

# Beyond Traditional Boundaries: The Origins and Features of the Public-Consular Diplomacy of Mexico

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## Abstract

The evolution of public diplomacy from one-way communication to relationship-building efforts and the prioritization of consular affairs inside the ministries of foreign affairs significantly impacted the diplomatic activities of consulates. Mexico's provision of health, educational, and defence schemes to Mexicans in the United States are beyond traditional consular services. These efforts by the government of Mexico showcase that, in its essence, consular diplomacy is also public diplomacy. The essay describes the origins and main features of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy in the U.S.: partnerships, proximity, flexibility, federal issues at the consular level, and high-visibility consular cases. By highlighting these characteristics, the work helps to understand the merge of the two diplomatic tools into public-consular diplomacy. Examining case studies from the Global South can contribute to this growing field of study.

**Keywords:** Consular Diplomacy; Public Diplomacy; Diaspora; United States of America; Mexico

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Mexico has developed a wide array of consular assistance programs that include traditional consular protection and documentary services as well as innovative health, education, and legal defence schemes to take care of the needs of an increasingly complex and diverse Mexican community in the United States.

Implementing these efforts transformed the routinary activities of the Mexican consular network in the United States into public-consular diplomacy. Maaïke Okano-Heijmans (2011) defines consular diplomacy as “international negotiations on a consular (legal) framework and individual consular cases that attract substantial attention from the media, public and politicians” (p. 21). Even though Cárdenas Suárez (2019) does not use the term consular diplomacy, he emphasizes the political and strategic impact of Mexico’s consular policy (p. 1079), which is the salient feature of consular diplomacy.

There is little research on public diplomacy at the consular level; therefore, there is no consensual definition of public-consular diplomacy. Torres Mendivil (2018) indicates that “the link between public diplomacy and consular diplomacy clearly explains the evolution from consular assistance and protection into consular diplomacy” (p. 117), while De la Vega Wood (2014) views the consulates’ country image promotion activities as public-consular diplomacy (p. 184), which comprises of political dialogue at the subnational level, trade promotion, international co-operation projects, and cultural activities (p. 172).

Moreover, Fernández de Castro & Hernández Hernández (2018) conclude that “consular diplomacy is a lot closer to the complexity of the diplomatic work, of management, lobbying, and public diplomacy; however, it still maintains its special closeness to the Mexican in the United States, providing documentary services, protection, and community services” (p. 19).

Using Mexico as an example, this essay argues that, in its essence, consular diplomacy is also public diplomacy because the consular offices' diplomatic activities focus on engagement with foreign audiences, such as local and state authorities and a wide array of domestic publics abroad including citizens in distress overseas and diaspora communities. Besides, its main objective is to establish long-lasting relationships with local allies to protect and empower Mexican migrants in the U.S.

The paper is divided into four sections. It starts with the four-defining factors of the public-consular diplomacy of Mexico that gave birth to this new form of consular engagement due to the combination of domestic pressure and foreign policy changes in the 1990s. The third section explains the main features of the country's public-consular diplomacy: partnerships, proximity, flexibility, federal issues at the consular level, and high-visibility consular cases. It is followed by a discussion on the idea that consular diplomacy is intrinsically a public diplomacy strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> All views expressed here are that of the author and do not represent the opinions of any other authority, agency, organisation, employer, or company.

## **The Defining Attributes of Mexico's Public-Consular Diplomacy**

Mexico's public-consular diplomacy has been shaped by four defining attributes of the Mexican community in the United States: genesis, size, vulnerability, and concentration in one country. As a result, it became a strategic activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico (SRE) (Cárdenas Suárez, 2019, p. 1079).

### ***A. The Genesis of Mexicans in the United States***

After the Mexico–U.S. War of 1846-1848, the two countries signed the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty on 2 February 1848. Suddenly, with a pen's stroke, around 75 thousand Mexicans who lived in Upper California and New Mexico became foreigners (Morales, 1982, p. 40; cited in Gómez Arnau, 1990, p. 131). Most Mexicans who stayed in the U.S. lost their property, suffered from widespread discrimination and abuses, as well as other violent situations that required their home government's assistance (Moyano Pahissa, 1989).

