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Mexico's public diplomacy efforts to engage its diaspora across the border: Case study of the programs, messages and strategies employed by the Mexican Embassy in the United States

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Abstract

This research offers a case study of how Mexico has engaged its diaspora community in the United States, since the 1990s until today. It provides an analysis of the recent messaging strategies that the embassy of Mexico in the United States employs to reach its diaspora community via websites, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. This study demonstrates how active and intentional Mexico's leadership is when it engages its co-nationals who live in the United States, adapting to changes in political context and national priorities. In particular, after the change in the U.S. administration, the messaging by the Mexican government through its Embassy expanded from messaging centered on building a positive image of its migrants and defending their rights, to responding to U.S. President Donald Trump's messages about restrictive immigration policies and the flow of drugs and undocumented migrants from Mexico. The study shows how Mexican government used its diaspora communication and other strategic messaging efforts to remind the United States that immigration is a shared responsibility.

Keywords

Public Diplomacy, Diaspora, Framing, Mexico, United States, Immigration

Introduction

Public diplomacy has been defined as the collection of strategies and tactics that

state and non-state actors use to build relationships and engage key stakeholders located abroad (Zaharna 2009; Gilboa 2008; Gregory 2011; Leonard 2002) with the purpose of advancing specific interests and values (Gregory 2011). While most of the literature on public diplomacy has focused on how governments or non-state actors from a given country build positive relationships with foreign publics, a growing body of literature has studied how home governments interact strategically with a *home* public located abroad: the home country's diaspora community (Bravo & De Moya 2015; Bravo 2014a; Gamlen 2014; Kunz 2010; Zaharna 2011). Diaspora communities can be defined as "communities of people who left their ancestral homes and settled in foreign countries, but who preserve the memory of and links with the land of their fathers and forefathers" (Horbocken 2004, p. 201).

Latin America is typically an under-researched geographical area in most fields of study, which is true also in the case of public diplomacy research, but some authors have described how state-diaspora relations are built and nurtured in this region (Délano 2014; Délano & Gamlen 2014; Gamlen 2014). Case studies of state-diaspora relations have been developed as well for particular countries in Latin America, such as Ecuador (Margheritis 2011), El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Colombia (Bravo & De Moya 2015; Bravo 2014b), and, more than any other country, Mexico, which is considered the exemplary case in the region (Gonzalez Gutierrez 2006, 1999; Hernandez Joseph 2012; Iskander 2010; Martinez-Saldaña 2003; Smith 2005).

Mexico, one of the most active countries regarding relationship-building efforts with the diaspora, in particular with those who live in the United States. Therefore, Mexico's efforts have attracted scholarly attention as a positive example of a highly active nation with multiple public diplomacy initiatives (Gonzalez Gutierrez 2006, 1999; Hernandez Joseph 2012; Iskander 2010; Martinez-Saldaña 2003; Smith 2005).

Building on previous research, this study describes some of those best practices implemented by Mexico since the 1990s to engage and build positive relationships with their co-nationals living in the United States. Additionally, it includes a content analysis of the messages that the Mexican embassy in the United States has communicated through its website, Twitter and Facebook during the last six months of U.S. President Barack Obama's second term and the first six months of U.S. President Donald Trump's administration. The purpose of analyzing the messaging in this timeframe is to describe the salient themes in the messaging and identify shifts in that messaging as a result of the change in U.S. administration, demonstrating how the Mexican communication strategies adapts in response to policy changes.

This case study shows that in the case of the relationship-building strategies used by Mexico to engage its diaspora community in the United States, the Mexican government makes conscious choices regarding how they are addressed, i.e. the terminology it uses to refer to them; the issues Mexico emphasizes in this government-diaspora communications; and the type of relationship it tries to build with its diaspora community (a mix of altruistic/communal and transactional/exchange-based) (Bravo & De Moya 2015; Hon & Grunig 1999). This study also highlights the potential impact of changes in a host country's Administration, in this case the United States, can have in the public diplomacy efforts of a home government, in this case Mexico, that has a strong diaspora community living in the host country's territory.

