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CONVOCATION



3.0

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The opinions expressed in this publication are representative of the discussions that took place between the former ambassadors during Convocation 3.0. They do not reflect the opinions or views of the U.S.-Mexico Foundation, the Mexico Institute, individual ambassadors, or other special guests.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Convocation, a collaborative effort led by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Center's Mexico Institute, convened for its third iteration, reinforcing the significance of enhancing the North American region. Former Ambassadors from diverse backgrounds, encompassing the U.S. to Mexico, Mexico to the U.S. and Canada, and Canada to the U.S. and Mexico, united in a transformative three-day retreat. Amidst the dynamic currents of an evolving global landscape, the Ambassadors delved into five pivotal themes: economy, security, migration, soft power, and agriculture.

Commencing in Palo Alto and Año Nuevo, California, Convocation 3.0 epitomized the commitment to comprehensive discussions. Engagements with technological companies HP and Oracle emphasized the critical role of technology in the trilateral relationship and its impact on economic ties, workforce development, and broader cooperation. Subsequent sessions in Año Nuevo fostered profound dialogues on the economic landscape, security challenges, migration dynamics, cultural diplomacy's potential, and the foundational role of agriculture.

Within this framework, a series of interconnected insights and recommendations emerged. The Ambassadors recognized the strategic value of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) for advancing integration in a shifting global scenario. Discussions on Security and the Rule of Law highlighted the importance of upholding human rights and countering mutual threats. Migration and Labor Mobility deliberations advocated for a strategic recalibration that prioritizes authorized crossings, fortified asylum procedures, and collaborative migration centers. The potential of Soft Power in promoting cultural narratives and shared values resonated as a transformative tool for influence. Meanwhile, the conversation on Agriculture focused on developing climate-resilient practices, trade policies, and sustainable approaches to nourish the region's population.

These dialogues are a compelling call to action to further unify and strengthen the future of North America. Convocation, an enduring testament to collaboration, diplomacy, and understanding, underscores the unwavering commitment of former Ambassadors toward a resilient, prosperous, and harmonious North America.

ABOUT CONVOCATION

Convocation is a program led by the U.S. Mexico Foundation and the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center that brings together more than a dozen former North American Ambassadors to discuss key elements of the bilateral relationship's present and future.

Over the course of several days, Ambassadors discuss vital topics, including strategic alignment of North American economies, workforce development, public security, and soft power, hoping that the ideas raised will strengthen the relationship between our countries.

In January 2020, a distinguished assembly of twelve former Ambassadors met in San Antonio, Texas, marking the inaugural Convocation 1.0. This gathering served as a forum for a comprehensive dialogue, exploring the multifaceted dimensions of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. The discussions spanned a variety of themes, including economics and trade, migration, security, and soft power. The insights from these deliberations culminated in a seminal publication titled "Convocation: A Vision for a Stronger U.S.-Mexico Partnership." This document, a repository of critical takeaways, was disseminated among bilateral stakeholders, resonating with cabinet-level officials on both sides of the border.

In December 2021, this group reconvened once more in Tequila, Jalisco. The leaders engaged in three days of rigorous working sessions, collectively enhancing the bilateral relationship. Convocation 2.0 saw a dynamic exploration of opportunities, focusing on strategic alignment within North American economies, workforce development, labor mobility, public security, and soft power. In a concerted effort to broaden the dialogue's scope, we welcomed the perspectives of ten distinguished business leaders and two academic representatives from both nations on the second day of the retreat. Their invaluable insights further enriched the discourse, illuminating the region's main challenges.

During these deliberations, it became evident that ongoing challenges, exemplified by the ever-evolving COVID-19 pandemic, magnified pre-existing issues. Notably, Ambassador Kenneth Salazar, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, and Esteban Moctezuma, the Mexican Ambassador to the U.S., joined during the closing sessions of Convocation 2.0.

Convocation 3.0 took place in April 2023; three days of collaboration yielded recommendations rooted in the wisdom of past experiences and present realities. Given the importance of North American regional cooperation, Convocation 3.0 invited special guests representing the relationship of both countries with Canada. While the bilateral and trilateral relationship encompasses a variety of topics, stakeholders, and institutions, the Ambassadors offer the following recommendations as a pragmatic blueprint. This collection of actionable strategies seeks to fortify ongoing endeavors and pave the way for future cooperation, harnessing the immense potential of North American integration.

Previous reports:

- [Convocation 1.0 \(2019\)](#)
- [Convocation 2.0 \(2021\)](#)
- [Convocation's Panel at the North Capital Forum 2022](#)



U.S.-MEXICO FOUNDATION

The U.S. Mexico Foundation (USMF) is a binational non-profit organization dedicated to fostering cooperation and bilateral understanding between the United States and Mexico. Rooted in the North America Free Trade Agreement and launched in 2009 with seed funds from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and the Business Foundation in Mexico (Fundemex), the USMF is governed by a bi-national board of business and civic leaders with extensive networks in the U.S. and Mexico.

The USMF started a new chapter with a compelling agenda focused on policy and advocacy, creating new strategic alliances, educating important stakeholders and providing a voice on the most relevant issues pertaining the U.S.-Mexico relationship.



MEXICO INSTITUTE

Chartered by Congress in 1968, The Wilson Center is the nation's key non-partisan policy forum. The Wilson Center tackles global issues through independent research and open dialogue to inform actionable ideas for the policy community. The Wilson Center's Mexico Institute seeks to improve understanding, communication, and cooperation between Mexico and the United States by promoting original research, encouraging public discussion, and proposing policy options for enhancing the bilateral relationship.



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INTRODUCTION

In its third iteration, Convocation has created an opportunity for former Ambassadors to reinforce the importance of strengthening the North American region. Convocation, a collaborative initiative by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation and the Wilson Center's Mexico Institute, gathered former Ambassadors of the U.S. to Mexico, Mexico to the U.S., Canadian Ambassadors to the U.S. and Mexico, and Mexico to Canada. During a three-day retreat, the Ambassadors shared a common objective: to explore and contribute to shaping the present and future of the trilateral relationship. These seasoned diplomats delved into pivotal themes, forging a path toward greater understanding, cooperation, and progress.

Convocation 3.0 took place in Palo Alto and Año Nuevo, California. Given the importance of technological advances in the trilateral relationship, the Ambassadors visited the HP and Oracle Headquarters in Palo Alto, where they met with company representatives to understand the activities and opportunities in an evolving global scenario. After these sessions, the Ambassadors traveled to Año Nuevo, where they engaged in discussions on the Economy, Security and Rule of Law, Migration and Labor Mobility, Soft Power and Culture, and Agriculture. During these sessions, they were joined by experts in the subjects as well as industry professionals from AWS, Prodensa, IBC Bank, Driscoll's, Reiter Affiliates, Lipman Family Farms, and others.

In an era of unprecedented interconnectedness and shared challenges, trilateral cooperation between Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. is crucial in shaping North America's resilient and harmonious future. Fostering a robust and cooperative partnership among these neighbors, bound by geographic proximity, and deeply intertwined economic, social, and cultural ties, extends far beyond diplomatic formalities—it touches upon core issues that can potentially shape the destiny of millions of people.

A sound economic relationship between the three partners is critical, especially concerning the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). This agreement reaffirms the countries' commitment to advance regional integration and global trends, notably the emergence of nearshoring. The lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and escalating U.S.-China disputes present Mexico with the unique opportunity to reap the benefits of shifting global supply chains. The focus on nearshoring propelled numerous companies to relocate their operations to Mexico, strategically positioning themselves closer to their final markets. This scenario presents an opportunity to harmonize strategies in trade, investment, and sustainable growth strategies.