This situation, together with the growing emigration of workers to the United States and the anti-Mexican sentiments that existed in border states, pushed Mexico's government into developing, very early on, a specific type of consular assistance focused on the defence of the unjust treatment of its citizens north of the border, rather than promoting trade and business of their citizens abroad like other countries (Hernández Joseph, 2015, p. 50).

### ***B. The Large Size of the Mexican Community Living in the U.S.***

Around 11.5 million persons born in Mexico live in the United States (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2018), accounting for approximately 9 per cent of the country's total population. In addition, there are around 25.4 million people in the U.S. that consider themselves of Mexican origin (Noe-Bustamante, Flores, & Shah, 2019).

Even though many Mexicans in the United States have lived there since the late 1970s, from 1990 to 2009, 9.6 million Mexicans emigrated to the U.S. (Israel & Batalova, 2020). Mexicans accounted for 24 percent of the 45 million foreign-born persons living in the United States, making it the top country of origin (United States Census Bureau American Fact Finder 2015, cited in Cárdenas Suárez, 2019, p. 1081).

### ***C. The High Degree of Vulnerability of Mexicans in the United States.***

Half of the Mexicans residing north of the border, around 5.4 million, are undocumented; thus, "they are more vulnerable to being deported, suffer labour rights abuses, receive lower wages, and have worse health conditions" (Cárdenas Suárez, 2019, p. 1082).

Besides, even documented and naturalised Mexicans have significant vulnerabilities from their lack or reduced knowledge of the English language, are probably unbanked, and suffer from institutional discrimination (Israel & Batalova, 2020).

As most Mexican families are formed by members with different immigration statuses, from U.S. citizens to undocumented persons, and they do not segregate themselves into different categories, the vulnerability of the individuals extends to the rest of the family. It is one of the reasons why immigration enforcement operations have a high impact on the whole family (Hernández Joseph, 2012, p. 228-229).

Together with African American and Indigenous populations, Mexicans were the “other,” which helped define the dominant identity of the United States. Even today, after 170 years since Mexicans became the first Hispanic community in the U.S., they still struggle with integrating into mainstream society.

#### ***D. The Concentration of Most Mexican Migrants in Just One Country: The United States***

Another feature that differentiates Mexico from other high-emigration countries, such as China, India, and the Philippines, is that nearly 97.2 per cent of Mexicans abroad live in just one country: The United States (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2018). This fact also makes Mexican migrants different from the rest of the immigrants in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

Before the 1990s, the Mexican population clustered in the four border states (California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas), Illinois, and small pockets in other parts of the United States. The economic expansion of that decade in the U.S. and financial struggles in Mexico enabled Mexicans to move to every state, particularly in the South, Northeast, Northwest, and West (Batalova, 2008).

As the needs and demands of Mexicans north of the border changed and the ups and downs of the U.S. economy, so were the consular services offered by the most extensive network of consular offices in a host country, with 50 consulates.

#### **The Rise of Public-Consular Diplomacy in Mexico: Domestic Pressure and Foreign Policy Changes**

The convergence of domestic pressure to enhance consular assistance to the Mexican community in the United States and foreign policy changes produced a substantial shift in Mexico’s consular activities. This qualitative transformation resulted in the creation of robust public-consular diplomacy at the beginning of the new millennium (Márquez Lartigue, 2021c).

Daniel Hernández Joseph (2012) argues that the sheer size of the Mexican-origin population in the United States, combined with the fact that one in four Mexicans have a relative north of the border, shaped the government’s significant expansion of consular services.

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<sup>2</sup> Most immigrants to the U.S. usually plan to stay for the rest of their lives as they cannot go back to their home countries for several reasons, including fear of persecution and the cost of travel. In the case of Mexicans in the U.S., even with higher enforcement and costs of migrating, it is relatively easy to go back their home country.