Literature Review

Mexico is currently the strongest immigrant-sending country for the United States (Fitzgerald 2008), with about 11.4 million Mexican immigrants living in U.S. territory (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez 2013; Pew Research Center 2015). Mexico and the United States are neighboring countries and long-term commercial partners, especially as members, along with Canada, of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (USTR 2008; Verca 2014).

Migration flows from Mexico to the United States have been a constant in U.S.-Mexico history (Garcia Zamora 2009). With such an interdependent relationship regarding labor, trade and migration flows, both countries have conducted many public diplomacy efforts to maintain a mutually beneficial relationships (Chavez & Hoewe 2010; Lee 2006; Rivas 2014).

With so many Mexican citizens living in the United States, and with the migration flows happening for so long, it is understandable why Mexico became a Latin American pioneer in the development of public policy and specific strategic communications and actions to connect and build relationships with its co-nationals in the diaspora (Gonzalez Gutierrez 2006, 1999; Hernandez Joseph 2012; Iskander 2010). Mexico has also been an exemplary case in the defense of the human rights of Mexicans abroad, regardless of immigration status in the host country.

Mexico has used a wide variety of strategies to keep contact with the diaspora and maintain the connection of the diaspora members to the homeland. Mexico employs traditional public diplomacy and public diplomacy 2.0 (or digital diplomacy) tools, which is the use of technology and interactive media to achieve public diplomacy goals (Cull 2013; Dodd & Collins 2017; Storie 2015; Zhong & Lu 2013). In public diplomacy 2.0, the emphasis is placed on building relationships using social media platforms and online communities, allowing the creation of user-generated content, and establishing horizontal networks of information

exchange facilitated by technology (Cull 2013).

One of the ways in which Mexico is using public diplomacy 2.0 is through the social networks and messaging strategies it has developed using online platforms such as the Facebook page, the Twitter handle and the website of its Embassy in Washington D.C. A few similar efforts have been studied previously, such as Dodd and Collins (2017)' study of Twitter use by 41 embassies, in which the authors concluded that Twitter is being used by embassies to promote specific policies and ideas, and to do cultural promotion. The fact that the audience can interact with, and respond to, the embassies' online content means that diplomacy has the potential to become more open, diverse and democratic, as regular people can reach diplomatic actors more easily (Comor & Bean 2012), although that is not always the result in practice.

Through its website, its Twitter handle and its Facebook page, Mexico's embassy in the United States is providing information to its diaspora community that has been traditionally shared by this embassy through other means such as brochures, phone lines and face-to-face customer service. This information includes descriptions of policies and details about consular services, among others. But this study argues that Mexico's embassy is also using online platforms to deliver messaging that includes intentional strategic frames targeted at the diaspora.

Strategic Framing

Framing, as understood in the field of strategic communication, is a theory that explains that, when communicating about an issue, person or event, sources of information—in general—and political actors—in particular—make salient certain frames over others, assigning to certain aspects of the issue, person or event more relevance than to other aspects about the same issue, person or event (Chong & Druckman 2007; Entman 2003, 2004; Lecheler & de Vreese 2012).

In doing so, the particular framing of the issue, person or event that is selected and disseminated by the source of information communicates specific attributes. This framing can impact how the audience interprets the issue, person or event and what opinion the audience forms about the issue, person or event. As Entman (2003, p. 416) explains, "Successful political communication requires the framing of events, issues, and actors in ways that promote perceptions and interpretations that benefit one side while hindering the other."

To frame, thus, is to select and make salient some aspects of reality over others (Entman 2004). Sometimes, the selection of frames has no particular intentions, such as when the source of information simply selects certain aspects of the issue over others to make communication more efficient and/or more personal (McCarthy, & Dolfmsa 2014; Van Dalen 2012). Other times, framing is strategic and

the process of selection of certain frames over others is done with the purpose of promoting a certain view or interpretation about the issue, person or event (Druckman 2001; Hanggli 2012; Hanggli & Kriesi 2012).

Frames are used to accomplish four objectives: provide a certain definition of the problem or issue, indicate what is causing the issue (who is responsible for it), suggest whether the issue is positive or negative (by communicating moral judgments) and offer courses of action (or solutions to the issue) (Entman 2004). Combined, these objectives can achieve the goal of communicating an overall strategic message that the source of information is interested in transmitting (Sheafer, Shenhav, Takens, & van Atteveldt 2014).

