

El Salvador and Costa Rica's State–Diaspora Relations Management

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Through a case study that includes 20 in-depth interviews with key informants, this qualitative study compares the state–diaspora relations of two Central American countries, one where the state considers the diaspora a key transnational public (El Salvador), and one where the state interacts at a low level with its diaspora and does not consider this group a priority in its policies (Costa Rica). This article also offers eight propositions for studying state–diaspora relations, a model of the main factors that influence the strength of the state–diaspora relationship in Central America, and implications for international public relations.

Key words: global public relations, diaspora, transnationalism, Central America, Costa Rica, El Salvador.

Introduction

This article analyzes the contrasting relationship-management strategies that the governments of El Salvador and Costa Rica, both Central American nations, use—or not—to communicate with and engage their respective diaspora communities in the United States. In El Salvador, the state considers the diaspora a key transnational public. In Costa Rica, the state has interacted at a basic level with the diaspora for particular instances of government–diaspora communications, and it does not consider this community a priority public in its policies.

Findings of the study conducted for this article indicate that the differences in the styles of these two countries' state–diaspora relations occur not only because of differences in the relative sizes of the diaspora communities or in the impact that these publics have had in their home countries' economy through remittances and investments but also because of differences in these states' conceptualizations of the diasporas and in their political contexts (a transitional democracy with legitimacy issues in one case versus a mature democracy in the other).

This article contributes to studies about global public relations by offering a set of eight propositions as a starting point for studying state–diaspora relations, a model of the main factors that influence the strength of the state–diaspora relationship in these particular cases, and implications for international public relations.

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Additionally, this study elucidates not only the complexities of diaspora groups as publics but also the unique characteristics that each diaspora community has, depending on its country of origin and on historical developments both in the home and host countries. This knowledge is relevant because, according to projections released in 2008 by the U.S. Census Bureau, minorities constituted one-third of the U.S. population, and Hispanics will comprise one third of the U.S. population by 2050 (CNN U.S., 2008).

Literature Review

In public relations, it is widely accepted that one of the main goals of any organization (corporation, public entity, nonprofit, etc.) is to build and maintain relationships with key publics and that the quality of the relationship can be measured by indicators such as trust in the organization, satisfaction with the relationship, commitment to the organization, and control mutuality between the organization and a given public (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2009; Ledingham, 2001, 2003; Yang, 2007).

There is a wealth of empirical research in public relations about how different organizations establish relationships with publics located in the same country, but there is little research about how a national government establishes relationships with its diaspora, a unique public in that it is international because it is located abroad, but it is national because it is formed by citizens of the home country who maintain some transnational connection to the homeland while in the host country. Because of this gap in the public-relations literature, this study borrows theoretical perspectives from political science and sociology to understand the characteristics of the relationship established by Costa Rica and El Salvador with their respective diasporas in the United States.

Migration research, typically conducted in the fields of international relations and political science, has extensively explored the topics of immigration control by receiving countries and the process of migrant integration into the new societies, but it has less intensely studied the "policies of sending countries (and homelands) towards their nationals abroad" (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, p. 3). The field of diaspora studies, in contrast, has placed its focus on analyzing whether diaspora communities keep ties with their countries of origin. These studies have been developed mainly by anthropologists and sociologists (Koslowski, 2005). In the last decade, international relations researchers and political scientists have started to study if and how nation-states establish relationships with their diasporas, and whether those relationships are initially fostered by the state (state-led transnationalism) or by the diaspora (migrant-led transnationalism) (Gamlén, 2008; Goldring, 2002; Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003; Margheritis, 2007). Even though some authors have studied the reasons for an increased connection between diaspora communities and their home countries in recent migration waves, these researchers have illustrated that it is difficult to predict if or how nation-states will interact with their diasporas, as nation-states—even when they are similar countries—tend to react in dissimilar ways (Délano, 2010; Gamlén, 2008; Koslowski, 2005; Kunz, 2008; Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003; Margheritis, 2007; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

Comparative studies, such as the ones cited above, have explanatory power because they allow researchers to find patterns and peculiarities, and they help scholars to identify and analyze contextual factors that seem to make a difference for the phenomenon under study. For example, Gamlen (2008) embarked in a meta-analysis of previous research and compared the diaspora policy mechanisms of 64 different states to look for similarities and differences in diaspora-building strategies and diaspora-integration mechanisms. The present study, within a more limited scope, follows this path of comparing nations, in this case two countries, because comparative research is critical for building models and for offering explanations that contribute to building theories.

In Central America, two of the most relevant cases for studying state-diaspora relations are those of El Salvador and Costa Rica because these countries can be placed at the extremes of a continuum. Even though they are both small countries, El Salvador has a large migrant community in the United States (about 3 million people, or 33% of El Salvador's population), and this group has a strong impact on the home economy, as remittances constitute about 18% of the country's GDP (Banco Central de Reserva de El Salvador, 2010; McCoy, 2009; Menjívar, 2000; PNUD, 2007), while the number of Costa Rican migrants in the United States is low (about 128,000) (American Community Survey, 2011) and their impact on the home economy is not significant, as remittances constitute only about 2% of the country's GDP (Asamblea Legislativa, 2007; Banco Central, 2011; Céspedes Torres, 2009, 2010; World Bank, 2011). Also, while Costa Rica has a mature, stable democracy, El Salvador has a weak, transitional democracy after years of military rule and violence (White, 2009; McCoy, 2009).

