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FOREWORD

**THE CALIBAJA BORDER, THE GATEWAY TO A
CROSS-BORDER REALITY**

MARCELA CELORIO*

ABSTRACT

As a cross-border consul, I deal with “single stories” about Mexico, Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the border region on a daily basis. “Single stories” is a concept that represents a reductionist way of describing individuals, communities, and even countries, where “a people [are shown] as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.”¹ CaliBaja is a large border region

* Ambassador of Mexico since April 28, 2017, and holds a law degree from the Mexican law school: “Escuela Libre de Derecho.” She has worked in the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where as Director for Nationality and Naturalization she promoted the recognition of dual nationality, which resulted in the constitutional reform of 1997 and the issuance of the new Nationality Law of 1998. Subsequently, she served as Director of Protection Policies and then as Director for the United States of America’s office at the Ministry. From 2002 to 2006, she served as political advisor and Chief of Staff in the Mexican Embassy, where she gained expertise in subjects

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comprised of San Diego County, Imperial County, and Baja California's five municipalities: Tijuana, Ensenada, Mexicali, Tecate, and Playas de Rosarito.² When "single stories" about CaliBaja become generalized conceptions and myths, they threaten to dominate the public's perception of the region, undermine the area's progress, and create lasting cultural division. Myths have polluted the understanding of the United States' southern border. In this essay, I focus on specific myths by analyzing the following statements that are meant to embody the general perceptions I have encountered during my work and personal experiences and that are frequently expressed in discussions of the U.S.-Mexico border. The following statements represent the four major myths about the United States' southern border: (1) "All immigration and border crossings through the U.S.-Mexico border are illegal or have a negative connotation"; (2) "The border is an unsafe, dangerous, and inefficient place"; (3) "Mexican and U.S. authorities at the border do not coordinate with each other"; (4) "Mexicans who come to the United States steal Americans' jobs and do not contribute to U.S. economic development."

In this essay, I present the case of CaliBaja—a prime counterexample to the myths those statements represent, which have almost become legitimized preconceptions of the U.S.-Mexico border

like integration, security, and regional development. From 2013 to 2016, she was appointed as Deputy Consul at the Consulate General of Mexico in New York, where she co-led the implementation of various initiatives for the empowerment of the Mexican community. From 2016 to 2019, she served as Consul General de Mexico in San Diego, California. Her work at the border centered on implementing a cross-border consular diplomacy model for overseeing the CaliBaja region. Since June 2019, after appointment by the President of Mexico and ratification by the Mexican Senate, she has served as Consul General de Mexico in Los Angeles, California. From this position, she promotes a consular diplomacy that stands for the principles and values that unite Mexico and California, such as human rights, freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination, among others.

1. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Talk Presented at TEDGlobal 2009: The Danger of a Single Story (July 2009) (transcript available at https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en).

2. Christine Clark, *Report: Cali Baja Mega-Region Exports \$24.3B Worth of Goods, Services Internationally*, UC SAN DIEGO NEWS CTR. (July 13, 2018), https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/report_cali_baja_mega_region_exports_24.3_b_worth_of_goods_services_internationally; *Baja California*, HISTORY, <https://www.history.com/topics/mexico/baja-california> (last updated Aug. 21, 2018).

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region. In June 2016, I was assigned to the CaliBaja region. Before my assignment, I spent a considerable time determining the unique characteristics of CaliBaja and the best approach for addressing its needs.³ Accordingly, I adapted the classic consular diplomacy approach and developed my cross-border consular diplomacy model. I internalized this model by making it a personal motto and using it to create an identity for my current role as the Consul General of Mexico in San Diego.⁴ I also wanted to use this model to assist future Consuls who succeeded me. To provide for the bi-national community's needs, I fought to dispel the myths that overshadow CaliBaja, particularly by highlighting Mexican Americans' various contributions and strong attempts to establish an identity. Nevertheless, an integrative approach cannot address these issues that degrade CaliBaja without the work and support of allies and stakeholders; this essay duly recognizes their assistance. Ultimately, I could not have fulfilled my role as Consul if I had not critically examined the myths that have defined the general public's perception of the U.S.-Mexico border.

