dependency theorists, the sovereign and autonomous development of

[25]On April 4, 2025, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) announced it would begin a process to examine possible widespread or systematic enforced disappearances in Mexico. In response, dozens of organizations submitted a detailed report on the national disappearance crisis, urging the Committee to refer the evidence to the International Criminal Court to open a preliminary investigation for crimes against humanity (Nochebuena, 2025, April 4; 2025, October 2).

peripheral economies cannot be thought of outside of the reality of an unequal global order. Neo-developmentalism sidesteps this problem by deploying a populist discourse of sovereignty, creating the illusion of self-sufficiency while austerity measures coexist with social programs that avoid structural changes in the tax scheme. Policies emphasizing relocalization incentives (boosting employment and domestic production through attracting foreign firms) and domestic development (promoting energy and food self-sufficiency through reindustrialization), give the impression of an internal solution to underdevelopment.

A growing body of scholarship further highlights the neo-extractivist consequences of these policies. Large-scale projects in energy, industry, and connectivity, justified as serving the public interest, deepen extractive dependency on the global system. Another consequence of neo-extractivism is the contradictions between strengthening fossil fuels extraction and pursuing an energy transition, as well as between environmental protection and resource exploitation. Milanez & Santos (2015: 24) stress that neo-developmentalism ultimately reinforces neoliberal mandates, facilitating extractive sectors that provide foreign currency for debt repayment, while industrial policies remain incoherent and resource driven. Moreover, by ignoring the structural constraints of the global economy, neo-developmental discourse fails to deliver promises of sovereignty or sustainable development. Similarly, Ruckert et al. (2017: 1595) note that much of the post-neoliberalism literature converges on two key concerns: the contradictions between the stated aims and long-term outcomes of neo-developmentalism, and the broader apprehension that post-neoliberalism does little to alter the existing global order.

This study should be understood as a preliminary analysis, conducted only a few months after the publication of the PND. Future research will be essential to evaluate retrospectively how the PND has been employed to legitimize specific policies and actions, and what concrete outcomes have emerged from its implementation. Likewise, a more comprehensive examination of the *mañaneras* and their rhetorical strategies could offer valuable insights into the discursive configuration of Sheinbaum's presidency and the ways in which her political narrative diverges from that of her predecessor.

Although the last seven years of the 4T have seen certain economic improvements, particularly in poverty reduction, this thesis argues that, from a long-term perspective, the model ultimately reinforces a reprimarized, extractivist pattern of development. It does so by dispossessing local communities and extending capitalist colonization into pre-capitalist sectors of the economy through deeper trade integration with the United States, the stimulation of foreign direct

investment, and the prioritization of export-oriented industries, all while constraining democratic participation.

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Appendix

Summary of the content of the Research Diary

Date	Activity	Reflections from the diary	How it affects the course of the project	Pages
January	Planning the project Exploring different methodologies Structuring the research design Starting thematic and methodological literature review	*I plan to conduct a qualitative textual analysis of media (written, oral, or visual) guided by a constructivist theoretical framework (e.g., feminist or postcolonial), focusing on texts as unobtrusive data sources (because of timeframe) while critically reflecting on interpretation and contextual production.*	I am considering several questions: What type of document? Written texts, public discourse, social media communication (and why) What medium? (Ex. social media, tv, …) Which are relevant actors in my case? What is the concrete topic? Tourism? And how is the gender lens applied?	RD 1-20
January	Looking for gaps in the research Selecting angle for research and making a plan	*What are most talked about topics in the first 100 days of Sheinbaum presidency? Pre-liminary inquiry into the differences between AMLO and Sheinbaum (is she going to care more about women? What is special about her?)* *Phase 1: select medium/media and think on how to look at them.* *Phase 2: look at the results from the first coding and then look further into the main topics that came out from the media in relation with the development plan published in January 2025 to see if media discourse matches official discourse* *Phase 3 > look at framing.*	At this stage I am still considering the amount of texts I will be using, and whether to use media and compare with the PND.	RD 20
February	Choosing unit of analysis	*In brief this article proves how in Mexico media input from the government and the president specifically is extremely relevant as news*	Decision to focus on the president as main actor and to look at official presidential discourse.	RD 25-26

		media tend to report mostly from government sources. This study is an example of quantitative content analysis which is a great starting point to then look also at qualitative aspects.		
February	Choosing methods	Reading methodological literature and choosing for CDA and frame analysis.	Starting to consider discourse and frame analysis as methods. Still open the question of the unit of analysis.	RD 26-39
March	Focus on Sheinbaum's rhetoric and preliminary analysis of topics. Thematic literature	Watching *mañaneras* at least 2-3 times per week and read literature about it.	Considering whether using the daily press conferences as unit of analysis.	RD 40-49
March	Thematic literature	Megaprojects, extractivism.		RD 49-53
April	Preliminary analysis	Watching *mañaneras* 3-4 times per week.		
April, 11	Feedback on Process Paper	*Focus: Analyze Sheinbaum's media discourse on Plan Mexico within the broader "pink tide" of Latin American progressive populism.* *Method: Textual/media analysis with possible complementary interviews (activists, journalists, communication officers).* *Sources: Mañaneras, media articles, gray literature, and social media content.* *Aim: Explore how Sheinbaum's discourse shapes and is shaped by media narratives and audience reactions.* *Reflexivity: Document methodological and ethical reflections in the research diary.*	Start focusing more on the bigger picture and on the pink tide as a Latin American phenomenon, as well as on the connection with populism and democracy. In terms of unit of analysis I start to gravitate more towards the PND and using daily press conferences as contextual data.	RD 54-55

