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Academic Collaboration and Outreach To the Public and Policy Makers

The Presence of *Voices of Mexico*
In North American Public Opinion

North American topics and issues have expanded dramatically in the last 30 years, precisely in the time since *Voices of Mexico* appeared. In 1990 when the magazine be-

gan circulating, the topics were no more than half a dozen; now the agenda is counted by pages not by topics. NAFTA coming into effect in 1994 opened new formal dimensions in Mexico's longstanding relationship with the United States and Canada, making it more deeply interdepen-

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The Michigan State University campus in East Lansing, Michigan.

dent. The significance of the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and its southern neighbor turned into a trilateral model that added Canada, giving North America as a region more content and visibility. This new model has been of the utmost importance for the governments and the people of the three countries as they live their daily lives and activities.

Historically, migration and border controls have played substantial roles in relations between the United States and Mexico; then manufacturing and trade became important in the relationship, and after those, it was the turn for energy, financing, direct investments, human rights, drug trafficking, and the environment. The CISAN and *Voices of Mexico* have recognized the relevance of all this beyond the traditional transit and movements of people and goods across the shared border. As the region grew more interconnected in the 1990s, other themes expanded, including environmental, labor, and security issues. And yet, after the September 11 events, it was clearly realized that borders ought to be a major vehicle of national security; in other words, it made Mexico a key partner on security issues for the region.

In 2005 with the passing of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, clearly Mexico, the United States, and Canada had cemented a more comprehensive region; *Voices* followed that, too. Mexico's role in enhancing U.S. national security cannot be ignored; the SPP led to the

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creation of programs for the safe transit of goods and trusted travelers, sharing law enforcement intelligence, the amplification of e-commerce, health, and energy research collaboration, and protection of natural resources.

As the relationship continued to grow, the North American research agenda has continuously expanded: the three countries' populations and economies are more interconnected and interdependent, and reliable analyses are needed. Mexico-focused research has been able to find a place in *Voices* that directs the attention of its analysis to policymakers and public opinion, and this is no easy task. *Voices's* editors have been able to identify not just the signature themes it always publishes, but the pressing issues added to each government's agendas.

The topics analyzed about North America with a Mexican focus include immigration, trade, drug and human trafficking, environmental issues, energy, national security, and social networks that have cemented cultural ties. When *Voices* publishes an issue, it is not just about international relations, but also about literature, poetry, the arts, music, and photography, the cultural basis for a friendly relationship especially between Mexico and the

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U.S. Early on, *Voices* recognized the importance of media topics, including cinema, print media, television, radio, and, of course, the study of social media, which has facilitated the communication of neighbors, families, and friends across borders. *Voices* also has paid attention to the dramatic violence against women working in maquiladoras and the tragic expansion of drug trafficking and its violence in Mexican cities across the border from the United States.

Voices is recognized as the prime outlet for analysis on these topics, making it necessary reading for those engaged in policymaking across North America. Many of the scholars who contribute their analyses are renowned academics who ensure that their research contributes to informing public opinion and, in turn, policy makers.

Academic Collaboration as Bedrock for *Voices of Mexico*

One of the magazine's most remarkable features is the rich cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary analysis of the topics it publishes. This has been the result of an active strategy of the CISAN leadership and the *Voices* editorial staff. The CISAN has built an active and successful academic relationship with dozens of universities, colleges, and think tanks across the world, and early on the directors recognized that for relationships to be successful, they needed to be built with constant interaction among scholars. That is why the CISAN has been visible not only in North America and the rest of the continent but in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. With more international presence, *Voices* has followed those relationships. As many of us travel for research internationally, it is encouraging to see issues of *Voices* in the libraries or offices visited; it is a message that Mexico's voice is all over the world.