Selecting these two countries, then, allowed for comparisons of contextual factors such as size of the diaspora community, impact of remittances on the local economy, political situation in each country, relative stability of the democratic system, presence or lack of recent crises (economic or political), and leadership style of the executive power, among others. These comparisons added explanatory power to the model presented in this study and to the theoretical propositions it advances for the study of state-diaspora relations in Central America.

This study understands global public relations as any "strategic communications and actions carried out by private, government, or nonprofit organizations to build and maintain relationships with publics in socioeconomic and political environments outside their home location" (Molleda, 2009, para. 10). Global public relations, then, is understood as the relationship-building efforts of an organization with publics located abroad (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault & Agee, 2007).

To understand the global public-relations strategies undertaken by El Salvador and Costa Rica to connect with their diaspora communities, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

- How do Costa Rica and El Salvador establish their communication and relationship-building goals with their respective diasporas? What are their motives and expectations?
- What entities in those governments are in charge of developing and accomplishing these communication and relationship-building goals?

- How do these governments integrate their respective diaspora into their public relations strategy?
- What is the impact of contextual variables (such as availability of resources or political relevance ascribed to each public) in this relationship-building process?

Methods

This study uses case-study methods (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to analyze the cases of Costa Rica and El Salvador, which were selected through purposeful sampling because, as described previously in the Literature Review section of this study (see, for instance, McCoy, 2009; and White, 2009), the characteristics of their diaspora communities in the United States place them at opposite sides of a continuum.

These differences offered a rich opportunity for comparing and contrasting the communication efforts that the states implement—or not—with their diasporas in the United States. In other words, these two cases allow for maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), a popular approach in qualitative studies because “when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives—an ideal in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126).

For both cases, this study analyzed in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher in person or by phone in 2011 and analyzed government documents (legislation pieces, strategic plans, news releases, speeches, migration reports, etc.) and audiovisual materials (TV and radio interviews, for instance) published or broadcasted mainly between 2009 and 2013, although a few documents dating back to 2006 were also included in the sample.

The documents and audiovisual materials were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In each document or audiovisual, the sentence was the unit of analysis. Each sentence was coded and assigned a label, and then it was compared to the next sentence. Sentences with the same labels were put under the same category. Salient labels (themes) were identified for each country and grouped into categories. These themes and categories were then compared between countries.

I conducted 20 in-depth interviews during the summer of 2011 with key informants (high-level government officials, politicians, academicians, and journalists from Costa Rica and El Salvador) (see Table 1) to supplement the document analysis. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes and other lessons. I stopped conducting in-depth interviews when the point of saturation was reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Table 1. List of Key Informants, Cited in Alphabetical Order by Country and Affiliation

Country	Key Informant	Affiliation	Interview Date, 2011
El Salvador	José Manuel Castillo	Direction for the Strengthening of Salvadoran Organizations Abroad, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	June 22
	José Joaquín Chacón	General consul in Tucson, Arizona	June 14
	Sulma Rivas	Member of PROESA	June 13
	María José Saavedra	Financial journalist/ <i>La Prensa Gráfica</i>	June 14
	Tirso Sermeño	General consul in Las Vegas	June 13
	Ricardo Valencia	Political counselor at El Salvador's embassy in Washington, D.C.	June 28
	Ana del Carmen Valenzuela	General consul in San Francisco, California	June 22
Costa Rica	Consular official	New York Consulate	June 7
	High-level gov. official #1	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	May 11
	High-level gov. official #2	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	May 11
	Gabriel Macaya	Academy of Sciences	May 12
	Álvaro Murillo	Political journalist/ <i>La Nación</i>	May 9
	Hugo Picado	Instituto de Formación y Estudios en Democracia; director, Electoral Supreme Court	May 10
	María Santos	Academy of Sciences	May 12
	Ottón Solís	Leader of Party Acción Ciudadana (PAC) and former presidential candidate	April 12
	Xinia Vargas	General consul in Los Angeles, California	June 23

Findings

Costa Rica and El Salvador are opposite cases when it comes to state-diaspora relations. Factors that undoubtedly contribute to these differences include the size of the migrant community and the impact that migrants' remittances play in the local economy. These differences are fundamental moderators that affect the characteristics and strength of the relationship. Nonetheless, this study found that other factors also play a relevant role.

Political Context

It would be easy to conclude that El Salvador shows high involvement with its diaspora because of the size of its migrant community and the relevance of remittances to its local economy. These factors do exist and moderate the relationship, but other aspects also play a relevant role, as the situation in the 1980s and early 1990s in El Salvador shows. At that time, the country had a large diasporic community, mainly in the United States, and their remittances had a strong impact in the local economy. What was not in place then was a political environment conducive to building solid government-diaspora relations like there exists now.