At the same time, Alexandra Délano (2009) maintains that foreign policy changes permitted the development of a proactive and more engaging relationship with the Mexican diaspora. These transformations allowed the emergence of what could be described as public-consular diplomacy.

The experiences of negotiating and passing the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s and establishing collaboration mechanisms conferred Mexican authorities a greater understanding of the United States political system. This new knowledge and experience translated into a new interpretation of the “non-intervention” foreign policy principle and the end of delinking the different issues of the bilateral agenda (Délano, 2009, p. 765).

Particularly relevant was the awareness of the vast possibilities of collaborating with different actors, including local and state authorities and non-governmental organisations. The promotion of the Mexican Consular ID (*matrícula consular*) across the U.S. after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 by the consular network marked the emergence of Mexico’s public-consular diplomacy (Délano, 2009, p. 793-797, Márquez Lartigue, 2021a, 2021c & 2022).

These two trends, together with the greater political participation of Mexican migrants after the 1997 constitutional amendment that allowed dual citizenship (Bravo & De Moya, 2018), a surge of migration to the U.S. that now included women and children, enhanced immigration enforcement activities, were the perfect combination for the explosion of consular activities after 2000 (Torres Mendivil, 2014 & Navarro Bernachi, 2014).

Besides, the end of circular migration by mostly male Mexicans due to greater enforcement operations from the mid-1990s (Délano, 2009) substantially changed the demographics of the Mexican community north of the border. Divided families reunited in the U.S., which meant the arrival of a significant number of Mexican women and children (Rosenblum & Brick, 2011, p. 14).

This demographic shift resulted in the demand for new services, particularly social ones like health and education. Besides, Kunz (2008) explains that one consequence of the recognition of migrants as agents of development and the government’s diaspora courting strategy was their empowerment resulting in new demands. Consequently, the consular network developed new health, educational, community engagement, and financial literacy programs to respond to the unique demands of migrants, which included the specific needs of women and children (Durand, Massey, & Parrado, 1999, p. 525-527).

A milestone in the recognition of the importance of the migrant communities in the U.S. was the creation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (*Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior* -IME-) in 2003, which included for the first time for the government an advisory council (CCIME) (Délano, 2009, p. 791). The direct dialogue with the immigrant community, mainly through the CCIME, prompted innovative services beyond traditional consular offerings (Bada & Gleeson, 2015, p. 40-44).

The new perspective on migrants in Mexico also attracted the attention of other Mexican federal agencies, Congress, state and local authorities, and non-governmental organisations, thus expanding the availability of resources to provide innovative consular services north of the border (Hernández Joseph, 2012, p. 229).

The rising interest in consular assistance also meant even greater pressure for the Mexican consular network to deliver better consular services, so it embarked on a very ambitious modernisation process, using information and communication technologies, particularly in providing documentary services (SRE, 2019b, p. 24).

### **The Main Features of Mexico's Public-Consular Diplomacy.**

Mexico's public-consular diplomacy might share similar characteristics with other countries' consular efforts; however, the most significant difference is the breadth and size of Mexico's consular programs, which go well beyond the traditional consular services.

The main objective of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy is to protect the rights of the Mexican community in the United States and promote their empowerment and integration into the host country (Torres Mendivil, 2018, p. 116). This goal is broader than routine consular services; therefore, it requires more than regular consular interactions, thus the rise of public-consular diplomacy.

The NAFTA experience of co-operating with more than just the executive branch and institutionalising different collaborative bilateral mechanisms was the base for establishing partnerships across the U.S. (Délano, 2009, p. 773-777). Furthermore, since the 1990s, consular offices have been given the autonomy to develop partnerships with local ad hoc actors (González Gutiérrez, 1997, cited in González Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 191).