To achieve a thriving economic relationship, it will be necessary to continue strengthening Security and the Rule of Law across the region. Anchored in a shared commitment to upholding human rights and countering mutual threats, such as proliferating cyber threats and the diversification of organized crime groups who are empowered by synthetic opioids, particularly fentanyl, the Ambassadors advocate strongly for robust mechanisms for intelligence sharing and crisis management. Bilateral cooperation currently falls short of the need, while soaring fentanyl trafficking demands more, better, and decisive action by both governments to reduce supply and demand for this and other deadly drugs. Migration and Labor Mobility constitute defining facets of the trilateral agenda. As North America's share production and value chains are reshaping labor dynamics, Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. are also grappling with navigating regional migratory pressure while upholding the dignity of individuals and exploring how to better strengthen and integrate their labor forces. The ambassadors conclude that mounting evidence underscores the need for more authorized and regularized worker crossings, significant reformed asylum procedures, and the creation of collaborative centers along migration routes throughout the broader region. Improved security measures, alternative migration pathways, and humane and dignified treatment of migrants are all needed as soon as possible.

The expression of national (or regional) culture in diplomacy can often lead to enhanced Soft Power. In politics (and particularly in international politics), soft power is the ability to co-opt rather than coerce (in contrast with hard power), it involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. When used appropriately, cultural narratives and shared values can influence the three nations' populations and global perceptions of the region. Soft Power has already been transforming how Mexicans and Americans see each other and can be used more purposefully as a transformative tool in the years ahead, improving understanding among policymakers, key stakeholders, and citizens. The United States, Canada, and Mexico must increasingly use their public diplomacy programs to emphasize the importance of cross-border partnerships, mutual comprehension, and diverse voices in order to foster a North American identity that complements each country's national identity so that the value of trilateral cooperation and partnership can be more widely appreciated.

The Ambassadors agreed fully on the importance of deepening trade and commerce across the continent with the enforcement of USMCA and developing the competitiveness agenda through the North American Leaders Summit process. Cooperation to further develop key technologies such as electric vehicles, semiconductors, critical minerals, and renewable energy must be vital work themes in near-shoring and supply chain resilience. The Ambassadors highlighted that agriculture is essential to North American prosperity through sustaining a resilient food supply. The focal points of the discussion centered on developing



climate-resilient practices, liberal trade policies, and sustainable approaches pivotal in safeguarding food security. The three countries must also improve labor mobility, support small-scale farmers, reduce waste, and expand access to nutritious food, echoing the commitment to building a nourished and sustainable North America.

In conclusion, the Ambassadors stressed that the year ahead will bring presidential and legislative elections in both countries, and those political contests will generate pressure on managing U.S.-Mexico relations. It is already evident that certain actors on each side of the border will doubtlessly seek to achieve political gain by criticizing the practices and policies of the neighboring country or offering policies that could harm the neighbor. Missteps related to sensitive issues like migration and cross-border crimes will likely set off additional criticisms and spark tensions. This situation demands careful attention and management by those overseeing bilateral ties. It will also require regular advice and support from those who know the immense value of good U.S.-Mexico ties to help keep the relationship on track and avoid lasting damage.

As the bilateral and trilateral agendas evolve, the challenge will be how to best address various critical topics shaping the relationship. Guided by the Convocation program, the Ambassadors addressed these five themes with a clear understanding of their significance. They recognized the importance of continued investment in enhancing dialogue and taking effective action. These recommendations now stand as a compelling call to act, guiding the way toward a unified, strengthened North American path.

The following sections provide an account of the individual sessions and were drafted by the moderators whose guidance of the discussions ensured that all voices were heard, and all critical issues discussed.



ECONOMY AND TRADE

Moderator: Sean Randolph, Bay Area Council Economic Institute

The current economic landscape showcases numerous opportunities for North America. The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges, but the region seems to be recuperating and returning even stronger. This conversation explored the prospects for near-shoring in Mexico, the impact of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the ongoing challenges that need to be addressed for sustained economic growth, and recommendations for the region.

Near-shoring in Mexico seems to be a prominent opportunity for economic development as companies from different countries strive to move their operations and supply chains closer to their end consumers in the U.S. Nonetheless, the current administration in Mexico has not fully capitalized on this phenomenon and in some cases has pursued domestic policies that would run contrary to the announced objective of leveraging the near-shoring trend. The lack of incentives for foreign direct investment (FDI) or near-shoring has led companies to decide not to invest in Mexico, which makes it difficult to quantify the extent of the impact.

During the session, participants estimated that up to half of the companies and industries considering moving their operations internationally are choosing to relocate to Mexico due to various factors, such as the proximity of their supply chains to the end market in the U.S. and competitive labor costs. However, issues such as lack of energy providers, restrictive mining laws, limited availability of infrastructure in the right places, crime, and lack of a skilled labor force are significant impediments to attracting investment. Companies need reliable, clean, and affordable energy, and while Mexico may achieve this eventually, it is missing opportunities to attract new investment. Another critical factor in attracting investment is the demonstration that the rule of law will be applied to provide certainty to investors. In addition, improving the security environment is critical to attracting investment in Mexico.

USMCA

One significant observation is that the U.S. is Mexico's largest competitor, export market, and co-production partner. Trade with the U.S. accounts for 80% of Mexican Exports and 39% of its GDP. This situation is due to the economic integration wrought by NAFTA and now fostered by USMCA. These trade agreements created the conditions conducive to establishing integrated supply chains between the two countries, capitalizing on their shared border spanning 1,954 miles.

Under USMCA, trade between the U.S. and Mexico has risen rapidly. It now totals over 1.5 million USD a minute, giving Mexico a sizable trade surplus with the U.S. and making Mexico the U.S.'s #1 trading partner as of mid-2023. It is worth noting that Mexico is just ahead of Canada, and both have a significant lead over China, which is in third place.

However, an intriguing paradox poses significant policy challenges for both countries. The USMCA dispute settlement panel decision against the U.S. on vehicle rules of origin could undermine the Biden Administration's priority of increasing auto and auto parts production in the country, depending on how the decision is implemented. Similarly, the U.S. and Canadian complaints about Mexico's energy and related investment policies favoring state-owned companies and its proposals to limit biotech agriculture imports (specifically genetically modified corn) run directly into policies championed by Mexican President Lopez Obrador. They also appear to violate parts of USMCA and threaten U.S. and Canadian trade and investments.

At this writing, if or how these three disputes will be resolved and the impact that might have on the assessment of USMCA's effectiveness remains uncertain. Both the U.S. and Mexico have presidential elections in 2024, and the USMCA will be reviewed, per the terms of the agreement, in 2026, leaving observers to speculate whether the governments will seek to address the three contentious issues before the elections or wait to deal with them.

In addition to biotech, energy, and vehicle rule of origin disputes, labor remains a sensitive issue. U.S. government agencies must report to Congress on the speed of Mexico's implementation of reformed labor laws to encourage labor democracy, and whether these reports will be favorable is unclear since several interim assessments indicate that implementation is going slowly. And, while the U.S. and Mexico have generally worked well together in solving individual labor democracy problems raised by the U.S., Mexico has signaled increased sensitivity, rejecting at least one U.S. request, and the U.S. has asked for the first-ever dispute settlement

panel under the labor rapid response mechanism after Mexico rejected its complaint.

Additionally, The United States has drawn attention to Mexico's failure to protect endangered species, like the vaquita marina, as required under the environmental chapter of the USMCA. The rare animals remain in great danger, and Mexico's efforts have not been enough to avoid possible sanctions from the U.S.

The Ambassadors agreed that NAFTA and now USMCA have transformed North America's bilateral and trilateral relationships and generated immense economic benefit for all three countries and societies. They agreed on the importance of working hard to implement USMCA well and maximizing the positive economic benefits over the years ahead. But they also recognized that USMCA disputes also carry political implications and consequences. Several noted, for example, the private companies affected by some of the measures implemented by the current Mexican administration in the energy sector, which are considering initiating a dispute resolution process but are also deterred by the fear of retaliation. Also, there is a concern that if a panel rules against the Mexican government, and it refuses to pay imposed damages or change policies, this could taint the atmosphere for the 2026 review of USMCA's performance and the attitudes in the U.S. Congress toward the agreement. This is particularly relevant for representatives of states that produce GMO agricultural goods currently sold to Mexico that could be banned under proposed Mexican policies.