For the specific contextual reasons described next, the state basically ignored the Salvadoran diaspora in its discourse and policies in the 1980s and early 1990s (Organizacion Internacional para las Migraciones [OIM], 2007; PNUD, 2007). This illustrates the strong impact that contextual factors such as the political conditions of a country at a given time can have on the government-diaspora relationship-building process. In the 1980s, El Salvador suffered a civil war (White, 2009). The state had priorities, such as gaining stability, over courting its diaspora. After gaining political stability in 1992, El Salvador became a transitional democracy: stable but fragile, in need of allies within different sectors. The diaspora community became one of those allies in the late 1990s, and this alliance strengthened in the 21st century.

For the reasons explained above, the "faraway brother," as Salvadorans refer to migrants (María José Saavedra, financial journalist, personal communication, June 14, 2011), was not considered a priority in the 1980s or the early 1990s, there were few formal mechanisms to attract remittances, the topic of the defense of migrants' human rights was barely discussed, and granting absentee votes to migrants was not part of the political discussion (OIM, 2007; PNUD, 2007; White, 2009). Yet, the size of the migrant community and the impact of its remittances were as relevant then as they are now. Nonetheless, political instability was rampant at the time (White, 2009), so the state had to concentrate on other priorities, such as rebuilding from within, over building transnational alliances.

The state's current vision of the diaspora started to come about in the mid-1990s, when political forces reconfigured themselves in El Salvador: The Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) became a legitimate political party rather than a guerilla movement, and conservative party Alianza Revolucionaria Nacional (ARENA) started losing its domination of El Salvadoran politics (Menjívar, 2000; White, 2009).

This was a turning point on the path to democracy after the bloody civil war of 1979–1992, and this tendency of building a closer relationship with the diaspora intensified, especially after 1999 with the government of Francisco Flores (ARENA party), but the diaspora did not become a priority until 2004, with the government of Elías Antonio Saca (ARENA party) (Nosthas, 2006; OIM, 2007; PNUD, 2007). This trend became stronger with Mauricio Funes's government (FMLN party) in 2009 (Funes, 2011; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador, 2011; Tirso Sermeño, general consul of El Salvador in Las Vegas, personal communication, June 13, 2011; Ricardo Valencia, political counselor at El Salvador Embassy in Washington, D.C., personal communication, June 28, 2011).

Costa Rica, on the other hand, has always had a punctual involvement with its migrant community that has been neither present in the official discourse nor mentioned in government documents such as national plans for development (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Costa Rica, 2012), or foreign policy priorities (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Costa Rica, 2012). This has occurred even though Costa Rica has had political stability since 1948, when the country fought its last civil war. Costa Rica is one of the most stable, strong democracies in Latin America (Lijphart, 2012), and even though it has the political stability and financial conditions required to look beyond its borders, it does not have an urgent need to do so: The country is stable enough and its political system is legitimate enough that its political actors do not find it urgent to establish alliances beyond its borders, neither to attract resources nor to build political support.

According to the 2011 American Community Survey, in 2011 there were 127,652 Costa Ricans legally residing in the United States (Motel & Patten, 2013). This is about 2.7% of the Costa Rican population of 4.7 million (2013 estimate), although this official percentage does not include the Costa Rican migrants who are undocumented in the United States, a population that is hard to quantify. This official percentage of migrants is small compared to countries such as El Salvador, but as the 2006 elections in Costa Rica demonstrated, if, hypothetically, just 20% of these 127,652 migrants had voted for the same political party that year, these diaspora members could have changed the outcome of the elections (that year, Oscar Arias, candidate of PLN party, was elected president with less than 20,000 votes' difference over candidate Ottón Solís, of PAC party) (Rojas Bolanos, n.d.). This is, of course, just a hypothetical situation, but the diaspora community could have a decisive political impact at home, especially since absentee voting was granted for Costa Ricans living abroad starting with the national elections of February 2, 2014, which indicates that political actors in Costa Rica (i.e., parties and candidates) are missing the opportunity to engage this pool of voters.

Besides, the diaspora has a strong economic impact in certain agriculture-based areas of the country through remittances (Céspedes Torres, 2009, 2010). This migrant community, then, can have strong repercussions in the home country's political and economic life, even though this is not formally acknowledged by the state. In a stable democracy like Costa Rica, the government has not needed to form alliances with nontraditional sectors such as the diaspora.

In summary, the size of the migrant community and the financial impact that the diaspora has on the home economy are key differences between El Salvador and Costa Rica, and these moderate the differences in the state–diaspora relations of each country, but other factors beyond these, such as the

presence of a transitional democracy in El Salvador rather than a stable democracy in Costa Rica and the specific projects advanced by the president in each country, characterize and differentiate the state-diaspora relations in each case.