In the particular field of public diplomacy, only a few authors have studied strategic framing processes. Fitzpatrick (2010) offered a typology of public diplomacy strategies that has been used by other scholars to analyze political messages (for instance, Dodd & Collins 2017; White & Radic 2014). In her typology, Fitzpatrick (2010) identifies the following public diplomacy strategies: advocacy, communication/information provision, relationship-building, promotional, warfare/foreign policy propaganda, and political. White and Radic (2014) indicated that these strategies can be used in combination by nations, but that it is possible to identify the primary function of a message, which in turn allows to identify what were the messaging strategies used by those nations to advance public diplomacy objectives with different audiences.

State-diaspora Relations

This study adds to the body of literature about state-diaspora relations, which is a field that has explored how governments build and maintain relationships with their diaspora communities (Delano 2014; Delano & Gamlen 2014; Iskander 2010); try to “govern” the relationship with these extra-territorial stakeholders by developing public policies and institutions that serve but also “manage” the diaspora (Mikuszies 2014; Ragazzi 2009, 2014); seek support from the diaspora for home-country initiatives and programs (Kunz 2010; Lyons & Mandaville 2013; Zaharna 2011); and promote a specific image of their diaspora communities to improve their image in the host countries where those diaspora communities reside (Bravo & De Moya 2015). Much of the literature in this field is from disciplines such as political science and sociology, but it has increasingly been studied in strategic communication.

As indicated before, through public diplomacy efforts, home governments interact, build relationships and manage reputations through strategic communications and actions that connect with and engage publics located abroad, including a *domestic* public located in different host countries: the home country's diaspora

community (Bravo & De Moya 2015; Bravo 2014a; Gamlen 2014; Kunz 2010; Zaharna 2011). Diaspora groups can help home countries achieve their public diplomacy objectives and can build bridges between home and host countries, with the diaspora members becoming, informally, symbolic ambassadors of the home country (Gamlen 2014; Koser Ackapar & Bayraktar Aksel, 2017; Smith 2005). At the same time, diaspora groups organize themselves in many cases and demand access to rights and opportunities (Koser Ackapar & Bayraktar Aksel 2017; Smith 2005), or even oppose the home government (Bravo 2014a).

This study offers a unique contribution in the field of diaspora diplomacy, in particular in the exemplary case of Latin America, which is Mexico, by exploring how a change in a host government's Administration impacts the strategic frames present in the messaging of the home government to and about its diaspora community in that host country. It does so by answering the following research questions:

1. What strategies has Mexico developed and employed to build and maintain a positive relationship with its diaspora community?
2. What have been the main messages that Mexico has communicated to its diaspora through its U.S.-based Embassy website and its U.S.-based Embassy's Facebook page and Twitter handle?
3. How has Mexico's messaging strategy shifted after the change of Administration in the United States (from president Obama to president Trump) in their communication to and about its diaspora in the United States?

Methods

This study first presents the results of a qualitative content analysis of strategic messaging disseminated by the Mexican Embassy in the United States through its website, Facebook page and Twitter handle, during six months of president Barack Obama's second term in office (from August 25, 2015, to February 24, 2016) and six months of president Donald Trump's first term (from April 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017), as detailed below.

Then, it provides a detailed description of the long-term policies and initiatives developed by the Mexican government, since the 1990s, to build relationships and to communicate with its diaspora communities around the world. Special focus is given to its largest diaspora community, which resides across its northern border in the United States.

Case study methodology is used because it is considered appropriate when research needs to be conducted to empirically examine "a real-world phenomenon

within its naturally occurring context, without directly manipulating either the phenomenon or the context” (Kaarbo & Beasley 1999, p.372). The case study includes a qualitative content analysis to analyze the messaging, because it is a well-regarded methodology for strategic framing analysis, given that this approach allows for analyzing the ideologies that lead to the construction of meaning in messages (Durham 2001).