As mentioned above, the Ambassadors discussed the great opportunity Mexico has at present to attract near-shoring. While the Ambassadors agreed that many companies already established in Mexico will doubtless take advantage of the near-shoring trend, they expressed concern that others could be deterred by the current policies and practices in Mexico, which are not addressing the needs and concerns of companies looking to start investing in the country. The ambassadors agreed that it is essential to understand that short-term decisions will shape long-term opportunities. They expressed hope that future administrations will take measures to address any conflicts arising from the current administration's policies, which include a lack of adherence to the rule of law.

As stated before, in 2026, there will be a revision of the functioning of the USMCA. This review offers an opportunity to enhance the agreement, possibly by incorporating improved provisions for compensating private entities affected by government policy decisions, such as those in the Mexican mining sector.

The political situation around the review, consultations, and implementation process will involve challenges. Some Mexican participants expressed worry that if the U.S. does not fully implement the panel finding on vehicle rules of origin, it



could negatively affect investment in Mexico from Europe and Japan. The ambassadors also speculated about reports that the U.S. is delaying acting on Mexico's energy investment policies because they do not want to endanger cooperation with Mexico in better-managing migration. This calculation may change after the US and Mexican elections. In this connection, the Ambassadors agree that going forward, it will be essential to consider what is happening in the U.S. Congress, as well as the impact on both Republican and Democratic parties and companies in the U.S. that are being affected by the actions of the Mexican government.

Border Trade Technology and Security

The Ambassadors agreed that it is imperative to support and track advances in collaboration to improve the use of technology at and around the border. In specific ports of entry, scanners are being installed to track drugs and migration patterns. Doing it at all key crossings on both sides of the border could make a significant difference in catching drugs and guns as well as in speed traffic flows, especially with improved trusted shipper programs, the ambassadors agreed. To boost competitiveness, gathering economic and political resources to strengthen border security and infrastructure is crucial. This includes upgrading technology and design to accommodate a higher volume of vehicles. Nonetheless, one issue that has complicated cooperation is the -organizational shifts of the current Mexican administration, which recently transferred responsibility for customs and port management to the military. This has made implementing specific policies challenging, especially as the military are not experienced or trained in customs and border management.

The decision to make ports of entry more efficient and secure is vital to the region's economic development. This significant trade relationship has implications for drug trafficking, as drugs are smuggled across the border by concealing them within other trade products. Deploying enhanced scanning equipment for trucks, buses, and cars will significantly help with drug detection. While possibly upgrading preclearance processes, which allows customs inspections before crossing the border, can be of great benefit, the ability to undertake an improvement is currently less confident due to military control over customs in Mexico. Digital preclearance remains a potential breakthrough option that should be pursued. Both countries should also move ahead smartly with joint investments in border inspection and technology improvements. Mexico must follow through on its commitments to enhancing investment in its non-intrusive inspection equipment. This would greatly help deal with arms currently smuggled from the U.S. to Mexico.

China

Given the U.S.'s distancing from China, Mexico and Canada's relationship with that country is an important issue to consider. U.S. policy has created challenges for Mexico's relationship with China and impeded certain economic transactions and investments, especially in the border region. For example, U.S. red flags increased when Mexico considered buying Chinese scanners to deploy at the U.S. border. Several Mexican participants pointed out that Mexico's relationship with China has become an issue for Mexico because of the lack of "red lines" regarding specific types of investments by Chinese companies and entities in Mexico that would be viewed as inimical to U.S. interests. Clarity is needed, including concerning technological advances potentially impacting national security, for example, cargo screening or 5G. One example of applied limitations is in internet connectivity, with Huawei being allowed to operate only in the southern states of Mexico and not in the northern region closer to the U.S. Mexico and the U.S. should conduct a severe policy dialogue to hammer our mutual understandings in this area.

Many group participants agreed that Mexico cannot entirely give up its relationship with China. However, if Mexican production replaces some Chinese exports to the U.S., it could mean an additional 2-4% of GDP for Mexico. However, the Ambassadors agreed that Mexico has no serious strategy or policies to incentivize near-shoring or attract FDI to Mexico. That job has been left largely to state governors. National policies to encourage and support near-shoring investment and investing in the energy, transportation, and water infrastructure needed to support new investment are essential for Mexico going forward.

In addition, the ambassadors fully agreed that Mexico and all three USMCA countries need to focus on investing in their workforces if they are to take full advantage of the impulse to nearshore and reshore investment from Asia to North America. It is crucial to prioritize investment in workforce development within the North American region, especially as investment moves into newer industries using evolving technologies and skills. This effort should include targeted reskilling and upskilling programs, focusing not only on traditional industries like automotive and computer components but also expanding to emerging sectors such as semiconductors. Fortunately, workforce development is built into USMCA, the High-Level Economic Dialogue, and the North American Leaders Agenda. However, there is little evidence that Mexico is investing significantly in these efforts.

Semiconductors

Finally, the discussion included semiconductors and Mexico's role in the industry. The U.S. government has designated \$500 million USD for global semiconductor projects over five years through the International Technology Security and Innovation Fund (ITSI Fund). Up to \$100 million, USD per year may be spent to secure critical mineral supplies, policy coordination for industry incentives and avoiding supply chain disruptions, expanding international semiconductor assembly, testing, and packaging capabilities, and addressing national security-related risks involved with advanced semiconductors. The U.S. Secretary of State and Secretary of Commerce flagged the opportunities for Mexico at the last meeting of the U.S.-Mexico High-Level Dialogue, and semi-conductor cooperation was included in the previous North American Leaders Summit. Ministers from Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. met in May to agree on a coordinating committee addressing semiconductor development across the continent. Mexico has not expressed any focused effort to collaborate or to attract investment. Several participants recommended that Mexico offer incentives to attract investment and express interest in working with the U.S. in this effort.

Ambassadors agreed, however, that the U.S. is unlikely to provide financial incentives for companies to move to Mexico through the CHIPS Act. While two semiconductor companies in Guadalajara, Jalisco, and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, have expanded their operations, these companies already had investments in Mexico. A participant noted that the Ministry of Economy sent a team to Taiwan to analyze chip package production. The current Mexican administration has been interested in locating semiconductor companies in the Istmos Region in Mexico (Oaxaca and Veracruz). Still, there are currently no incentives available for potential investors to do so.

In conclusion, all agreed that the North American region holds significant economic opportunities, with near-shoring in Mexico emerging as a promising trend. However, challenges remain for Mexico, including incentivizing foreign direct investment (FDI) and addressing critical issues such as energy availability, infrastructure gaps, and the rule of law. Additionally, the ability to demonstrate strong enforcement of USMCA and the evolving relationship with China adds complications.

To unlock the region's potential, it is crucial to focus on attracting investment, enhancing trade efficiency, and strengthening border security. This can be achieved through collaboration, strategic reforms, and proactive measures in

1. Department of State Allocating \$100 Million in FY 2023 for CHIPS Act Projects. <https://www.state.gov/department-of-state-allocating-100-million-in-fy-2023-for-chips-act-projects/>

workforce development, technology implementation, and regulations. By capitalizing on opportunities, mitigating challenges, and fostering balanced relationships, North America can drive economic growth and resilience in the years to come.

Recommendations

Based on this wide-ranging discussion, the ambassadors recommend the following:

- 1. Invest in workforce development in the region:** It is crucial to prioritize investment in workforce development within the North American area. This should include targeted reskilling and upskilling programs, focusing not only on traditional industries like automotive and computer components but also expanding to emerging sectors such as semiconductors. By equipping the workforce with relevant skills, North America can remain competitive globally.
- 2. Establish a federal strategy in Mexico to attract FDI and improve salaries:** While states and cities play a significant role, enhanced national coordination is necessary to seize near-shoring opportunities effectively. North America can create a more attractive investment climate, enhance global competitiveness, and increase the prosperity of its workforce.
- 3. Produce a scorecard to measure the success of USMCA, including labor mobility, services and tourism, education and training, and labor supply:** By regularly assessing these key indicators, North America can track progress and identify areas for improvement.
- 4. Improve labor mobility regulations:** Addressing labor mobility regulations is crucial to address the shortage of workers in the U.S. manufacturing sector. The U.S. will continue to face a growing labor shortage as demographic changes occur. Mexico's abundant labor force can play a vital role in supplying skilled workers. Streamlining and improving labor mobility regulations will facilitate the seamless movement of workers across borders, benefiting both countries.
- 5. Improve technology and infrastructure at entry points to increase trade:** Upgrading border infrastructure and implementing advanced technologies will expedite the movement of goods and services, reducing trade barriers and increasing efficiency. By investing in modernized and efficient entry points, North America can foster increased trade and economic growth.