Besides, the extensive demand for services by the Mexican community pushed the government of Mexico to seek out partners to meet their needs. Therefore, the consular network engaged in an intensive public diplomacy effort to develop collaborative efforts with a wide array of organisations, authorities, even its own diaspora. These efforts are the foundation of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy (Torres Mendivil, 2018, p. 118-120). In addition, Mexico's consular diplomacy also promoted greater co-operation with Latin American embassies and consulates across the U.S. and even influenced the diaspora policies of other countries like Morocco (Delano, 2014).

One reason for the success of local collaborations was that "a sizable proportion of U.S. local authorities are sensitive to the need of finding pragmatic solutions to the demand generated by undocumented workers and their families" (González Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 189-190).

All these partnerships with local and state authorities and institutions have transcended the consular field and leapt into the world of bilateral diplomacy, thus the rise of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy. Torres Mendivil (2018) asserts that the "evolution of the

[Mexico-U.S.] bilateral relation and the influence of the Mexican community in the design and execution of its foreign policy has transcended the traditional distinction between consular and diplomatic work” (p. 113).

One of the characteristics that set apart the public-consular diplomacy of Mexico is that, in addition to traditional documentary services and consular assistance activities, it developed a third group of schemes, managed by the IME, which focuses on diaspora relations and offers social services such as health and education (Laglagaron, 2010; Délano, 2014; and Márquez Lartigue, 2022). Besides, it also created and expanded ambitious legal defence programs, including the promotion of labour rights (Márquez Lartigue, 2021b). Few countries besides Mexico provide these types of programs to their citizens abroad (Schiavon & Cárdenas Alaminos, 2014).

The core characteristics of the public-consular diplomacy of Mexico are partnerships, proximity, flexibility, federal issues at the consular level, and high-visibility consular cases.

**Partnerships.**

As mentioned above, the number of Mexicans living in the U.S. outstrips the human and financial resources of the consular network of Mexico. Therefore, out of necessity, there has been a push to establish and expand partnerships with all allies to provide services to them.

De Moya and Bravo (2021) deem that the diasporas’ “literature has shown that the Mexican state and diaspora have more experience and successes in building partnerships that benefit themselves and other diasporas” (p. 320). From churches hosting mobile consulates to national Hispanic, labour, and health organisations and authorities, and from alliances with the consulates of Central America to lawyers and educational institutions, the number of official partnerships is staggering. Only in the field of consular protection, there are 1,050 agreements and informal collaboration schemes, as seen in tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** Consular assistance agreements between the Mexican consular network with U.S organisations and authorities

Subject of the collaboration	Number of MOUs
Labour	312*
Legal Assistance ( <i>PALE</i> )	349**
Local Repatriation Arrangements	26***
Children’s Issues	37
TRICAMEX	15****
Total	739

Notes: \* Signed with different labour authorities from 2012 to 2018. \*\* Contract signed for the 2015-2018 program. \*\*\* Signed with DHS agencies’ regional offices. \*\*\*\* Consular co-operation scheme with Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala consulates, also known as TRICAMEX.

Sources: Labour, SRE, 2019b, p. 66; Legal assistance, SRE, 2018, p. 191; Local repatriation agreements, SRE, 2018, p. 192; Children’s issues, SRE, 2018, p. 195; and Tricamex; SRE, 2019b, p. 74.

**Table 2.** Consular assistance informal collaboration schemes between the Mexican consular network with U.S organisations and authorities

Subject of the collaboration	Number of informal co-operation schemes
Mexican Civil Rights Advisory Groups (one national and nine regional groupings)	58*
Domestic violence & human trafficking	104**
<i>Abogados Consultores</i> (Consultant Lawyers)	149***
Total	311

Notes: \* Around 13 civil rights organisations are members of the National Advisory Group, plus a minimum of five per each of the nine regional groups. \*\* Includes task forces, strategic alliances, and memoranda of understanding. \*\*\* Certificates of designation issued by the Undersecretary for North American Affairs.