Differences Beyond Community Size and Remittances

In the last 20 years, but especially since 2004, El Salvador has recognized the difficulties that prompted the exit of its migrants. Hundreds of thousands of migrants left the country in the 1980s because of the 1979–1992 civil war (Menjivar, 2000; White, 2009). Millions more, deeply hurt by poverty, afraid of political instability and repression, hopeless about the future, followed in the 1990s and 2000s. Although El Salvador's financial hardships have not ended yet and keep pushing Salvadorans away, there has been a shift in the relationship-building process between the state and the diaspora in the last decade that has allowed the construction of closer relations (Nosthas, 2006; José Manuel Castillo, head of the Direction for the Strengthening of Salvadoran Organizations Abroad, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, personal communication, June 22, 2011; Martínez, 2011; Ana del Carmen Valenzuela, general consul of El Salvador in San Francisco, personal communication, June 22, 2011).

The state has gone from recognizing the importance of the diaspora to realizing that it needs the diaspora's contributions to survive. The state has also understood that it needs to create a win-win situation, replacing the current one-way process of asking for help without giving anything in return (J. M. Castillo, personal communication, June 22, 2011; OIM, 2007; M. J. Saavedra, personal communication, June 14, 2011; T. Sermeño, personal communication, June 13, 2011). Discussing a two-way process, Director José Manuel Castillo said:

This is a state vision. The fact that Salvadorans abroad become key actors and active participants in the country's development is a vision that crosses all the government institutions, and ends in the institutionalization of those processes. It is a vision that is being accompanied by the creation of mechanisms, attention structures, and formal procedures, where each government institution adopts a role of attention to the Salvadoran abroad. (personal communication, June 22, 2011)

A new way of governing. With president Elías Antonio Saca (2004–2009), the right-wing party ARENA adopted a more centrist political position and granted some benefits to migrants through the creation of the Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad, the organization of two Presidential Forums for Salvadorans Abroad, and the creation of several "consulates of protection," whose main objective is the protection of in-transit migrants (Nosthas, 2006; OIM, 2007; T. Sermeño, personal communication, June 13, 2011). This initial process of "courting the diaspora" (Kunz, 2008; Ragazzi, 2009) stemmed from the state's recognition that El Salvador needed to keep remittances coming and needed migrants' investments in local productive projects (J. M. Castillo, personal communication, June 22, 2011; M. J. Saavedra, pers. comm., June 14, 2011; R. Valencia, pers. comm., June 28, 2011; Ministerio, 2011). Besides, with leftist FMLN gaining more political power election after election, ARENA needed to form new alliances.

The 1980s' political and economic crises in El Salvador forced the state to look beyond its borders for support, which happened especially through the 2000s, making the diaspora responsible for the well-being of its communities of origin, reminding diaspora members about their identity as Salvadorans, even transnationally (Nosthas, 2006; Menjivar, 2000; PNUD, 2007; White, 2009), and telling Salvadorans abroad that the state cannot fund all the improvements needed at home. This is reflected, for example, in the mission statement of the Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad:

Given the importance of the compatriots who live out of our borders, the Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad considers that: *El Salvador is only thinkable, is only viable, and is only possible if Salvadorans abroad are included in the national development plans*. In this framework, the Vice-Ministry has as its fundamental objective the promotion of Salvadorans-abroad's rights and their access to opportunities for their inclusion in the national development. This is now the main function of the Salvadoran consulates in the administration of President Mauricio Funes. This new vision stems from a concept of sovereignty that transcends the exclusive protection of Salvadorans in some determined territory. (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador, 2011, paras. 3, 4, 5, italics in the original)

This position is congruent with the neoliberal policies adopted by El Salvador since the 1980s, when the state started diminishing in size, advocating for privatization of some state enterprises, decentralizing power, defending free trade, and expecting nontraditional sectors to contribute to the country's development. At the time, the state vision seemed to be summarized in this hypothetical statement: We need you, and we need your money, even though we practically forced you to leave the country.

Change of paradigm. When leftist party FMLN reached power for the first time in 2009, President Funes, consistent with the socialist ideology defended by FMLN, acknowledged the need for restitution to the migrant community; for incorporating migrants in a more active way in political, social, and financial life at home; for protecting migrants' human rights; and for protecting Salvadoran citizens at home and abroad (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador, 2011). Political counselor Ricardo Valencia explained:

Since President Mauricio Funes started his term in 2009, the commitment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been to reinforce the protection of the human rights of our migrants, no matter where they are located. This was a fundamental change in this government, which has a strategic vision about human rights. (personal communication, June 28, 2011)

Besides, as a first-timer leading the executive power, FMLN needed to establish itself as a party capable of governing the country. Also, as a party that won the 2009 elections by a narrow 2% margin, it had to establish an alliance with a base of voters who had been ignored, looked down upon, or neglected by other political forces in the past. Thus, Funes designated the diaspora as a key public for El Salvador, and

he frequently acknowledged the importance of the diaspora in his discourse (Funes, 2010, 2011; Ministerio, 2011). For example, in a speech on February 7, 2013, Funes said:

The Salvadoran democracy would not be complete without the vote of the Salvadorans who live abroad. It was first a dream and then a political campaign promise. That's why this afternoon, while signing this law that guarantees the vote of the Salvadoran men and women while abroad, I can say that this is a fact now, a reality, a new accomplished promise. (Funes, 2013)

The current Salvadoran state vision toward the diaspora seems to be an approximation of the following idea: We still need your money, but we know that we owe you. We want to give something back for your support, which we will continue to ask for.