SECURITY AND RULE OF LAW

Moderator: Richard Downie, Pacific Council on International Policy

Solving the challenge of U.S.-Mexico security cooperation is more important now than even a decade ago, considering the ever-expanding significance of the North American economic partnership and the rapid expansion of trafficking of synthetic opioids. The adverse effects of insecurity on citizens and businesses grow as integration increases and longstanding problems evolve. The growth of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) beyond illegal drug production and trafficking and new threats like potent and relatively easy-to-conceal fentanyl underlines the need for both countries to implement joint public security strategies, sometimes involving their North American partner, Canada.

Introducing the Bicentennial Framework in 2021 represents a crucial step forward after a period of stagnating cooperation. Nevertheless, transforming intentions into real-world programs and actions remains a work in progress. Despite the framework's high-minded goals, binational security cooperation and law enforcement collaboration to reduce deadly drug flows has not significantly improved since its launch. In fact, fentanyl seizures at the U.S.-Mexico border have continued to rise. Both countries have highlighted actions aligned with the goals of the Bicentennial Framework to protect people, prevent transborder crime, and pursue criminal networks. However, while homicides in Mexico have decreased slightly each year since 2019, they remain above levels recorded during the previous high point in 2011 and 2012, and U.S. drug overdose deaths remain at a historic high fueled by synthetic opioids.

Recent high-profile public security incidents demonstrate that challenges remain, yet also point to progress and further opportunities for cooperation. The March 2023 kidnapping of four Americans in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and the subsequent murder of two of the four individuals provided visceral evidence of the persistently high levels of violence at the U.S.-Mexico border. This incident is a powerful testament to the impact of focused cooperation and attention on a single case, showcasing how the gears of justice can be set into motion in ways that may seem unrealistic for most Mexican crime victims. Remarkably, not only were two of the four American victims successfully recovered alive, but the Gulf Cartel also handed over five individuals suspected to be the perpetrators to the authorities. In the U.S., investigators traced a firearm linked to the crime to a straw

purchaser in South Texas, who pleaded guilty to aiding the smuggling of the weapon to Mexico. Increasing this kind of investigation, binational coordination, and security cooperation is necessary to create a new standard of justice for crime victims.

The worsening fallout from the fentanyl crisis also indicates the urgent need for a common understanding of North American nations' shared security challenges. In the U.S., drug overdose deaths increased by more than 50% between 2019 and 2021, killing almost 107,000 people in 2021. According to the CDC, Synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, were responsible for two out of three overdose deaths in the U.S. in 2021. Moreover, fentanyl is involved in more deaths for individuals under 50 than any other cause. Despite the Mexican president's claims that fentanyl is not a Mexican problem, there is evidence that consumption and overdose deaths are also increasing in Mexico— though limited reporting infrastructure makes it challenging to paint the accurate picture of fentanyl use in the country. In our conversations at Convocation 3.0, the gathered Ambassadors were clear: fentanyl is a shared problem that must be tackled by both Mexico and the U.S.

Going forward, U.S.-Mexico security cooperation must build on past successes and avoid mistakes. Vaunted achievements, such as Mexico's arrest of Ovidio Guzman Lopez, one of El Chapo's sons, and the U.S. indictments of him and his three brothers ('los Chapitos'), are celebrated as significant steps but are uncomfortably reminiscent of the failed strategies of previous decades. Meanwhile, the Bicentennial Framework and the High-Level Security Dialogue have reinvigorated security policy discussions between the U.S. and Mexico, with both countries exchanging delegations for further discussions. Such exchanges are necessary to ensure that security cooperation policies and efforts evolve at pace with, or ideally ahead of, the changing tactics employed by TCOs to control migration routes and conduct human smuggling operations.

Shared challenges also offer opportunities. For example, Mexico and the U.S. can enhance security cooperation through dialogues addressing issues like cybersecurity and protecting critical infrastructure. Such topics grow in importance as our economies increase their interconnectedness. Significant upcoming events, including national elections in both countries in 2024, the North American 2026 World Cup, and the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, highlight the potential for increased cooperation.



Recommendations:

Based on this wide-ranging discussion, the ambassadors recommend the following:

1. Develop a Common Assessment to define shared challenges and construct common solutions, starting with fentanyl

While there is recognition in Mexico and the U.S. that trafficking and distribution of fentanyl into the U.S. is a pressing problem, discourse from each government illustrates that the two countries lack a common understanding of the problem. Both countries must take responsibility and carry out a shared assessment of the challenges to jointly identify and select specific strategies to pursue. The objective would be to provide a shared foundation for the governments to design more effective and targeted actions.

- The U.S., Mexico, and Canada should produce a joint assessment of the drugs and fentanyl situation, either as a process or product, which would include defining the related problems and challenges in each country.

2. (Re)Build institutions that increase civilian control of security forces and ensure a robust policy process that approaches security cooperation from a more-than-just-drugs focus

Mexico's institutional framework for public security cooperation has deteriorated in recent years with increased reliance on Mexico's military for security but without any significant improvements in bringing those guilty of crimes to trial or justice. Mexico's high impunity rate has not significantly improved, nor has the current Mexican administration maintained or deepened investigative and justice collaboration that existed in the past with the U.S. The following Mexican government will need to reconstruct these institutions. In the future, the U.S. counter-drug strategy and security cooperation discussions should incorporate broader perspectives beyond relying so heavily on the DEA, which fell out of favor with the current Mexican government. The cost of the last several years has been poor investigative cooperation while drug cartels were able to bring increasing quantities of drugs to the U.S. from supply chains in Mexico, reaping massive profits in the process. Cross-border challenges in North America should be used to create opportunities to implement institutional frameworks in all three countries.

- The U.S. and Mexico should each name national anti-drug coordinators independent of security forces or individual agencies, who can coordinate a whole-of-government approach. Their mandate should be to establish clear

goals, strategies, tactics, metrics, and evaluation progress. In addition to providing reports to their respective presidents, the coordinators would prepare reports to legislators and the public on US-Mexico public security, law enforcement, and justice collaboration.

- Recognizing that the Biden Administration has sought to create a government-wide policy on fentanyl using a range of agencies (including ONDC), for U.S.-Mexico cooperation, the U.S. needs to develop and implement a counternarcotics strategy that expands beyond any one agency (e.g., DEA) and to move beyond law enforcement, as the current U.S.-Mexico bicentennial framework seeks to do. This strategy should be developed via a process and policy layer above any single agency to foster broad U.S.-Mexico cooperation on security and counternarcotics and ensure critical policy decisions are framed by various actors outside and inside law enforcement. The U.S. strives to do this by designating a lead role based in the White House.
- Mexico must rebuild and reinforce its civilian institutions. This will be a long process, and the military institutions currently playing vital roles must be key actors during this time. Still, there should be an overarching policy and coordination level. Mexico also needs to invest in strengthening its justice and civilian investigative capacities. On a lower level, the governments must rebuild embassy-based ministry-to-ministry contacts to reflect trilateral cooperation.
- Those gathered agreed that civilian officials in Mexico should exercise more power and control over security forces, including re-establishing a national police institution and investigative agencies not under military control.

In the short term, Mexico must recognize the lack of national, civilian-controlled police forces in the country. Mexico's military is an essential tool for reducing insecurity, but Mexico's security policies must focus more on prevention and investigation to enhance the chances of success, and the military is not the group to take on these tasks. This will require investing more resources in these areas. An interim step could be to accept and recognize military control of the National Guard, which was created to replace the Federal Police. At the same time, the "system" is reformed to put civilians and civilian agencies in key roles.