Sources: Mexican Civil Rights Advisory Groups, SRE, 2019c, p. 137; Domestic violence and human trafficking, SRE, 2018, p. 197; Consultant Lawyers: SRE, 2019c, p. 136.

The Office of Consular Services and IME also have multiple arrangements and other types of official collaborations with different groups. The IME alone “has about 2,000 partners in Mexico and the USA” (Mendoza Sánchez & Cespedes Cantú, 2021).

The consular network’s partnerships are force multipliers. On the one hand, they provide services that otherwise might not be available. On the other hand, sometimes, these partner organizations become advocates of Mexico’s interests through the implementation of public diplomacy efforts (Gómez Zapata, 2021, p. 191). And the involvement of non-state actors in public diplomacy strategies can bring credibility to the endeavour, increasing its effectiveness.

Furthermore, Valenzuela-Moreno (2021) concludes that the provision of social services, such as health and education, by consulates can be considered a public diplomacy strategy (p. 45) and, because they are provided at the local level by consulates, can be described as public-consular diplomacy.

***Proximity***<sup>3</sup>

The restrictions of movement for most Mexicans due to different reasons, including irregular immigration status, lack of driver’s license, cost of travelling, or just a fear of going out, have encouraged the government of Mexico to open consulates where there is a high concentration of Mexicans. The result was the establishment of 50 consular offices across the U.S., which have changed location in some cases because of variations in population flows. For example, in 2009, Mexico inaugurated a consulate in Anchorage, Alaska, which closed in 2015, while opening a new one in Milwaukee in 2016 (Laveaga Rendón, 2018, p. 234-235).

The mobile consulate program now has four different variants: Mobile Consulate, Consulate on Wheels, Saturdays, Sundays, or Holidays opening hours, and Documentary services during the week outside the consular office (SRE, 2014). The objective is to bring

<sup>3</sup> The term *proximidad* (proximity) is mentioned by Cárdenas Suárez, 2019, p. 1084.

consular services to communities away from the host consular city. The consulates of Mexico in the U.S. issued 418,312 documents as part of the mobile consulate program from 1 December 2018 to 31 July 2019 (SRE, 2019c, p. 141).

González Gutiérrez (1999) highlights the role of the consulates as bridges between the Mexican community and local and state authorities in Mexico and between them and local and other institutions in the host society (p. 561). Therefore, the proximity is not just regional but transnational.

Besides physical proximity, there has also been a push to get closer to the Mexican community via telephone, with the establishment and enlargement of the Information and Assistance Center for Mexicans (*Centro de Información y Asistencia a Mexicanos -CIAM-*), a consular assistance-focus call centre, and via *MiConsulmex*, a consular services smartphone application.

For documentary services, the SRE established in 2006 the MEXITEL call centre that provides information about the requirements to obtain consular documents such as passports, consular I.D. cards, birth registration, voting cards, or powers of attorney. The centre also schedules appointments for documentary services in the nearest consulate (SRE, 2019a). From 2012 to 2018, the service scheduled 15.6 million appointments (SRE, 2019b, p. 92). In 2022, SRE restructured the program into *MiConsulado* (SRE, 2022).

Furthermore, the IME developed a comprehensive informative agenda that included the publication for many years of “*Lazos*”, an electronic newsletter sent to 12,000 subscribers, which provided a summary of news relating to immigration issues in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. (González Gutiérrez, 2006, p. 209). Nowadays, the Institute issues a monthly digital magazine “*Casa de México*” (IME, 2021).

In general terms, Mexico’s “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 [and] it has also included the Mexican diaspora as one of its priority publics in its public diplomatic initiatives” (Bravo & De Moya, 2018, p. 187).