April	Thematic literature	Megaprojects, extractivism. *The "juridification of ethnic struggles" highlights how focus on procedural rights like consultation overshadows substantive rights to land and self-determination. While indigenous consent is sought only formally, communities in Chiapas, Morelos, Oaxaca, and Guerrero declaring themselves "mining-free territories" embody real autonomy and self-determination.*	I started reading about neo-developmentalism as discourse. Reading counternarratives to extractivism and the basis of Indigenous peoples contestation of the official development discourse.	RD 55-70
April, 15-17	Pre-departure reflections and questions	*What are people fighting against and for in the context of socio-environmental conflicts?* *How is dependency on state and capitalist structures constructed? (ex. money, work)* *How can one share and develop knowledge and skills in and out of academia?* *How does my thesis fit in the bigger picture?*	Open questions that accompanied me during my internship at the CDH Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (April-October 2025).	RD 68-70
April, 20	Visit to the CERSS 5 penitentiary Human rights observation at the court	First encounter with cases of human rights violations related to land defense: visit to the "Five of San Juan Cancuc," Maya Tseltal defenders unjustly imprisoned, according to Opinion 21/2025 of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (published May 17, 2025). Also conducted human rights observation, in the case of Juana Santis vs. Juan Santis, involving preventive detention against two Maya Tseltales people based on unfounded homicide	Reflection on the justice system and on the contradictions between discourse and reality of the 4T for marginalized groups (ex. the push for "zero impunity" means that there is more incentive to create a "factory of culprits", to make sure that crimes are addressed on the surface while proper investigation and actual justice is missing.)	RD 70-78

		accusations.		
April, 24	Thematic & methodological literature	Fourth Transformation, framing		RD 78-89
	Thematic literature	Women and gender, Zapatismo.	Began participation in the "Escuelita Zapatista", a weekly discussion circle about the situation of the Zapatista movement and of the country, organized by Schools for Chiapas.	RD 89-94
April, 26	Roundtable "Cooredor Interoceanico + Tren maya = Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) 4T reconfigurado" by Maderas del Pueblo	History of the megaproject of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the Interoceanic Corridor.	Learning about megaprojects in the South-East region and the continuities with previous plans for economic development.	RD 94-97
April, 29	Escuelita Zapatista	History of agricultural reforms in Mexico and situation of common lands (*ejidos*) today. *Program Sembrando Vida. If you have enough land dedicated to timber or fruit trees, they give you 6,000 pesos every two months. The result is they are dividing up the land as much as possible and changing land use to get quick and easy money. But it is dispossession because the land is no longer for food sovereignty, and when it is divided, it is more difficult to defend it from companies. It is creating many conflicts in the communities.*	Learning about the effects of welfare programs on autonomous organization and the contradictions that they bring to local communities. Indigenist and progressive symbolism, as well as social legitimization through social programs while there seem to be no structural change.	RD 97-102
May	Thematic literature	*Relationship between Latin American social movements and progressive governments, showing that while these regimes replace authoritarianism with more democratic, left-leaning forms of capitalism (neo-*	Looking at the broader 'pink tide' in a comparative perspective; populism.	RD 102-115

		developmentalism), they often disappoint radical and indigenous movements. In Mexico, the EZLN's refusal to engage with Morena exemplifies the persistent divide between state reformism and grassroots struggles, as progressive governments remain constrained by extractivist, capitalist logics despite adopting inclusive, symbolic reforms.		
May	Escuelita Zapatista	Reflections on community welfare programs such as *La Escuela es Nuestra.* *In the community of San José Buenavista, only men over 15 participate in assemblies. The community receives an annual grant of 100,000 pesos to be managed locally, with priorities like clean water, sanitation, and health. Under the new system, the government transfers the funds directly, and the community decides how to spend them and reports at year's end. One condition was that a woman must serve as treasurer, leading men to hastily recruit women just for appearances, since women typically don't participate. A committee was formed, and through " La Escuela es Nuestra", the community received 200,000 pesos from the Ministry of Education, which they used to build a soccer field.*	Considering questions of pacification and autonomous organization, while reflecting on my positionality. The key issue is whether state aid programs genuinely strengthen community autonomy or merely serve short-term political goals, such as vote-buying and pacification. While initiatives may appear empowering, they risk fostering dependence and demobilization, especially when people can rely on both government support and local collective structures like EZLN. However as Europeans is easy to criticize communities for accepting state funds even though welfare systems exist in our own countries and the living conditions are very different.	RD 115-116
May	Thematic literature Roundtable "Migración Internacional y	Populism and migration	Still looking at side angles such as women and migration, while narrowing down the research.	RD 117-123