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3. See generally *A producir "mexicanistas,"* NEWSWEEK MEX. (Sept. 25, 2017), <https://newsweekspanol.com/2017/09/a-producir-mexicanistas/> (examining UCSD's Institute of the Americas' fundamental goal to foster knowledge and discussions about Mexico and U.S.-Mexico relations that can be useful in generating sensible public policies). I studied at UCSD's Institute of the Americas', and as Consul General of Mexico in San Diego, we established a good relationship with the Institute.

4. At the time of publication, the author had moved to serve as the Consul General of Mexico in Los Angeles, California.

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INTRODUCTION

What do you call the epicenter of a network of communities, economic actors, political leaders, and binational authorities? What do you call an economic driver so powerful that its success has been compared to that of a country? What do you call a territory so closely connected that its citizens even share the water they drink? What do you call a region so interdependent and intertwined, where borders seem to blur because of constant transit? Would you call this a border region? Would we risk limiting our understanding of such a complex society to satisfy our conventional understanding of cities and countries? Those are the questions I find myself asking every time I seek to present the case of CaliBaja. Critically examining the myths that surround the region is an important step toward understanding these challenging questions.

I. FOUR MAJOR MYTHS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES’
SOUTHERN BORDER

In her Ted Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discusses the danger of understanding individuals, communities, societies, and even

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countries, by what she refers to as “single stories.”⁵ These single stories about the CaliBaja border region permeate the rest of the country and the world, developing into generalized conceptions that ultimately divide an interconnected region—a difficult problem to remedy.

In this essay, I focus on disputing the four major myths and analyzing how these false notions of the border were established. I attempt to impart a more accurate understanding by sharing facts, success stories, and my personal experiences with both the government and the private sector’s involvement in the border region’s dynamic. I conclude by sharing the main elements of my cross-border consular diplomacy model. This model aims to effectively address the region’s objectives by understanding and addressing the needs of a bi-national community, which are best understood through studying empirical and factual data.

II. TACKLING THE MYTHS

A. Myth One: “All Immigration and Border Crossings Through the U.S.-Mexico Border Are Illegal or Have a Negative Connotation”

1. The Resurgence and Proliferation of Myth One

Immigration is a major form of border crossing into the United States, and it is a subject that has been repeatedly discussed by the media, electoral campaigns, and political forums regarding U.S.-Mexico relations.⁶ In 2016, hostile anti-immigration rhetoric re-

5. Adichie, *supra* note 1.

6. See, e.g., Vera Bergengruen, *Why the First Democratic Debates Will Force 2020 Candidates to Get Serious About Immigration Policy*, TIME (June 25, 2019), <https://time.com/5614124/2020-democratic-debate-miami-immigration/>; Seema Mehta & Matt Pearce, *2020 Democratic Candidates Vow to Undo Trump’s Immigration Actions*, LA TIMES (May 31, 2019, 9:55 PM), <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-democratic-presidential-candidates-2020-pasadena-immigration-20190531-story.html>; Ashish Kumar Sen, *Halting the ‘Caravans,’* ATLANTIC COUNCIL (Apr. 3, 2018), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/halting-the-caravans>. See generally Claire Felter & Danielle Renwick, *The U.S. Immigration Debate*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-immigration-debate-0> (last updated July 25, 2019).

emerged during the U.S. presidential campaigns.⁷ With Trump's campaign, the world witnessed an intense and direct diatribe toward Mexico and Mexican immigrants in the United States.⁸ After Donald Trump's election as the President of the United States, his campaign strategies became administration policies, which is best exemplified by the executive orders President Trump signed that were tailored to discourage immigration.⁹ Consequently, some Americans started to believe that "all immigration and border crossings through the U.S.-Mexico border are illegal or have a negative connotation."

2. *CaliBaja: A Prime Counterexample of Myth One*

During the first months of the Trump administration, many actions taken on immigration were incompatible with the realities of CaliBaja. In this mega region, immigration and other types of border crossings that result from trade and cross-border employment are an intrinsic part of social development.¹⁰ Thus, crossing the border is understood as a natural consequence fostered by both territorial proximity and successful binational cooperation. Data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) shows that in 2018 more than seventy-six million people crossed the border from Baja California, Mexico, into the United States, averaging more than six million crossings per month.¹¹ For many CaliBaja inhabitants and others throughout the United States, constant border crossings have become a routine part of life. Therefore, it is significant that developments in border infrastructure and advancements in technology have improved the efficiency and

7. See, e.g., Suzanne Gamboa et al., *Trump Ends Convention as He Started Campaign: Linking Immigrants to Crime*, NBC NEWS (July 21, 2016, 8:36 PM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2016-conventions/trump-ends-convention-he-started-campaign-linking-immigrants-crime-n614551>.