3. Foster communication at multiple governmental levels to build trust

The U.S. and Mexico both approach national elections in 2024, with politicians in both countries willing to inflame cross-border tensions to score political points. Given the potential for political mistrust and discord, governments urgently need to create and reinforce mechanisms to build trust and confidence, starting with increasing constant and continuous communication among the principal actors in the relationship. It seems that both governments have been trying to do this



over the last year, but more work is urgently needed. This may be harder to sustain as elections near, but it will be more important than ever.

- Mexico and the U.S. must increase binational communication and develop person-to-person channels at the cabinet, under-secretary, and technical levels. Mandates for officials in both governments should include an expectation to cultivate cross-border relationships relevant to their areas of responsibility.
- Officials below the cabinet level in both countries should work to improve common understanding around shared challenges and share these insights with their higher-ranking counterparts. The senior leadership in both countries should encourage and foster these practices.
- Officials in all three countries working on security and counternarcotics should be thoroughly and regularly vetted, using the same process in all three countries to increase trust. Negotiating won't be easy, but it is essential for success.
- The U.S. should host delegations, and Mexico should send its law enforcement agents on exchanges to cities beyond the border region to increase understanding, cooperation, and trust.
- Subnational cooperation is essential but should not exclude federal officials, particularly in Mexico.
- Review past efforts of binational cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico, including such processes as Interparliamentary Meetings, Binational Commissions, and the regular meetings of border governors, which could result in reestablishing successful mechanisms.

4. Cultivate a dialogue to build a deeper understanding of the benefits and strengths of the U.S.-Mexico relationship among elected officials

- Too often, politicians exploit cross-border tensions to alarm and mobilize potential voters. Meanwhile, other officials might evade addressing challenging subjects like immigration because of the sensitivities and polarized views. Ultimately, avoiding frank and open dialogue undermines the genuine economic, social, and cultural collaboration that occurs daily and does not help solve the real problems. It would be very beneficial if ways could be found to involve civil society and business communities better to help coordinate and contribute to a vision of the binational relationship as the unique, valuable, and powerful tool that it truly is.



- Better ways must be developed to encourage leaders across North America to understand the benefits of security cooperation and specific topics on which countries can collaborate.
- Encourage civil society and the business and policy communities to launch an effort to engage in dialogue with presidential candidates in Mexico and the U.S. to help foster an understanding of the potential for better cooperation and elements that are essential for successfully reducing the challenges of cross border crime and the illicit flows of drugs, money, arms, and people.

5. Take targeted actions now to improve security

While the implementation process for the Bicentennial Framework continues, urgent issues like the fentanyl crisis in the U.S. and the increasing power of TCOs in Mexico demand urgent actions now. With both countries holding national elections in 2024, officials and stakeholders should not wait to take steps that could improve security for millions of residents in both countries. Inaction can encourage imprudent and damaging proposals and exchanges emanating from pre-election campaigning.

- In the short term, the U.S. and Mexico should identify priority areas for urgent improved action. These should include bold measures against Fentanyl smuggling and clear signals from the top of both governments that this cooperation is a top priority. One powerful signal could be creating a joint investigative unit with multiple agencies, fully vetted by both governments, with the primary mission to reduce fentanyl smuggling. Several specific steps would also be valuable as part of this effort, including those outlined in the Convocation 1.0 and 2.0 reports, such as mapping TCOs' value chains, increasing intelligence sharing, and engaging in joint training exercises.
- In a similar vein, Mexico and the U.S. should align their controlled drug precursor lists to limit imports of precursor chemicals destined for illicit drug production into Mexico and work together to encourage a broader anti-fentanyl coalition among nations.
- Accompanying all of this work should be expanded efforts to reduce the flow of illegal guns purchased in the U.S. and trafficked to Mexico-based TCOs, as announced in [June 2023](#).



6. Adapt and expand security cooperation to counter emerging threats

Counternarcotics has traditionally dominated U.S.-Mexico security cooperation. However, both countries face additional shared challenges, including cybersecurity, foreign investment in critical infrastructure, and border security (as reminded by regular reports of individuals on the U.S. terrorism list being stopped at the border). Both governments should bring these topics into future security cooperation discussions, involving Canada as a partner in these efforts.

- Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. have agreed to deepen North American cybersecurity cooperation as part of the North American Leaders Summit process. Still, they need to turn that idea into a practical functioning collaboration.
- Elections in 2024 in the U.S. and Mexico represent an opportunity for both countries to increase cooperation on cybersecurity, specifically to protect the integrity of elections and monitor and counter foreign-backed disinformation influence campaigns.
- Mexico must establish or designate a national agency to lead cybersecurity efforts across the government.
- The U.S. must be clear on its strategies regarding rivals or adversaries like China and Russia. It should seek partnerships with Canada and Mexico to review areas such as foreign investment in critical infrastructure in North America and safeguarding such infrastructure.



MIGRATION AND LABOR MOBILITY

Moderator: Andrew Selee, Migration Policy Institute

Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. have yet to define how they want to manage regional migration movements in the coming years. This is a particularly acute issue for the U.S.-Mexico relationship, with Canada playing a supporting role, given irregular migration movements have less impact through the hemisphere. For Mexico and the U.S., migration has been a major political issue for decades and has dominated the bilateral relationship. Canada, however, can be an effective influence for comprehensive migration cooperation across the region.

The end of Title 42, a public health measure in place at the shared border since March 2020, presents an excellent opportunity to get migration policies right in North America²

There are some indications that the U.S. government has a more straightforward strategy to direct migration into safe, legal, and humane channels. The focus appears to be on limiting the number of people who can cross the border unauthorized and restricting asylum applications uniquely to ports of entry. At the same time, the intention is to move initial screening away from the border region, to reach people before people migrate—or at least earlier in their migration journey—through centers throughout the hemisphere to attend to would-be migrants and provide them with information and assistance. The aim is to push the border between the two countries further south to avoid a constant stream of people crossing through Mexico headed north. The Canadian government has also agreed to expand refugee resettlement and seasonal labor migration programs from countries in the hemisphere.

A key component of this strategy is the availability of seasonal work visas for all three countries of North America, especially the H-2 visas for the U.S. The H-2A visas for agriculture are unlimited but often cumbersome to access. In contrast, the H-2B visas for non-agricultural work are limited in number and far below what is needed for the U.S. economy. While access to these visas is expanding quickly in Central America, they have not reached a level that can provide a realistic alternative to irregular migration for most people. Visa processing delays and burdensome regulations add to the complexity of a process that ideally would be streamlined and efficient.

2. Title 42 was lifted on May 11, 2023.



At the same time, the U.S. government has expanded humanitarian parole opportunities for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans, allocating 30,000 slots each month. It requires applicants to have a U.S. sponsor and obtain a passport, which may limit the availability to some potential migrants. Still, it is quite expedited for those accepted into the program. In April, the Biden Administration also announced family reunification parole programs for select Central American nations and Colombia³

There is some evidence that these programs have initially lowered migration pressure from Central America. However, humanitarian parole is a stop-gap measure that does not constitute a coherent, transparent migration policy. Participants felt strongly that the U.S. needed to finally confront the urgency of immigration reform to address its workforce needs, the humanitarian realities of the region, and the partnership with Canada and Mexico.

The Ambassadors all agreed that recent moves were positive but that they likely have only provided a temporary respite and that hard work lies ahead. Mexican participants expressed concern over their government's capacity to effectively respond to the requests for cooperation from the U.S. government. These include expecting Mexico to exert greater control of its southern border and its willingness to accept migrants from third countries who are returned to Mexico. In particular, the pressure on Mexican border cities and regions to care for large migrant populations for indefinite periods poses public safety and humanitarian challenges. Additionally, the fire that broke out in a detention center in Ciudad Juárez in March 2023 highlighted some of the institutional deficiencies in Mexico's migration management system. With limited Mexican federal support for local jurisdictions that host large transient migrant populations, this could become a complicated political issue. Some participants argued that the U.S. should expect to reimburse Mexico for the impacts of the U.S. migration policy. Others noted the need for cooperation between equals as policies are defined and executed. It was mentioned that the U.S. is already contributing certain funds to Mexico through UN agencies to help with migrant populations.