The case study about Mexico's long-term state-diaspora relationship-building strategies and tactics, from the 1990s to today, is based on information collected through the review of secondary sources (i.e., news stories and scholarly journal articles), and also through the aforementioned analysis of the U.S.-based Mexican Embassy' website (at <<https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/eua/index.php/es/>>), and its Sección Consular (Consular Section website, at <<https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/washington/>>). Information was collected as well from the Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (Institute for Mexicans Abroad) website and the Voto de los Mexicanos Residentes en el Extranjero (Vote of Mexicans Who Reside Abroad) website. Through this process, the main initiatives, policies and structural reforms Mexico undertook in the last 30 years to serve its diaspora were identified.

For the qualitative content analysis, each information subsidy was collected manually from the Mexican Embassy's website, Facebook page and the Twitter handle, and all of them were read carefully, twice, at the time of data collection (last week of February 2016 and last week of September 2017).

Only information subsidies that mentioned the Mexican diaspora in the United States or that were targeted at the Mexican diaspora in the United States were selected, both in English and Spanish, given that the authors of this study are fully bilingual. In other words, only social media posts connected to Mexico's state-diaspora diplomacy were analyzed, given that all these posts were targeted specifically at the diaspora, or were disseminated to build the image or reputation of the Mexican diaspora in the United States. All these messages were crafted by communication experts at the Mexican Embassy, at the Mexican consulate in Washington D.C. or at the Mexican “Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores” (Foreign Relations Secretariat).

Given that some of the subsidies in the website were just a few sentences long, while others had dozens of pages, a word count was conducted instead to estimate the volume of information analyzed. In total, 85,120 words were analyzed from the Mexican Embassy's website. Regarding social media, 93 Facebook posts were identified as mentioning or targeting the diaspora (13 during Obama's six-month timeframe and 80 during Trump's six-month timeframe), and 657 tweets were also collected (273 tweets during Obama's six-month timeframe and 384 tweets during Trump's six-month timeframe).

All the information subsidies and social media posts were read twice and analyzed using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where you assign labels to themes in the content, and then you cluster those labels into categories of analysis (See summary of categories of analysis in Table 1).

Findings

Mexico's Communication Strategy for and about its U.S.-Based Diaspora Community

As most countries do in the content they provide through their embassies' and consulates' websites in a foreign country, Mexico's Embassy in the United States offers, in its website, information about consular services, lists of consulates in the host country, frequently asked questions, security and travel information, and the like. But, different to other countries' outreach initiatives targeting diaspora communities in host countries, which sometimes are scarce or almost non-existent (Bravo 2014b), Mexico has developed abundant content that targets its diaspora communities in host countries, in general, and those in the United States, in particular.

The Mexican Embassy's website in the United States includes, for example, a dedicated section focused on services for the diaspora community, with useful information for Mexicans who live in the United States, in particular. These services include information on how to vote in the Mexican elections while abroad; legal and health counseling available to diaspora members; a database of Mexican organizations formed in the United States; a database of "highly qualified Mexicans" working abroad; and a form to register organizations and associations formed by the migrants. It also includes a list of programs created by the Mexican government to support its migrant community (for instance, regarding labor rights and family matters such as international adoptions); information on how to qualify for favorable loans and matching funds offered by the government to its migrants; resources for diaspora members who want to invest in Mexico; and information on how to send remittances back home with discounted transaction fees.

The website posts announcements for Mexicans who live in the United States, and even phone hotlines for migrants to call if they think they are in danger while in the United States or while in transit, in the process of moving from the home country to the host country. It also informs about the procedure in place to repatriate bodies of Mexicans who died abroad, and it includes links to other types of useful information, such as health services available to migrants in the United States, a schedule with dates and places for mobile consulates, trainings available for migrants, and several other topics.

Social Media and Information Subsidies

In the six months' worth of content analyzed on the Mexican Embassy's website, Facebook page and Twitter handle during the Obama presidency, the authors of this study collected 70 information subsidies (mainly news releases) from the Embassy's website that included content of interest for or about the diaspora community. Regarding social media platforms, for Facebook (at www.facebook.com/EmbamexEUA), 13 posts for or about the Mexican diaspora were found. On Twitter (at @EmbamexEUA), 273 tweets for or about the diaspora were disseminated. This level of activity strongly contrasted with the second six-month period after the administration change, when 80 posts for or about the Mexican diaspora were published on Facebook, and 384 tweets for about the Mexican diaspora community were disseminated by the Mexican Embassy in the United States. Just by the number of posts and tweets, it was evident that the Mexican Embassy became much more active in communicating with or about its diaspora community in the United States after the U.S. Administration change.