### ***Flexibility to Adapt to Local and State Circumstances***

The SRE recognises that the implementation of its policies will vary according to the local and state contexts. There is a big difference between states like California and Texas and urban areas and rural districts (González Gutiérrez, 2018). Therefore, consulates have the flexibility to execute policies according to their specific circumstances. It is very different working in a border city in a rural area, such as Douglas, Arizona, or Presidio, Texas, to have a consular office in Chicago, Illinois, or Los Angeles, California. Martínez-Schuldt (2020) has demonstrated that the local context affects the provision of consular protection services by the Mexican consular network.

This flexibility has also allowed experimentation of different approaches that later developed into nationwide programs or even global ones. For example, one of the top consular schemes, the Health Window (*Ventanilla de Salud*), began in California in 2003 (Rangel Gomez *et al.*, 2017). Later it was expanded to all consulates and, in 2017, received the “Inter-American Award on Innovation for Effective Public Policy” of the Organization of American States (OEA, 2017).

### ***Federal Issues at the Consular Level***

One dimension of public-consular diplomacy “involves the negotiation of preventive, practical arrangements of consular assistance between states” (Okano-Heijmans, 2011, p. 40). Considering the size of the United States and the significant autonomy of its authorities, it is necessary to involve the consulates as part of Mexico’s diplomatic effort in that country.

The Mexican consular network in the U.S. regularly initiates, implements, and even negotiates agreements on federal issues at the consular level. Three examples are:

- The establishment of a **consular coordination scheme** in the U.S. between Mexico and Central America Northern Triangle’s countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), called TRICAMEX. It began in McAllen, Texas, in December 2015 and later evolved into fourteen additional schemes (Schiavon & Ordorica, 2018).
- **Local Repatriation Arrangements.** The 26 agreements were renewed in 2016-2017 by all the consulates of Mexico with the regional offices of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agencies. The arrangements include follow-up meetings at the local and regional levels to review their implementation and solve specific challenges locally (SRE, 2018, p. 192).
- **Labour collaboration.** In the early 2000s, there was an impulse for greater co-operation on labour issues. Therefore, in 2004 the SRE and the U.S. Department of Labour signed a joint declaration that opened the door for joining forces with the local and regional offices of the Wage and Hour Division and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Bada & Gleeson, 2015, p. 34). These agreements allowed the consulates to further collaborate with workforce state agencies and other organisations and unions that supported Mexican workers, particularly in the framework of the Labour Rights Week that started in 2009 and since its creation until 2021 it reached 1.7 million people (Márquez Lartigue, 2021b).

### ***High-Visibility Consular Cases***

High-visibility consular cases of distressed citizens abroad “transforms common consular assistance into consular diplomacy” (Okano-Heijmans, 2011, p. 40). In the instance of Mexicans north of the border, due to the nature of the Mexico-U.S. relation, only certain cases

become part of the bilateral agenda. Besides, both governments have established mechanisms to reduce the tensions that arise from these instances.

Even though there are thousands of consular assistance cases every year, one or two always bring the attention of the media, politicians, and high-ranking officers at SRE. Some result from possible abuses by U.S. authorities, and others are due to terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and other unfortunate situations.

In many countries, high-visibility cases tend to become political, thus generating tensions that can affect bilateral relations. In Mexico's case, Cárdenas Suárez (2019) indicates that "due to its technical nature, the [Mexican] consular policy partially maintains its isolation from strictly political decisions and in those tend to dominate specialised criteria" (p. 1080). Therefore, they are mostly solved without affecting the overall relationship.

However, some cases have an impact on the bilateral relationship. One example was the cancellation of a visit to the U.S. by then-President Vicente Fox in 2002 in protest of the execution of a Mexican sentenced to the death penalty in Texas (BBC News, 2002).

To reduce the possibility of affecting the bilateral relation, the Embassy of Mexico in Washington has an informal consultation mechanism with the Department of Justice to discuss possible abuses by U.S. authorities (Hernández Joseph, 2012, p. 233).

In addition, in 2014, both governments established the Border Violence Prevention Council (BVPC), that "promotes initiatives aimed at preventing incidents of border violence through collaborative efforts, joint public engagement campaigns, increased transparency and information exchange, and the sharing of best practices" (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores and the Department of Homeland Security, 2018).