U.S. participants also noted that the U.S. side of the border faces similar problems where local and state governments often bear the costs of integrating large, recently arrived populations. Even if much of this migration is driven by employment opportunities in the U.S.—both a structural shift owing to an aging population in the U.S. and a specific feature of the post-Covid economy—absorbing large numbers of recent migrants in schools and healthcare facilities can prove costly without federal assistance. Of the three countries, the Canadian government has the best-designed strategies for sharing the early costs of

3. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/07/07/dhs-announces-family-reunification-parole-processes-colombia-el-salvador-guatemala>



integrating recently arrived migrants. Notably, Canada is also the only country of the three with low numbers of unauthorized migration because of its geographic location and thus can plan better for expected arrivals. Canada's potential role as a model, a participant, and a facilitator of North American solutions to shared migration challenges was highlighted.

In their conversations, some Ambassadors expressed concern that crucial parts of the U.S.-Mexico agenda are becoming hostage to migration issues. The U.S. government prioritizes migration cooperation to an extraordinary degree, leaving little sustained engagement in other areas requiring bilateral engagement. To some, the U.S. has become more reticent on human rights, organized crime, and environmental cooperation to preserve migration cooperation. The failure to develop coherent, long-term strategies for dealing with migration between the two countries creates problems around migration. It also constraints progress on other vital issues from the bilateral and North American agendas.

Finally, Ambassadors agreed that the presidential political campaigns in Mexico and the U.S. in 2024 will likely politicize migration issues further. In the U.S., this will likely include renewed efforts to link migration, organized crime (including fentanyl trafficking), job displacement for Americans, decreased social service availability, and even terrorism. For example, suggestions to militarize the border and to designate cartels as foreign terrorist organizations will further increase tensions between the two nations. At the same time, there could be politically motivated resistance to cooperation with the U.S. government on containing migration in Mexico. Especially given the impacts on local governments coping with large migrant populations. This does not mean the end of cooperation, Ambassadors agreed, but it implies greater friction and the possibility that issues usually negotiated out of public view could become significant points of public debate in the run-up to the elections in the two countries.

In conclusion, all the ambassadors and guests involved in these discussions agreed that managing regional migration in North America remains a challenge and will likely be so for many years. The U.S. has outlined short-term strategies to limit unauthorized crossings and expand legal pathways, but they do not constitute an enduring solution.

Participants noted multiple bureaucratic obstacles even in existing U.S. systems, highlighting especially the difficulties in the H-2 worker visa programs, which are oversubscribed, complex to access, and slow to respond to employer demand. Some noted that Canada supports refugee resettlement and seasonal labor programs and could play a more significant role in building trilateral consensus.



While the political environment of the coming presidential elections in the U.S. and Mexico means migration reform is unlikely in 2024, participants agreed that, once elections are concluded, a concerted effort to secure comprehensive trilateral migration cooperation would be essential.

Recommendations

Based on this wide-ranging discussion, the ambassadors recommend the following:

1. The U.S., Canada, and Mexico should work to agree and put forward a trilateral comprehensive migration framework, guiding regional policies and coordinating institutional efforts and resources.
2. The U.S. should open clear and secure pathways for legal work in the country, such as H-2 temporary work visas, and increase the number of visa referees and migration processing officials to remove backlogs and attend to applicants promptly.
3. The U.S. should encourage and support the strengthening of Mexico's institutional capacity to ensure the safe, humane treatment of migrants.
4. In both countries, federal support should be increased to municipal and border state governments supporting large migrant populations.
5. Civil society, academia, and the private sector are essential in defending democratic values and institutions affected by internal discontent and transnational challenges like migration. Regular stakeholder dialogue should exist between these segments of society and the federal governments.
6. Once the 2024 presidential elections are complete, a concerted trilateral effort should seek to press all three governments to prioritize immigration reforms for North America.
7. There should be a coordinated effort to strengthen North American cooperation related to trilateral border entities – including border parks, border cities, border academic institutions, border youth programs, and border leadership academies.

SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Moderator: Pamela Starr, University of Southern California

The United States and Mexico have substantial Soft Power assets. Mexico's culture and cuisine have propelled its influence across North America and the world. The U.S.'s soft power image is fueled by its universities, entertainment industry, and much else. On the other hand, public diplomacy is one of the main tools that governments have to try to build and reinforce their soft power in ways that align with policy priorities and objectives. Despite the known importance of public diplomacy to effective foreign policy, it remains the poor cousin to hard power foreign policy tools, often neglected and almost always underfunded. What does this broad foreign policy truth say about public diplomacy and soft power in North America today? Where are we on the issue, and how do we move forward?

Public Diplomacy in North America Today

After agreeing on a broad definition of public diplomacy, the Ambassadors painted a representative picture of the status of public diplomacy in North America. While Mexico and Canada lack national public diplomacy strategies, President Biden is credited with restoring a certain soft power glister to the U.S. Unfortunately, despite the U.S. Embassy in Mexico's highly active public diplomacy activities and programs, North America does not stand as a central theme in President Biden's current endeavors. This is concerning considering the widespread lack of comprehension among the public and elites regarding Mexico's indispensable significance to the United States and vice versa.

In Mexico, previous conveyor belts for public diplomacy have either been shuttered or lost funding, the Tourism Ministry lost its promotional funds, and the agency to promote investment, ProMexico, was eliminated). This leaves the entire public diplomacy (or nation branding) task to the Foreign Ministry, specifically to embassies and consulates (52 Consulates in the U.S. today). Unfortunately, these entities did not receive increased funding or human resources to tackle this overarching challenge effectively.

There have been public diplomacy efforts as instruments in two core policy objectives of the Mexican Embassy in Washington: the completion and ratification

of the new USMCA trade deal and a consistent endeavor to raise the visibility and importance of the Mexican community in the U.S. Both public diplomacy efforts benefited from using social media to modulate and target the message to better appeal to different audiences. The strategy to raise the Mexican community's visibility has included actions highlighting their past, present, and likely future contributions to the U.S., using the hashtag #werebettertogether. Former Mexican Ambassadors to the U.S. noted that they also used media, especially TV and radio, to promote USMCA, resist proposed tariffs, and support the North American economy in general.

Moreover, President Lopez Obrador's prominent personality seems to have cast a shadow over public diplomacy activities, shaping how Mexican diplomats managed communication. Recently, Mexico's president has called on the Mexican community in the U.S. to vote for/against particular candidates, which is not an ideal public diplomacy strategy since the appearance of intervention in U.S. domestic affairs was not well-received. Reminiscent of the challenges faced by U.S. diplomats under President Trump, AMLO's statements have detracted from concurrent initiatives by the Embassy/Consulates to enhance Mexico's image in the U.S.

Another challenge for Mexican public diplomacy is that Mexico has focused its public diplomacy efforts on significant events or issues rather than building and sustaining them over time. Mexico launched a major and effective campaign in support of the ratification of NAFTA in the early 1990s and then abandoned the effort once the U.S. Congress approved NAFTA. Then again, Mexico launched a public diplomacy campaign to support the Fox Administration's migration policy initiative in the early 2000 and subsequently abandoned it for the remainder of his presidency. President Calderon then developed a specific strategy to reposition Mexico worldwide, coordinated by the Tourism Ministry and its "the Mexico you thought you knew" initiative, accompanied by a country brand strategy. His administration used Pro Mexico extensively to attract investment. President Enrique Peña Nieto continued support for ProMexico, and his Foreign Ministry sought to align Mexico with several other middle-sized powers to create a positive image in the hemisphere and the G20 context. However, President Lopez Obrador's administration has no proactive public diplomacy strategy at the federal government level, so embassies and consulates must manage this mainly through their creative efforts. This means that whoever wins the 2024 presidential election in Mexico will inherit a denuded state without the personnel, budget, or institutions needed to carry out effective public diplomacy (and policy-making more broadly).