Before Donald Trump took office on January 20, 2017, both the Mexican Embassy's website and Mexico's social media platforms in the United States (Facebook and Twitter) highlighted the aforementioned services to the migrant community. The social media posts tended to emphasize on practical information of interest for Mexicans who live in the United States. For instance, there were information subsidies and frequent social media posts that focused on services available to the diaspora, celebrations and other social events, and messages emphasizing that diaspora members are important for the Mexican government, among others. There were also Facebook posts and tweets that disseminated messages framed around issues of identity and belonging, support for the migration process that the diaspora members go through when they leave Mexico to live in the United States, protection of the migrants' human rights, support for transnational business partnerships, and pride about the positive contributions of Mexicans to the United States at many levels (economic, social, cultural, political, etc.).

Identity and belonging. This frame emphasized, both in the static content of the Mexican Embassy's website and its information subsidies, as well as in its social media posts on Facebook and Twitter, that the Mexican identity should be central to Mexican citizens, regardless of the country where they live. The Mexican government highlighted in its messaging that it cares about the diaspora community and that the diaspora community members should care back by staying in touch, by being proud of their culture and roots, by attending cultural events, by being strategic partners for the Mexican government, by investing in Mexico, and by helping their families back home. In return, the Mexican government is ready to defend their rights in the host country and to offer favorable conditions for that "staying-in-touch" process.

Support in the migration process. This frame, utilized frequently by the Mexican government, emphasized that while it would prefer to have all Mexicans living in Mexican territory, the Mexican government supports the migration process of Mexican citizens to the United States, if that is the decision they make for the benefit of their families. As part of this support, the Mexican government indicated, in the Embassy's website and in its social media posts, that it supports both the DACA and DAPA programs (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of U.S. Citizens and Legal Residents, respectively). The Mexican government also offers trainings on topics such as labor and legal rights in the United States to facilitate the "empowerment" (e.g., Embajada de Mexico 2016) of the Mexican diaspora community, and it promotes the acquisition of dual citizenship, indicating that if Mexican citizens become U.S. citizens as well, they can exercise political rights in both countries.

Protection and Advocacy. This frame emphasizes that Mexican migrants have human rights, no matter where they live or what their migratory status is. As such, they deserve protection, safety and well-being, and this is a shared responsibility between the home and host countries. The Mexican government says it tries to guarantee Mexicans' safety and protection in the United States through diplomatic negotiations with the host country. For instance, the Mexican government tries to advocate against the use of disproportionate force, including deadly force, by U.S. immigration agents and by police officers; it offers trainings and workshops for migrants; it has hotlines to denounce abuses; it constantly maintains dialogue with the host country's authorities; and it tries to improve its customer service and the provision of services in its consulates and Embassy in the United States (e.g., Embajada de Mexico 2015a, 2015b).

Business partnerships. The Mexican government highlights, using this frame, that diaspora members are business partners: needed investors in their communities of origin, highly appreciated remittance-senders, and skilled workers who contribute to knowledge- and technology-transfers. To encourage these business partnerships, the Mexican government offers matching funds, discounted fees to send remittances back home, favorable loans to start businesses and build houses in Mexico, scholarships to students, trainings for teachers, and workshops for entrepreneurs, hoping they will bring back their resources and reinvest back their knowledge in Mexico.

Image/reputation management. The Mexican government uses this frame to "construct" the diaspora members' image as one of hard-working individuals, contributing members to the host country, important strategic partners of the home country, cultural brokers abroad, and informal ambassadors to Mexico in the host country. In the information subsidies, as well as in the social media posts, it is common to find key words such as "strategic partners," "agents of development,"

“agents of change,” and “co-nationals.”

Changes in Strategic Frames

As indicated before, the Mexican communications analyzed in the last six months of the Obama presidency (in 2017) showed that some frames in the strategic messaging of the Mexican government remained the same, but some others changed significantly, both in salience and in tone. Similarly, the frequency of the communication (i.e. posts or news subsidies) increased exponentially (from 13 Facebook posts in the Obama-period analyzed to 80 in the Trump-period analyzed, and from 272 tweets in the Obama-period analyzed to 384 in the Trump-period included in the study).