As part of this change in paradigm, mainly since 2009, the Salvadoran state has emphasized restitution to the diaspora through some political concessions such as the absentee vote, beginning in the national elections of February 2, 2014, and the participation of diaspora members in productive projects that generate revenue for diaspora investors while creating jobs in the home country (R. Valencia, personal communication, June 28, 2011). Some of these projects have partial funding and technical assistance from the Salvadoran government through funds such as Unidos por la Solidaridad, Reto del Milenio, Fondo Social para la Vivienda, and Fondo de Desarrollo Productivo (PNUD, 2007; T. Sermeño, personal communication, June 13, 2011; R. Valencia, personal communication, June 28, 2011; J. M. Castillo, personal communication, June 22, 2011; Sulma Rivas, member of PROESA in El Salvador, personal communication, June 13, 2011).

At the institutional level, in the last 10 years, El Salvador has developed a stronger structure to serve its diaspora with the creation of the Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad, the General Direction of Migration and Development, the General Direction of Human Rights, and several "consulates of protection" (Nosthas, 2006; PNUD, 2007; T. Sermeño, personal communication, June 13, 2011; J. M. Castillo, personal communication, June 22, 2011; J. J. Chacón, general consul of El Salvador in Tucson, Arizona, personal communication, June 14, 2011). This is reflected in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Strategic Plan of 2009–2014, which indicates:

Sixth objective. Salvadorans abroad: The New Foreign Policy in El Salvador will not remain indifferent to migration and the demands of the citizens abroad. Because of that, it will promote a new conceptualization in the diplomatic and consular service oriented to provide integral protection to the Salvadoran people abroad and their families, as well as to reestablish and strengthen their links with the country, so that they can actively participate in the country's development. (Ministerio, 2009, p. 8)

Innovative partnerships. El Salvador has established innovative alliances by partnering with diaspora members, local community organizations, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), international funding agencies, municipalities, and other groups, mimicking what Iskander (2010) described for Mexico

and Morocco as the development of a "creative state," and placing more attention on relationship-building efforts with "the domestic abroad" (Varadarajan, 2010).

El Salvador has incorporated migrants' remittances in its future development to such a strong degree that in the years to come, the BRIDGE program will fund broad infrastructure projects and social initiatives in El Salvador using future remittances as collateral. In this innovative, binational relationship, the United States will loan money to El Salvador to develop social projects and to build infrastructure, and both El Salvador and the United States are counting on future remittances for El Salvador to pay back the loan (Belloso & Ramírez, 2010; Funes, 2011; M. J. Saavedra, personal communication, June 14, 2011; Laínez, 2010; R. Valencia, personal communication, June 28, 2011). This means that remittances have been fully institutionalized as part of the home GDP and incorporated as part of the country's foreign income. For this reason, El Salvador needs to guarantee that remittances will keep on coming and that migrants will keep on feeling responsible for the well-being of the homeland.

Socially and culturally, El Salvador's embassies and consulates constantly organize social, sport, and religious events with the diaspora—sometimes even bringing Salvadoran migrants to El Salvador to participate in forums, tournaments, and artistic encounters (J. M. Castillo, personal communication, June 22, 2011; R. Valencia, personal communication, June 28, 2011; A. C. Valenzuela, personal communication, June 22, 2011). Besides, El Salvador extensively uses several government sites, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds to stay connected with the diaspora.

Also, El Salvador has placed more attention on the communications developed by its Secretariat of Communications in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and on the communications that stem from the executive power, as the state has indicated that increasing transparency is one of its priorities in its interaction with Salvadorans abroad (Ministerio, 2011). Nonetheless, all these changes and discussions in El Salvador barely happen in Costa Rica, where the connection with the diaspora is limited mainly to the provision of consular services and punctual interactions for issues management.

Costa Rica: Low Levels of Government–Diaspora Interaction

In contrast to El Salvador, Costa Rica has had limited, punctual interactions with its diaspora community because the state considers it small and weak, in terms of its political and financial impact at home (Asamblea Legislativa, 2007; Céspedes Torres, 2010; World Bank, 2011). This is how the key interview participant designated as "high-level Costa Rican government official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs #1" described state–diaspora relations, in two separate instances:

The state–diaspora relation is very distant: It happens when someone has to renew a passport or run some errand. This is going to change because in 2014 a new law will allow them to vote while abroad, and also because of the impact of social networks. But, in the past, the importance given to this population has been pretty much zero. (personal communication, May 11, 2011)

The group [of Costa Ricans] living abroad is very small. It is not necessarily a group of unprotected rights. Many of them are people of solid academic formation, who work in corporations, who know how to defend themselves. There has been no need to develop relevant collective defenses of migrant workers or to face situations that happen in other countries. (personal communication, May 11, 2011)