Finally, the ambassadors and others agreed that Mexico must improve its global image. This image is much more negative vis-a-vis news reports of crime and



human rights violations than reality warrants. The new government in Mexico, thus, will be well advised to focus on national branding and, in so doing, to recognize that branding is essential within Mexico and outside. France and Great Britain have done this well – it has a positive image despite being highly nationalistic. Studies such as “[The Soft Power 30](#)” analyze countries and governments that have had success. Maybe Mexico can learn something from those experiences.

It was briefly noted that Canada seems to feel that public diplomacy is not essential given the country’s strongly positive international image. It has not had a public diplomacy strategy for 20 years despite having great public diplomacy resources like the Cirque du Soleil and highly efficient trade. This ought to change.

How do we move forward?

Listening is the foundation for effective public diplomacy. Knowing who (which audiences) in the foreign population matters for achieving a particular foreign policy aim is essential. This will allow public diplomats to target their limited resources on those actors and audiences who matter most to conduct foreign policy objectives.

Listening is also essential to know your target audience’s attitudes about your country, its policies, and the drivers of these attitudes. This illuminates what they believe, how deeply held these beliefs are, how emotional they are, and how distant they are from the new perspectives the public diplomat hopes to elicit. In general, deeply held, emotional, and foreign beliefs from the attitude inherent in a received message make it less likely that the message will have the desired impact on the target audience. Effective listening will thus allow the public diplomat to identify the correct narrative with which to reframe the conversation, the best way to modulate this message, which specific issues to spotlight, and how to identify a trusted messenger willing to send the message. Hence, it has a more significant impact on the target. On this foundation of knowledge, it is essential to differentiate the opinions of the public and recognize the importance of good, well-targeted polling.

Careful polling and public opinion research can help us understand how Mexicans, Canadians, and Americans (especially the target groups within these populations) feel and think about one another. It can also provide great insights, like how they feel about North America and what they think and feel about a potential North American identity. For those seeking to promote appreciation of the importance of North American cooperation, analyses of these opinion polls can help officials understand the most promising themes to emphasize and share in public diplomacy messages about North America.



Another key aspect of an effective public diplomacy strategy that the Ambassadors explored is its long-term and short-term focus. Long-term public diplomacy actions focus on shaping how foreign publics think about a country. Educational and professional exchanges are some of the most important tools that the U.S. deploys to achieve long-term positive impact. Designing and implementing long-term strategies is challenging for policymakers, particularly Mexican diplomats, who lack the massive exchange and education programs available in the U.S. For the three countries, short-term public diplomacy efforts are often focused on debunking falsehoods and misperceptions, as well as responding to misunderstandings. In the U.S., current disinformation about security, drugs, and migration related to Mexico is undermining Mexico's image and making the public increasingly cynical when thinking about Mexico. Nonetheless, Americans do not hesitate to vacation in Mexico. Mexico's diplomats, however, seem to have a very challenging task to take on the constant misconceptions about Mexico circulated in the U.S. news media.

The ambassadors noted that Mexico's private sector holds substantial potential as a potent instrument for advancing the country's interests. Primarily, it can serve as a positive voice and example, especially for segments of society that regard business as a reliable messenger. In this case, Mexican companies should be encouraged to invest in and participate in public diplomacy efforts. This approach could prove particularly pivotal in fostering favorable perceptions regarding the advantages of trade with Mexico, leading up to the 2026 assessment of the USMCA. Moreover, it could play a broader role in highlighting the stability that the agreement's regulations bring to the North American economy. Furthermore, the private sectors of all three countries should collaborate to chart a collective public diplomacy campaign, identifying the public outreach endeavors that could facilitate better understanding of the value of North American cooperation and collaboration. The Ambassadors agreed that they and others should actively advocate for the involvement of the private sector in these public diplomacy ventures, especially in support of USMCA and North American collaboration on competitiveness.

Beyond the private sector, there are other potential allies for governments trying to improve the image of their country among foreign publics; there are other "influencers." For example, digital nomads living and working in cities like Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Merida can become effective Ambassadors toward their friends and followers back home if leveraged correctly. To engage the broadest range of influencers, a country's message must be modulated to address the specific issues relevant to each target public's interests and concerns.

Another excellent example of engaging a wider community and further nurturing the concept of a North American identity is the forthcoming hosting of



the World Cups (2026 for men and 2027 for women). This presents an unparalleled opportunity that holds potential for the enduring advancement of North America. Consequently, there should be intensified public diplomacy campaigns between the governments and appropriate sports associations and clubs to build toward the World Cup. The ambassadors noted that other examples of sports diplomacy can be leveraged to benefit across the continent.

Alongside these communication strategies, region-wide public diplomacy can also benefit from exchange programs. While the temporary closing of these initiatives during the pandemic was a significant setback for public diplomacy, it is now time to foster a wide array of exchange programs that connect North Americans, emphasizing educational exchange between the three countries. This helps change the participants' minds, and their experience can be leveraged if they collaborate in post-exchange programs to tell stories about their experience that deliver a positive message.

Finally, cities and states are other vital channels for advancing public diplomacy. In promoting themselves, state and city diplomacy can positively affect the rest of their country. They can create cross-border partnerships and initiatives that transcend national boundaries. They can orchestrate roadshows to showcase their city and foster connections with individuals and communities throughout North America. Cities and States have been building successful bonds for decades, but they should be further encouraged to unlock additional cross-national collaboration and mutual gain.

Recommendations

Based on this wide-ranging discussion, the ambassadors recommend the following:

1. Generate consistent data to understand public opinion better and inform decision-makers on how the public and key audiences see North America and their country's relations with its partners, their sense of identity, and their perceptions of Mexicans, Americans, and Canadians, as well as cross-continental cooperations.
2. Create and fund additional exchange programs across North America as a public diplomacy tool. These programs have long-term influence, and trilateral programs can be implemented to create opportunities for exchange.
3. Promote city and state diplomacy, with possibilities for cross-border partnerships and initiatives that transcend national boundaries.

4. Recognize the importance of the private sector by engaging them across the three countries to work together and submit proposals for public-private collaboration, as well as for generating better understanding of the great potential of North American collaboration for prosperity, security, and well-being.

5. Promote a regional public diplomacy strategy through sports diplomacy, such as the World Cup in 2026 and the U.S.-Mexico bid for the Women's World Cup in 2027.



AGRICULTURE

Moderator: Héctor Luján, Reiter Affiliated Co.

During their meeting, the Ambassadors were fortunate to receive a thorough and insightful briefing about the importance of agriculture and food security.

According to data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the total value of agricultural food production in the North American market of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico was approximately \$392 billion in 2000. In 2020, the total value of agricultural food production in the North American market increased to approximately \$881 billion. This represents an increase in value over the past two decades of 225%.

Based on data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Government of Canada, and the Government of Mexico, agricultural food exports among the three countries have grown significantly. These findings reveal that all three nations have experienced an impressive increase in agricultural food exports, surpassing 180%. Mexico stands out with the highest surge, achieving a remarkable 486% increase in exports to the U.S. Meanwhile, Canadian exports exhibited comparatively lower growth with a 186% increase.

Agricultural Food Exports in USD

	Mexico to U.S.	U.S. to Mexico	U.S. to Canada
2000	\$5.7 billion	\$4.4 billion	\$11.1 billion
2020	\$27.7 billion	\$19.6 billion	\$23.1 billion
Percent Increase	486%	445%	208%

Agricultural Food Exports in CAD

	Canada to Mexico	Canada to the U.S.	Mexico to Canada
2000	\$204 million	\$13.9 billion	\$158 million
2020	\$840 million	\$25.9 billion	\$437 million
Percent Increase	412%	186%	277%

It's worth noting that the specific types of agricultural food products exported may vary from year to year, depending on factors such as market demand and supply chain dynamics. Some of the top U.S. agricultural exports to Mexico in recent years include corn, soybeans, pork, dairy, and beef.