The main changes in the strategic messaging by the Mexican government to and about its diaspora community in the United States after the administration change can be summarized in the following ways: Besides communicating using the “traditional” frames described above, the Mexican government changed gears and started communicating, frequently, its disappointment with Trump’s decision to end the DACA program, its support of the “Dreamers,” its willingness to fight U.S. Bill SB4 (which could impact Mexicans living in Texas), and its perspective that border issues, migration issues and drug issues along the Mexican-U.S. border are “a shared responsibility” between the two countries. The new frames identified were the following:

Aid in times of crisis. Mexico was impacted by strong earthquakes in September of 2017. This particular situation resulted in the Mexican Embassy increasing its communications, both in the Embassy website and on social media, about this natural disaster, encouraging diaspora members in the United States to help in the recovery process at home by donating money and volunteering in the reconstruction process. For example, the embassy website includes a step-by-step guideline for Mexicans abroad on how to donate money for the victims of the September 17 earthquake (Embajada de Mexico 2017).

Cross-border relationships deteriorating. This frame was increasingly used by the Mexican government to indicate that the U.S.-Mexican relationship was suffering as a result of Donald Trump’s messages and actions. For example, Mexico’s Ambassador said, at an ordinary session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, that the United States’ decision to terminate DACA was a mistake; that the management of migration processes require collaboration between home, in-transit, and host countries; that the migration phenomenon is a shared responsibility, and that Mexico categorically rejects laws and policies against migrants. In the Mexican government’s view, anti-immigration laws and policies that criminalize, harass or stigmatize migrants do not stop migration and, on the contrary, they force migrants to use illegal channels of migration that expose them

to human rights violations and abuse (see, for example, Secretaría 2017b).

Other examples of the deterioration in the U.S.-Mexico relationship can be seen in high-level diplomatic meetings where Mexico protests DACA's termination, an announcement where Mexico withdraws the aid offered to support Texans affected by Hurricane Harvey (see Secretaría 2017a); a last-minute visit by the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs to California to support the Dreamers (DACA recipients); a video posted on the Mexican Embassy's Facebook page instructing Mexicans in the United States about what to do if they get detained while abroad; the concern of the Mexican government about U.S. Bill SB4, which could impact Mexicans living in Texas; and strongly worded official statements by the Mexican government stating that Mexico will not pay for the border wall; that Trump's tweets about the violence in Mexico, drugs and migration flows are inexact; and that the causes of the cross-border tensions and the steps to solve these problems are a "shared responsibility."

Table 1: Presented next, summarizes the frames identified in the Mexican Embassy and in the D.C. Mexican consulate regarding messaging to and about the Mexican diaspora community living in the United States

Frame	2016	2017
Aid in times of crisis		x
Exercising rights	x	x
Identity and belonging	x	x
Immigrant's contributions to the host nation	x	x
Protection and advocacy	x	x
Strained cross-border relationship		x
Support for adjustment	x	x
Supporting business partnerships/Cross border collaborations	x	x

Structural Changes and Long-Term Initiatives in Mexico Since the 1990s

Mexico is considered a pioneer in Latin America when it comes to establishing long-term state-diaspora relationship-building strategies and tactics with its diaspora community in the United States. It is also the country that others in the region look up to for best practices in this area of public diplomacy (Bravo 2014a; González Gutiérrez 1999, 2006). Mexico has been making structural, political and strategic communication changes in their public diplomacy efforts since the 1970s but mostly since the early 1990s, to better serve and engage its diaspora community around the world, in general, and in the United States, in particular (Délano 2014; Goldring 2002; González Gutiérrez 1999, 2006; Hernández Joseph 2012; Martínez-Saldaña 2003; Massey, Durand & Malone 2002; Smith 2005).

Institutional Reforms and Provision of Consular Services

For almost three decades, Mexico has been creating a solid institutional network to support Mexicans who live abroad with many of their information and logistical needs. In 1990, Mexico established its General Directorate for Mexican Communities Abroad, as a division of its Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, to specifically serve its diaspora communities. In 2001, the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad was opened, placing the priority of serving this key audience under the direct supervision of the Mexican President, and, in 2002, to avoid duplicities, this office and the General Directorate for Mexican Communities Abroad merged under the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad, once again under the purview of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (Bravo 2014a, González Gutiérrez 1999, 2006; Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003).