The interaction of the Costa Rican state with its diaspora so far has been mainly limited to consular services offered in small embassies and consulates around the world (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Costa Rica [Ministerio], 2011; Consular official in New York, personal communication, June 7, 2011; high-level Costa Rican government official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs #2, personal communication, May 11, 2011; Xinia Vargas, general consul of Costa Rica in Los Angeles, California, personal communication, June 23, 2011). Low budgets allow for only a few cultural activities with the diaspora (high-level Costa Rican government official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs #2, May 11, 2011). "Consular official in New York" describes the situation:

Regretfully, we don't have the possibility of organizing cultural activities because, to do so, we need an appropriate place, human resources, and a budget, and we don't have any of those three things. (personal communication, June 7, 2011)

The diaspora, for example, is not mentioned in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' strategic plan (Ministerio, 2012), and several communication channels that could be used effectively and inexpensively to reach its members, such as the ministry's website or its Facebook page or Twitter feed, are not used to their fullest extent to engage this public or establish alliances. For instance, at the time of writing, the ministry's website was being used to provide general information about Costa Rican foreign policy, but there was no section targeted at the diaspora. The ministry's Facebook page was a resonance box for the its accomplishments and news instead of a mechanism for establishing dialogue and interaction. This page was handled as a bulletin board with comments, not as a relationship-building tool.

The few examples of meaningful state-diaspora communications have happened when issues needed to be managed. One occurred in March 2011 after a strong earthquake in Japan, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, using its Facebook page, successfully contacted the 300 Costa Ricans living in Japan to ask about their well-being (high-level Costa Rican government official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs #1, personal communication, May 11, 2011). Another happened between October 2010 and May 2011, when the ministry used its Facebook page to post messages, at least biweekly, asking sectors including the diaspora for support in its position regarding a border conflict with Nicaragua, a diplomatic issue that was successfully taken to the International Court in The Hague.

A third instance has been happening since 2010, when Ticotal, an academic virtual network, was established on the website www.ticotal.cr by the Costa Rican Academy of Sciences (linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology) to connect Costa Rican faculty and researchers at home and abroad (Gabriel Macaya, president of the Costa Rican Academy of Sciences, personal communication, May 12, 2011; María Santos, project manager at the Costa Rican Academy of Sciences, personal communication, May 12, 2011). And perhaps the most sustained effort of state-diaspora communications has been the two-year

program undertaken by the Costa Rican Electoral Supreme Court since February 2012 to inform the Costa Rican diaspora about the absentee vote. Most of those informational materials can be found at the Voto Costarricense en el Extranjero website (Costa Rican Vote Abroad, at <http://www.tse.go.cr/votext/votext.htm>). Some information was also posted on the ministry's Facebook page (for example, on July 15, 19, 23, and 26, 2010).

Recognition. The process of recognition of the diaspora's importance has barely started in Costa Rica, even though migrants send more than \$500 million a year in remittances (Banco Central de Costa Rica, 2011), even though their contributions are essential for the well-being of their families in certain agriculture-based regions of the country (Céspedes Torres, 2010; Leitón, 2010), and even though migrants could eventually change the outcome of the presidential elections if they united to support a specific candidate. Truly, the Costa Rican diaspora is smaller and weaker than the Salvadoran, but the Costa Rican diaspora has a relevant financial impact at home and could have a political influence that has not been recognized by the Costa Rican state.

The political impact of the Costa Rican diaspora could be much stronger if this community were better organized to tout its existence, showcase its importance, and voice its opinions (in the last regard, there are opportunities for diaspora-led public relations to be developed). Given the size of the country and the impact that the executive power has on national priorities, a relationship-building program to increase the diaspora's interaction with the president and other leaders in Congress, political parties, and municipalities—supported with some media relations to build awareness—could go a long way.

Some experts estimate that the political impact of the diaspora will become stronger after 2014 (when the absentee vote began) (Hugo Picado, director of the Instituto de Formación y Estudios en Democracia, Electoral Supreme Court, personal communication, May 10, 2011). In the first absentee vote, 12,654 Costa Ricans registered to vote in 61 voting centers in 42 countries (Ruiz Ramón, 2014). The number of absentee voters needs to increase and logistical barriers need to be lifted for this new political right to be a success. For instance, right now, the absentee vote can only be exerted in person in a consulate or embassy, which involves traveling hundreds of miles for many Costa Ricans and thus lowers the motivation to vote (Ruiz Ramón, 2014). However, the absentee vote is a process whose logistics could be improved over time.

Moving from the political influence to the financial one, diaspora remittances have a strong impact in certain areas of the country (Leitón, 2010; Céspedes Torres, 2010), and it is in those areas that diaspora members could start demanding stronger attention from local governments. Also, because Costa Rica is a small country, with only 57 congressional representatives, the diaspora could establish public relations efforts with the goal of engaging local congressional representatives and local city majors. What is true is that so far, Costa Rica has not started the process that El Salvador initiated 20 years ago. Furthermore, the Costa Rican Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have the structure it needs to serve the diaspora, as El Salvador does.