One example of these institutional academic relationships built by the CISAN derived from the years before

NAFTA was passed. Two years before the agreement was passed by the three countries' legislative bodies, researchers from the CISAN attended conferences in the U.S. and Canada to learn about how each nation debated the agreement's benefits and risks. One was hosted in Michigan and attended by scholars from the Midwest, from the University of Notre Dame, the University of Wisconsin, Michigan State University, Kalamazoo College, the University of Chicago, and DePaul University, among others. As a participant, I learned from CISAN researchers about their focus areas; and they also were eager to learn about most of our research derived from other perspectives far from Mexico. From those meetings, we built institutional relationships that have lasted until today. For instance, Michigan State University started an ongoing academic exchange, still underway today, which has included areas related to international relations, political and diplomatic processes, media influences, immigration, trade, and environmental issues. Faculty from both institutions have conducted research in each other's campuses and have produced dozens of peer-reviewed publications; many of them have even received awards.

When NAFTA needed to be evaluated after ten years of operation, the CISAN and *Voices* were there to examine the impacts on Mexico. From the U.S. and Canadian perspectives, the agreement was assessed, contrasted with Mexican views; and scholars from institutions working with the CISAN were there to shed light at such a controversial moment. The Bush administration proposal in 2004 to construct additional governmental relationships was based on national security concerns, to reshape the relationship on a more interconnected bureaucracy. The proposal was signed at the presidential and prime ministerial levels, and since then cooperation and collaboration have undoubtedly not been missing in North America. Mexico's major concerns about the proposal were discussed and analyzed by scholars who were part of the CISAN's extended academic relationships. Without those academic linkages, finding expertise in the area would have been daunting, if not dreadful.

For scholars, policymakers, and the media, *Voices* is absolutely required reading about the everyday North American experience. At the time of this writing, the three North American countries are facing a major health challenge due to the spreading of the coronavirus disease COVID-19. The previous H1N1 experience in 2009 has prov-

en that the United States cannot underestimate the governmental actions and policies about important issues that affect the population of both countries. When it was time to react, Mexico moved resources and activated policies to reduce the impacts of that virus and *Voices* was able to inform the public as well as policymakers about how the goodwill of two neighbors worked in synchronicity to reduce the spread of H1N1. The writings about the experiences were also the result of that academic collaboration.

This time with Covid-19, health is an issue that will test the cooperation and collaboration of the U.S. and Mexico about borders that need to interact 24-7. In mid-March, the tightening of U.S. border crossings, first with Canada and later with Mexico demonstrated the coordinated efforts that the governments are able to construct. The partial border closing was orderly, negotiated between the presidents of each country (and Canada's prime minister), seeking minimal disruption of daily activities and allowing the transit of goods and products while reducing nonessential crossings. Surely, *Voices* will publish a series of articles about the challenges and responses to this unprecedented health event; and again, the academic relationships will be handy.

When elections take place in the U.S., the CISAN has organized panels, inviting scholars who belong to its institutional network. Regardless of what political party is in the White House, expert panels examine the political perspectives that the U.S. president will have in relation

to Mexico since the relationship between the two countries is crucial for both. It was no surprise that during the 2016 presidential election Donald Trump used the border and Mexico as his bullet points for his presidential platform. Despite some volatility and economic impacts in trade, large U.S.-based corporations demonstrated to Mr. Trump that North American manufacturing models were completely interdependent and that attacking Mexico would be, ultimately, a negative proposition for the economic prosperity of the United States. The CISAN hosted one of the first panels of analysis within a week of Mr. Trump's victory to examine how his presidency would impact Mexico and the entire migratory process. And the passing of a new trade agreement precisely proposed by the Trump administration is recognition that the structural relationships in North America are difficult to change. Ultimately, Mr. Trump acknowledged that the realities of the U.S. interdependence with Mexico cannot be ignored and that borders and geography cannot be changed or disregarded.

Voices has been the best forum for the institutional collaboration and academic interaction of the CISAN and all the academic institutions in United States and Canada. Plus, no topic has escaped the analysis and examination of scholars actively engaged in fundamental research that always has policy and public opinion implications. This anniversary will be the departure point for many more successful years of publishing about the issues that matter the most for the North American countries, especially Mexico. ■■