The Mexican Embassy in D.C. and the Mexican consulates in the United States have been expanding and improving their services as well, from the traditional ones (i.e., emission of passports and ID Cards) to the most innovative (matching funds to invest back home, help with the repatriation of bodies to the homeland, etc.). This has been supported by increases in consular budgets, personnel, services and efficiency in their customer service (Bravo 2014a, Embajada 2015c). As of 2018, out of its 69 consulates worldwide, 47 of them (68 percent) were located in the United States (<https://directorio.sre.gob.mx/index.php/consulados-de-mexico-en-el-exterior>). The majority of Mexico's foreign-service personnel works in consular activities. This responds to the strong presence of people of Mexican origin in the United States: In 2013, there was an estimated 34.6 million people of Mexican origin living across the border, with one-third of them (close to 12 million) being immigrants born in Mexico (Lopez 2015).

Remittances

The money that migrants send back home to support their families (in other words, remittances) are an important part of the income of family members left in the homeland. According to 2017 data and 2018 data projections, about 95% of remittances sent to Mexico come from migrants in the United States, they account for about U.S. \$33 billion, and they represent about 3 percent of Mexico's GDP (Gross Domestic Product), surpassing oil exports for the first time in 2015 (Sonneland 2017). This explains why Mexico has been trying to increase the attraction of remittances and has been offering productive options for Mexican migrants to invest their money back home (Hernandez Joseph 2010).

In the 1990s, Mexico established a 3x1 matching fund, in which every dollar invested by Mexican migrants in productive public work projects that serve their communities of origin are matched by one dollar invested by the Mexican federal government and one dollar invested by the state government in the same project

(Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003). The Mexican government also offers favorable-condition bank loans to Mexicans who want to invest in private projects or buy houses back home, and it negotiated favorable money-transfer fees for Mexicans with remittance-sending agencies such as Western Union (Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003).

Dual citizenship, voting and other state protections and rights

As early as 1996, and becoming a pioneer in Latin America, Mexico started offering dual citizenship to Mexicans living abroad. One decade later, it started offering Mexicans abroad the possibility of voting in the Mexican presidential elections through absentee vote. Mexican migrants can also run for office in Mexico (Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003), all of which has increased the political participation of Mexican migrants in domestic politics. Furthermore, as part of the consular services provided to Mexican migrants, they can receive legal counseling in the consulates, there is program of mobile consulates that go to communities where consulates are not available, and, in its strategic communication and actions, the Mexican government constantly emphasizes that one of its priorities is to protect the human rights of Mexicans abroad, no matter their immigration status (Bravo 2014a; González Gutiérrez 1999, 2006; Hernández Joseph 2012; Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003).

Diasporic identity construction

The Mexican government disseminates information in the form of press releases, speeches, photo galleries, announcements, databases of diaspora organizations and other static content on its network of websites. For instance, the websites of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, the Mexican Embassy in the United States, the Consular Network, the Institute of Mexicans Abroad – Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior--, and the Voto de los Mexicanos Residentes en el Exterior website –Vote of Mexicans Abroad. Furthermore, besides the strategic messages also communicated through the social media platforms associated with these government divisions and offices, Mexico uses other communication and relationship-building strategies and tactics to keep the Mexican migrants close. These communications remind the diaspora community members that they are Mexicans no matter where they are; encourage them to reinvest their financial and social capital back home; shape their image in their host countries portraying them as hard-working, contributing individuals; and construct the diasporic image at home by describing them with terms such as “co-nationals,” “strategic partners,” “people deserving of having their human and labor rights protected anywhere,” and “agents of development,” among other strategic goals (Bravo 2014a).

Additionally, Mexico encourages and organizes visits of Mexican–American delegations to Mexico, transnational sports tournaments, leadership trainings, youth

encounters, cultural exhibits, holiday celebrations, pilgrimages and other symbolic activities to keep the diasporic identity alive (González Gutiérrez, 1999, 2006).