Costa Rica is more concerned with being heard at international forums such as the United Nations, where the country has tried to gain a stronger presence in various committees, than with serving

its citizens abroad. Political leader Ottón Solís, of PAC party, call this position "petulant" and "cruel" toward the migrants (O. Solís, leader of PAC party and former presidential candidate, personal communication, April 12, 2011). Others think that this attitude is not based on arrogance but on the ministry's lack of awareness about the importance of this public (Alvaro Murillo, political journalist at newspaper *La Nación*, personal communication, May 9, 2011). Furthermore, Costa Rica has no programs for migrants to start productive projects at home.

Activism by the Costa Rican diaspora could raise awareness among government officials, but, up to this point, Costa Rican migrants have not been able to organize themselves in a long-term, meaningful structure to exert pressure on the home government.

Discussion, Limitations, and Further Research

The comparative analysis of the state-diaspora relations maintained by El Salvador and Costa Rica highlighted key differences in the way these countries have managed their relationship-building process. El Salvador has made stronger steps more quickly to connect with its diaspora, but these steps have been made after a process of self-analysis and maturation that has taken about 20 years to develop, a period in which the Salvadoran state changed its vision, long-term policies, bureaucratic processes, structures, and flexible multisector partnerships. This process has not fully started in Costa Rica, at least not beyond punctual interactions and traditional consular services constrained by low budgets and the absence of a clear state vision.

Based on the previous analysis, this article offers eight propositions that contribute to building theories in the field of state-diaspora relations for Central America and then introduces a model of state-diaspora relations that highlights some factors that seem to strengthen or weaken the relationship between a state and its diaspora in Costa Rica and El Salvador.

Theoretical Propositions

The following eight propositions can inform future research in the field of state-diaspora relations.

- Proposition 1: The size of the diaspora community moderates the strength of the relationship between the state and its diaspora: The larger the diaspora community, the stronger the attention the state gives to this relationship-building process.
- Proposition 2: The financial impact of the diaspora's remittances on the home-country's economy moderates the strength of the relationship between the state and its diaspora. The stronger the financial impact, the stronger the attention the state gives to this relationship-building process.
- Proposition 3: The strength of the state-diaspora relationship is also moderated by the political projects and priorities of the executive power, especially of the president. The

stronger the president's interest in the diaspora, the stronger the state-diaspora relationship.

- Proposition 4: State-diaspora relations can change, even drastically, from one political term to the next, depending on the president's priorities at a given time. These priorities can weigh more heavily than political goals established in national plans of development or institutional strategic plans.
- Proposition 5: State-diaspora relations are not monolithic but fluid, constantly evolving, and likely to be shaped by the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and historical contexts in the home and host countries.
- Proposition 6: The existence of a democratic government or a stable financial situation in the home country does not guarantee that the state will establish public relations efforts with its diaspora.
- Proposition 7: The creation of communication products such as websites, social media, news releases, speeches, brochures, magazines, and bulletins to engage the diaspora are an indicator of the quality of a state-diaspora relationship because the presence of communication products indicates stronger state-diaspora connections than in their absence, especially when these products allow two-way communication, but this media presence does not suffice to evaluate the quality of the relationship.
- Proposition 8: The guilt, retribution, or it's-up-to-you factor can play a role in the strengthening of state-diaspora relations in political regimes with legitimacy issues or facing economic crises.

Based on these propositions, the following model of state-diaspora relations highlights what seem to be, from the government viewpoint, the main factors that moderate the strength of the relationship between the state and the diaspora in the cases of Costa Rica and El Salvador. The model put forth here is an initial representation of factors. This model can serve as a starting point for analyzing other cases in Latin America and around the world and for comparing and contrasting the common circumstances and unique characteristics of each case. The model, then, is a contribution to the study of state-diaspora relations on a global scale, but it has to be further revised and tested so that it can be supported or contested. The model offers a benchmark for further research, but it is just a starting point.

Implications of the Propositions and Model of State-Diaspora Relations for Public Relations

The importance of contextual factors on the formation of state-diaspora relations indicates that diaspora communities have to be analyzed as complex publics, as fluid audiences, as heterogeneous groups that do not usually fit the rigid categories of publics offered in the past by public-relations typologies (Grunig, 1992; Hallahan, 2000). Instead, these communities can be studied using cultural-economic models of public relations (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). A contribution of this paper to the field of

global public relations is the realization that, counter to previous indications that public relations thrive in democratic societies and stable economies (Sharpe & Pritchard, 2004; Cutlip, 1994), state-diaspora relations can become stronger in transitional democracies with stable but fragile political contexts than in solid democracies.