In recent years, the top agricultural food exports within the North American region have shown variations based on the exporting and importing countries while maintaining a notable degree of similarity. Mexico exports fruits and vegetables, and beer to both the U.S. and Canada; the U.S. exports meat (pork and beef) and dairy products to Canada and Mexico, and Canada's top five exports are the same for both countries: canola oil, soybeans, pork, wheat, and beef.

Top Agricultural Food Exports in North America by Country

	Mexico to the U.S.	U.S. to Mexico	U.S. to Canada	Canada to Mexico	Canada to the U.S.	Mexico to Canada
1	Fruits and vegetables	Corn	Fruits and vegetables	Canola oil	Canola oil	Fruits and vegetables
2	Beer	Soybeans	Dairy products	Soybeans	Soybeans	Beer
3	Snack foods	Pork	Snack foods	Pork	Pork	Tequila
4	Meat	Dairy Products	Meat (beef, pork, and poultry)	Wheat	Wheat	Coffee
5	Sugar and sweeteners	Beef	Processed fruits and vegetables	Beef	Beef	Processed fruits and vegetables

While the agricultural industry has experienced consistent growth over the past 20 years, significant food security concerns affect Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. Given the importance of this issue internationally, the U.S. State Department named Dr. Cary Fowler as U.S. Special Envoy for Global Food Security. The North American region benefits from the leverage provided by the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which strongly emphasizes securing the agricultural sector and upholding commitments related to food security. Additionally, the agreement provides support for farmers and agricultural companies.

The experts who briefed the Ambassadors noted that food security remains a political and economic issue with international implications. Therefore, the region needs to continue collaborating in strengthening the sector. They highlighted the following issues that affect food security in the region:

- 1. Climate Change:** The impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, can have significant implications for food

production and availability, particularly in North America, given the importance of agriculture and rapidly changing climate patterns.

2. Trade Policy: Trade policies and agreements between the three countries can significantly impact food security, particularly for smaller-scale farmers and producers for whom changes in trade regulations may create negative impacts.

3. Food Waste: Food waste is a significant issue in North America, with an estimated 30-40% of all food produced in the region going to waste. This represents a considerable loss of resources and contributes to food insecurity for many people.

4. Food Access and Affordability: Food access and affordability are important issues for many people in North America, particularly in low-income communities and areas without easy access to grocery stores or fresh food options.

5. Agricultural Practices: How food is produced, including the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and other inputs, can have a significant impact on the environment and human health. Improving sustainable agricultural practices is essential to ensure food security for future generations.

The issue of labor mobility and food security in North America is intricately connected to the evolving trade landscape and the increasing interdependence between countries. Recognizing that actions taken in one country can have far-reaching effects on others is crucial. A key concern arises from the potential closure of borders, harming food security in all three countries involved.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a reminder of the level of integration within supply chains and the urgent need to better understand and manage these interdependencies. During the pandemic, essential industries were not effectively coordinated between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, leading to labor availability and food production disruptions. This highlighted the necessity of implementing mechanisms to ensure smoother coordination and cooperation in times of crisis.

The North American workforce, while diverse, shares a significant level of commonality across the three countries. Canada, for instance, heavily relies on temporary visa programs to secure agricultural workers. To promote labor mobility across the region, it is important to recognize the need for a qualified labor force and facilitate their movement throughout the region. Addressing labor mobility challenges can contribute to a more efficient allocation of labor resources from Central America and enhance overall food security in North America.

Moreover, insurance coverage for Mexican immigrants in different countries poses



a concern. Efforts should be made to develop comprehensive and inclusive insurance systems that provide adequate coverage for all immigrant workers, regardless of their destination country. Recognizing the significance of social security, Mexico and the U.S. signed an agreement in 2005 to address this matter specifically for immigrants in the U.S. This agreement underscores the importance of establishing robust social security mechanisms that safeguard the well-being of immigrant workers and their families, ensuring their access to healthcare. The current issue in this regard is the implementation of the agreement for the workers' families in Mexico, which is why IMSS is now working on this issue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico.

In addition to the issues related to labor mobility and food security in North America, trade-related concerns also play a significant role in shaping the region's food security landscape. One prominent trade issue revolves around agricultural practices and the use of pesticides and chemicals. A list of approved products exists, with certain chemicals being phased out. However, discrepancies arise when comparing Mexico and the U.S. organic standards. Although Mexico has developed its organic standards, they do not align completely with those in the U.S. This misalignment raises challenges regarding certification for organic products in Mexico, as certification often comes from the U.S. Moreover, instances of fraud within Mexico's organic program have further complicated the trade dynamics in the region.

Another complicated issue within trade and food security is the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). While no substantial evidence suggests GMOs' negative health effects in the U.S., the regulatory process governing their approval is intended to be based on scientific evidence. Consultations are continuously conducted to ensure that the regulatory framework effectively considers scientific findings and fosters a transparent decision-making process.

Food security in North America remains a pressing concern that requires collaboration and concerted actions from Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. Addressing challenges related to climate change, trade policies, food waste, access and affordability, and sustainable agricultural practices is crucial for ensuring a sustainable and secure food supply.

Efforts should focus on establishing resilient agricultural practices for North American food security, supporting small-scale farmers through trade policies, reducing food waste, improving food access in underserved communities, promoting sustainable farming, and establishing effective crisis management mechanisms. By working together, North America can create a more resilient and sustainable food system that benefits its population and contributes to global food security goals.



LOOKING FORWARD: CONCLUSIONS

Convocation is a unique platform that has brought together former Ambassadors to affirm the significance of strengthening the North American region. This gathering, the third of its kind, serves as a testament to the enduring commitment of these diplomatic veterans to shape a more cohesive and prosperous future for Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. As the world undergoes rapid transformations driven by technological advancements, shifting economic landscapes, and unprecedented global challenges, the trilateral relationship between these nations is essential for North America's present and future.

The Convocation program facilitates a dynamic exchange of ideas and expertise among Ambassadors from all corners of North America—the U.S. to Mexico, Mexico to the U.S., Canadian Ambassadors to the U.S., and Mexico to Canada. These seasoned diplomats collectively delved into multifaceted subjects that have the power to shape the trajectory of the trilateral relationship. The focus areas - economy and trade, public security, migration and labor mobility, soft power, and agriculture- allowed participants to identify important challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions.

The Convocation 3.0 retreat held in Palo Alto and Año Nuevo, California, allowed the Ambassadors to engage with key representatives from leading technological companies such as HP and Oracle and the opportunity to address the role of technology in the trilateral relationship as it relates to economic ties, workforce development, and cooperation efforts generally. Subsequent deliberations held in Año Nuevo delved deeply into the intricacies of the economic landscape, security imperatives, migration dynamics, cultural diplomacy, and the fundamental role of agriculture.

These dialogues accentuated the interconnectedness of the region's challenges and opportunities. The Ambassadors' deliberations encompassed a broad spectrum, highlighting the intricate makeup of the trilateral relationship and the shared commitment to address mutually pressing issues collaboratively. The insights from these conversations produced actionable recommendations, reflecting the Ambassadors' collective wisdom and commitment to enhancing cooperation and advancing North American integration.



Of special note: the Ambassadors were of one mind in stressing the complex challenges of managing U.S.-Mexico relations during 2024, with presidential and legislative elections in Mexico and the United States. Public security, migration, the border, and trade are hard enough to handle without an incredibly flammable layer of domestic election contests thrown into the mix. Getting through this year without significant difficulties and with the promise of making further progress in the years ahead will require skilled management by officials and strong support from stakeholders who know the value of trustworthy U.S.-Mexico collaboration for the future of both countries.

Convocation's significance becomes increasingly evident as the trilateral relationship evolves and responds to a rapidly changing global context. The program's continued success in promoting meaningful dialogue and consensus among esteemed Ambassadors is a testament to the enduring importance of collaboration, diplomacy, and understanding among Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. These dialogues lay the foundation for a future characterized by resilience, prosperity, and harmony—a future that these former Ambassadors are committed to shaping through Convocation's unwavering dedication to the trilateral relationship.