The Academic and Highly Skilled Diaspora

With its academic diaspora, and with highly educated Mexicans who work abroad, the Mexican government keeps a digital atlas to understand where they are located around the world, their institutional affiliations, areas of research and contact information. For example, they have a Mexican Researchers Abroad Catalogue (Catálogo de Investigadores Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2012). This database is associated with Mexico's Internationalization, Academic & Scientific Mobilities Network (RIMAC, in Spanish) and with Mexico's National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT, in Spanish). There is also the Global Network of Skilled Mexicans, which connects local chapters of highly skilled Mexicans who live abroad, all around the world.

These networks and their respective websites offer avenues of communication, doors to start collaborative projects, and some incentives to attract back the "brains" that left Mexico in search of better academic opportunities in about 30 countries around the world, including the United States.

Discussion

This qualitative study about how Mexico has built and developed its state-diaspora relations through time, offline and online, is an applied, prime example of Zaharna's (2011) statement that "countries are making an effort to incorporate the positive role of the domestic and diaspora publics to reinforce public diplomacy goals" (p.27).

Structurally, and over almost 30 years now, Mexico has built its institutional structure, has increased its resources, and has created the mechanisms necessary to serve its diaspora population around the world, in general, and in the United States, in particular. Offline, the Mexican government has been involved in developing and implementing long-term strategic communication and actions that have helped it build lasting relationships with the diaspora community. Online, the Mexican government has also portrayed itself as a defender of Mexican citizens' human rights, regardless of their geographic location, immigration status or level of connection to the homeland. It has also included the Mexican diaspora as one of its priority publics in its public diplomacy initiatives.

More recently, using the technological and strategic communication opportunities that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide, and using public relations materials (in other words, information subsidies) offered through a network of websites, the Mexican government has been pro-active in most cases

—and reactive in some others— constant, and intentional about communicating specific messages to and about its diaspora communities around the world, in particular in the United States.

Through almost 30 years and through different U.S. governments, Mexico has been consistent in communicating practical and useful logistical information to Mexicans who live abroad. To do so, it has used a wide variety of information subsidies, social media posts and static content on websites to highlight important issues, policies and programs designed to engage the diaspora, build its image, and protect its rights.

More recently, the U.S. change in Presidential Administration has generated adjustments in the Mexican government's messaging strategy that were not salient before Trump took office. Among others, since January of 2017, the Mexican government has begun posting on Facebook and using its Twitter handle to react to Trump's negative tweets about Mexicans in general, and about Mexican migrants in particular, about the process of migration from Mexico to the United States, about the potential construction of a border wall, and about the potential termination of the DACA and DAPA programs. The Mexican government has also reacted to Trump's tweets by expressing support for the Dreamers, by opposing Texas intention to pass bill SB4 into law, and by reminding Mexican migrants that they have human rights in the United States.

Along with recent social media posts, the Mexican government has kept communicating other frames that were present as well in its official communications when Barack Obama was president: the frames of identity, citizenship and belonging; the positive framing of the migrant's image; the frame of consular services available to the diaspora community; the frame of Mexicans having human rights no matter where they live; and the frame of the close relationship that should exist between the homeland and the diaspora.

The fact that close to 12 million Mexican migrants are undocumented (Pew Research Center 2015) places them in a vulnerable situation in the host country. The Mexican government's strategic messaging reflects this context, while at the same time it highlights the relevance of the financial and social capital that Mexican migrants have and how impactful these types of capital are for the homeland, through remittances, political participation, investment in productive projects at home, and the transnational membership in the home country. Mexico has been intentional in developing a long-term strategy that tells the Mexican diaspora that it matters, that it is valued, and that it is still considered an essential part of Mexico, at home and abroad.

Bio

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Vanessa Bravo, is an Associate Professor of Strategic Communications in the School of Communications of Elon University. She holds a Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the University of Florida; an M.A. in Mass Communication from the University of Florida, where she was a Fulbright Scholar, and a B.A. in Mass Communication from the University of Costa Rica. Her research focuses on the communication efforts and international public relations strategies that home governments in Mexico and Central America establish with their diaspora communities in the United States. She is interested in how public relations contribute to build national identities and to keep transnational connections between home and host countries. In 2015, she was an Educator Fellow for the Plank Center for Excellence in Public Relations.

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