	coordinación para la protección en el Estado de Chiapas"			
May	Visit to Simojovel (Chiapas)	Visit to the Parish of Simojovel, a historically very active community that has defended human rights.	Personal reflections on the reality of organized crime in Chiapas and the recent change of government at the state level.	RD 123-124; RD 225-226; RD 229-231
May	Thematic literature	Neo-developmentalism and neo-extractivism	Through the examination of these two concepts as "economic discourses", the overall structure of the forthcoming discourse analysis begins to take shape.	RD 124-135
May, 16	Feedback session	*Conceptual link: Connect exploitation of territory with exploitation of women's bodies (body–territory).* *Method: Use visual tools (e.g., word clouds) and microlinguistic analysis to identify recurring discourse patterns.* *Process: Begin with close reading; trace key words and phrasing that construct political messages.* *Focus: Examine resistance to populist politics through counter-hegemonic social movements.* *Argument: Analyze how both right- and left-wing populisms justify state power and megaprojects through nationalist or anti-imperialist rhetoric.* *Critical lens: Contrast ethnic homogenization vs. recognition of difference; explore nationalist narratives that may become*		RD 135

		necropolitical.		
May	Preliminary reading of PND Thematic literature	Reading of PND and media articles connected to the topics on the agenda.	After the preliminary reading, a word cloud with the content analysis is created (see **Table 2**). Exploring the concept of post-neoliberal turn.	RD 135-149
May, 19	Thematic literature	Dependency theory. Looking at the ideas of development and progress with a Marxist lens. Looking at the intersection between dependency theory and gender.	Argument: developmentalism is not in contradiction with neoliberalism. Therefore, it is not a challenge to a hegemonic discourse. Hegemony of the ideology of (capitalist) development Developmentalism vs post-developmentalism/alternative development Main bias or place of enunciation of this thesis is anti-capitalism	RD 149-181
May, 23	Starting discourse analysis	Development of categories (see **Table 3**) and the discursive tropes associated with those categories.	Clearer focus on economic discourse connected to megaprojects and income laws, leaving aside questions of gender.	RD 181-183
May	Discourse analysis Thematic literature	Discourse analysis through Nvivo Reading about logical and practical contradictions in the PND	Contradictions found in the PND: Austerity and expansion of social rights Fossil fuels and energy transition Infrastructure and austerity Contradiction between the protection of natural resources and infrastructure megaprojects Contradiction between overexploitation of labor and gender equality policies Contradiction between populism and democracy: authoritarianism and supposed expansion of participation in public consultations	RD 183-198
May	Thematic literature	Populism, AMLO, gender, the CNTE strike, judicial power election,	While doing discourse analysis, I am narrowing down the concrete	RD 198-

	Book presentation of *Estado, multiculturalismo y multietnicidad* from Francisco Lopez Barcenas	Constitutional reform on Indigenous matters.	findings. At the same time, I am reading articles about the current situation (month long strike of the teacher's union and the upcoming election of the new judicial power).	208; RD 226-229
June	Thematic literature	The question of public policy in relation to energy and energy transition		RD 208-216
June	Reading news and watching *mañaneras*	Reading on the questions of the judicial reform. Denounce of torture and sexual aggression against an Otomí land defender. Start of the construction of the Ruta de Las Culturas Mayas.	Reflections on judicial system reforms while witnessing everyday human rights violations highlight the tension between apparent corruption and the potential impact of reform. Meanwhile, the Chiapas governor's grand inauguration of a tourism-related megaproject drew criticism for its superficial indigenist approach to public events.	RD 216-225
June, 6	Annual gathering of *Slamalil K'inal*	Participation in the gathering about security threats to human rights defenders. There was also a presentation from a lawyer on the Constitutional reform on Indigenous matters.		RD 231-236
June, 20	Discourse analysis Reading media	Notes on discourse analysis. Reading on the current situation regarding the reforms of the *Guardia Nacional* and concerns from international organizations on the situation of human rights in Mexico.		RD 236-241; RD 241-244
July	Discourse analysis	Micro linguistic and frame analysis of excerpts	After dividing excerpts into categories, I am now analyzing them one by one. In terms of frame analysis, I am decoding whether the text aim is a diagnosis, proposed solution or motivation.	RD 244-287

August-September	Thematic literature			RD 287-328
September	Participation in the third regional meeting: Megaprojects and land defense (Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero)	Listening to the theoretical and practical perspectives of land defenders and their analysis of the situation of megaprojects in the South-East	Insights on specific examples of resistance to megaprojects through mapping. Learning about criticism of development from a grassroot perspective and alternative visions for development.	RD 328-335
September	Thematic literature	Economy, 4T as a nation project, Polanyi and post-Polanyian critique.	First draft is handed in	RD 335-351
September	Feedback on draft			
October	Methodological literature	Refining micro linguistic analysis	Work on refining the analysis and drafting of the final version of the thesis	RD 351-370