Both processes have helped reduce the tension of high-visibility consular cases that involve possible abuses by U.S. law enforcement agencies, including DHS officials at the border. It is a significant achievement of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy.

## **Turning into Public-Consular Diplomacy**

It is evident from the five characteristics of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy that the public diplomacy aspect is intrinsically a part of the consulate's diplomatic efforts. As described above, the core of its consular efforts in the U.S. has been building enduring relationships. The current public diplomacy perspective goes beyond strategic communication to include a central objective of establishing long-lasting trustful alliances "with civil society actors in other countries and about facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad" (Melissen, 2005, p. 22).

While describing the new public diplomacy, Melissen (2005) also showcases the relevance of consular relations, as "is probably no area of diplomatic work that has more potential to affect the foreign ministry's reputation at home" (p. 23-24).

In addition, the government of Mexico included listening and advocacy, central elements of public diplomacy (Cull, 2019), into its consular strategy. For example, the creation of the CCIME was an essential element in engaging with the Mexican community in the U.S. Moreover, the SRE made significant investments to be close to its community by building the largest network of consular offices worldwide, implementing the mobile consulate program and its extensive information and communication offerings. The flexibility of its consular policies also showcases the listening aspect of its public-consular diplomacy, thus adapting its policies according to the local context.

Mexico also found a successful solution to depoliticize high-level consular cases by establishing bilateral mechanisms such as the BVPC. This could not happen without incorporating a successful public diplomacy element resulting from the support of U.S organizations. It has been a remarkable achievement considering the number of consular cases that occur daily in the United States.

The co-operation with consular offices of other countries in the U.S., such as the TRICAMEX consular scheme, and participation in consular multinational fora, such as the Regional Conference on Migration and the Global Consular Forum, showcases the dichotomy of the country's public-consular diplomacy. Collaborating with other countries on consular affairs is a defining characteristic of consular diplomacy (Birka, Klavinš & Kits, 2022) and requires public diplomacy techniques centered around consular officials.

Besides, Mexico's experience confirms the idea that "the degree of [consular] care provided for citizens abroad is thus tied not only to political system, but also to state capacity, the perceived necessity for domestic legitimacy and the responsiveness of foreign host governments." (Leira & Græger, 2020, p. 4). The availability and willingness of many local and state authorities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations in the U.S. was vital for the rise of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy and also the development of programs that went beyond traditional boundaries of consular assistance.

## **Conclusions**

The concept of public-consular diplomacy is in its very early stages of development; thus, the experience of Mexico can contribute to a better understanding of this form of diplomacy. For 170 years, the country's consular services in the U.S. have evolved, offering programs beyond traditional boundaries, turning into a very active public-consular diplomacy.

Mexico's unique consular efforts in the United States resulted from having a large and highly concentrated community that is especially vulnerable. In the 2000s, the sheer size of the Mexican migrant population in the United States pushed the consular network to engage proactively in diplomatic strategies, including reaching out to foreign audiences and establishing partnerships, which resulted in the rise of Mexico's public-consular diplomacy. Identifying the five main features of these efforts (partnerships, proximity, flexibility, federal issues at the consular level, and high-visibility consular cases) helps to better understand these public

diplomacy efforts at the consular level.

One of the key elements for Mexico is its proven capacity to establish strategic alliances with local and state authorities, as well as civil society organizations, with the goal of expanding the consular services it provides to the Mexican community in the U.S. This is a crucial feature of today's public diplomacy, which in Mexico's case is performed at the local level by consular offices, rather than embassies or directly from the ministries of foreign affairs.

Studying the public-consular diplomacy of a Global South country, such as Mexico, can bring light to alternative experiences of Western countries. It could also lead to further comparative research studies with other high-emigration countries, such as India, China, and the Philippines.

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## ■ Rodrigo Márquez Lartigue

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