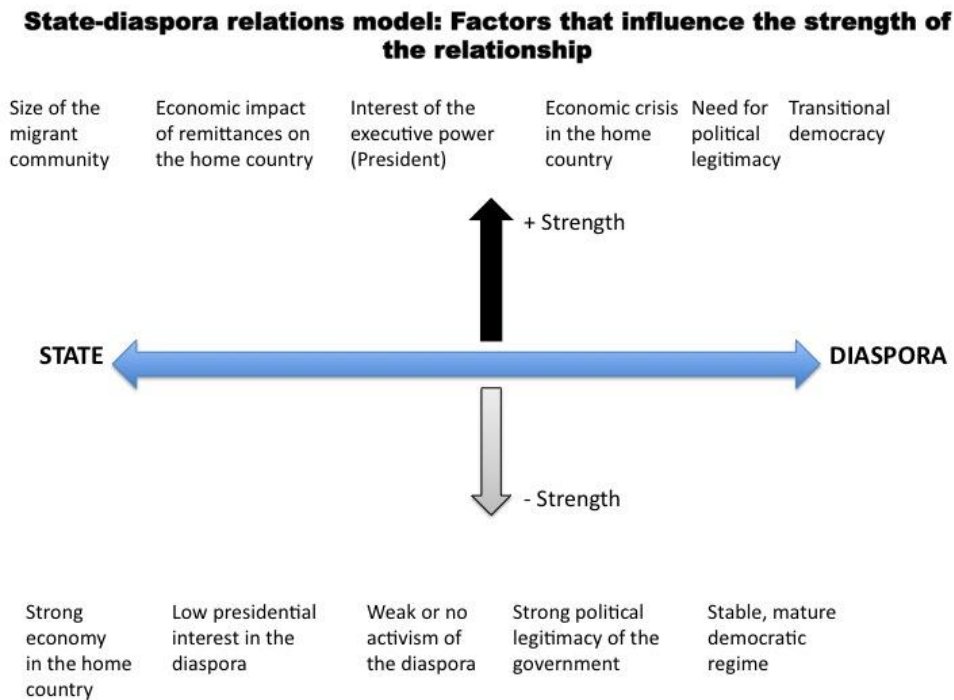


Figure 1. State-diaspora relations model.

Applying the model (Figure 1) to the cases of El Salvador and Costa Rica, the model explains and predicts that in countries with large diaspora communities that significantly impact the home economy through remittances and where transitional democracies or economic crises exist, the state-diaspora relationship will be stronger, especially when the executive power has a strong interest in building this relationship.

In contrast, the state-diaspora relationship will be weaker in countries where the diaspora community is smaller and contributes less to the home economy and where the local economy is strong, the political legitimacy is healthy, the democratic regime is mature, and the executive power does not pay particular attention to building this relationship, especially when the diaspora itself shows low levels of activism. This is precisely what happens in El Salvador and Costa Rica: while the fragility of El Salvador has forced the state to build transnational alliances, the stability of Costa Rica has allowed the state to maintain a weak, punctual relationship with its diaspora.

State–diaspora relationships in El Salvador seem to have strengthened under conditions of hardship: Economic crises and transitional democracies seem to be environments under which states are forced to engage diasporas strongly (using public-relations strategies and tactics, whether they are labeled as such or not) to support the national economy and to offer legitimacy to the political system, whereas conditions of political stability and economic progress, at least in the case of Costa Rica, have not been conducive to strong state–diaspora relations, as the state is not forced to engage, “flirt,” “court,” or “cultivate” the diaspora (Kunz, 2008; Ragazzi, 2009) to obtain economic or political gains.

For public-relations practitioners in the United States, this study describes the complexities of and the challenges faced by a public formed by immigrants, by Hispanic immigrants in particular, a growing population and a public that most corporations and organizations are trying to engage. But trying to engage this public without understanding how the contexts of exit from the home country and reception in the host country and how the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the community itself shape the diaspora experience is a sure path for the failure of projects aimed at Hispanic publics.

For diaspora groups from Central America living in the United States, this study indicates that activism efforts should concentrate on establishing or improving government relations at the top level, especially with the president, party leaders, and congressional members, and that because the strength of the relationship between a state and its diaspora can vary so drastically between one political term and the next, a strong stewardship on the part of the diaspora is essential to maintaining the relationship and obtaining political gains in transitional times (for instance, during electoral campaigns).

Diaspora-led public-relations campaigns can help raise awareness about the size of the diaspora community, the impact that the community has on the local economy, and the various contributions the community offers to the home country (for instance, technology transfer and education opportunities for relatives at home). Public relations can also help to raise awareness about the need to offer stronger political rights at home and human rights defense abroad to the diaspora, offerings that are already happening in El Salvador but have not yet developed in Costa Rica (except for the absentee vote). Disadvantageous conditions in the home country such as economic crises and weak democracies actually constitute opportunities for diasporas to increase their presence at home, to gain political rights, and to obtain financial benefits.

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this study is that it presents only the government viewpoint, without including the perspective of the diaspora. The process of building state–diaspora relations and the interpretation of the factors that seem to moderate the strength of the relationship are explored based on data collected only from government documents and in-depth interviews, not the migrants’ perspective. This research project thus constitutes a starting point in a growing research agenda that will explore, in the future, the “other side”: the diaspora communities’ perspectives.

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