8. See Katie Reilly, *Here Are All the Times Donald Trump Insulted Mexico*, TIME (Aug. 31, 2016), <http://time.com/4473972/donald-trump-mexico-meeting-insult/>.

9. See, e.g., Exec. Order No. 13,767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8,793 (Jan. 30, 2017).

10. WOODROW WILSON INT'L CTR. FOR SCHOLARS, THE U.S-MEXICO BORDER ECONOMY IN TRANSITION 6-7, 11-12 (Erik Lee & Christopher Wilson eds., Feb. 2014), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Border_Economy_Transition_Wilson_Lee%20%282%29.pdf.

11. Information shared to the Consulate General of Mexico by CBP passengers' monthly meeting.

feasibility of a border commute. For the people of CaliBaja, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border is just another stage of their commute.¹² Personally, I have crossed the border twice or even three times in one day. Due to the reality and importance of border commutes, stakeholders work to build a more efficient border that can promote CaliBaja's legitimate border dynamic, with the Smart Border Coalition (SBC) taking the lead.

a. Facilitating the CaliBaja Experience

Since its establishment, SBC's mission has been to develop "[a] border managed to bring the people of San Diego County and the Tijuana Metropolitan Area closer together in shared success and prosperity, setting a world standard for border innovation."¹³ SBC is a coalition of stakeholders that works to share relevant information about stakeholders' programs and initiatives, develop understanding on port of entry issues, propose new ideas, and fund initiatives that mobilize public and private entities toward multiparty solutions.¹⁴ SBC formulates and advances initiatives through infrastructure investment, technological applications, and regulatory and administrative actions.¹⁵ SBC helps improve people's access to ports of entry by advocating for programs like SENTRI, Global Entry, and commuter cards.¹⁶ Additionally, SBC uses social media to deliver its message about the importance of border crossings to a larger audience.¹⁷ SBC is effectuating its vision through these actions that are creating more efficient ports of entry, including an enhanced user experience at the border.

12. See, e.g., Eileen Guo, *The Border Commuters*, THE OUTLINE (Sept. 8, 2017, 10:01 AM), <https://theoutline.com/post/2219/the-border-commuters?zd=1&zi=r76bwgnc>.

13. *About the Smart Border Coalition*, SMART BORDER COAL., <https://smartbordercoalition.com/about-us> (last visited Nov. 2, 2019).

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. See Andrea Lopez-Villafañá, *Border Advocates Push for Port of Entry Improvements*, SMART BORDER COAL.: IN THE NEWS, <https://smartbordercoalition.com/blog/in-the-news/border-advocates-push-for-port-of-entry-improvements> (last visited Nov. 2, 2019).

17. See, e.g., @SmartBorderCali, TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/SmartBorderCali> (last visited Nov. 2, 2019).

*b. United States and CaliBaja:
Changes in Demographics and Apprehensions*

For people living in CaliBaja, an efficient border has allowed them to travel freely between the United States and Mexico on a daily basis, whether for work, shopping, or leisure. Additionally, affordable housing in the Mexican side of Baja California, specifically Tijuana, may increasingly attract Americans seeking a more affordable life, to lease or purchase property in that area.¹⁸ This may be particularly true for San Diegan residents as housing costs continue to rise.¹⁹ There are already many Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans who live in Tijuana but work in San Diego.²⁰ With increases in the United States' costs of living, fewer Mexicans may seek an undocumented life in the United States. As of 2019, illegal immigration in the CaliBaja mega region is no longer an issue exclusively attributable to Mexicans.²¹ Since fiscal year 2016, this shift in the makeup of apprehensions has been a consistent trend throughout the U.S.-Mexico border.²² Fiscal year 2018 represented the third time on record that there were more apprehensions of non-Mexicans than Mexicans at U.S. borders (the first was in fiscal year 2014).²³ In fiscal year 2018, CBP apprehended 152,257 Mexicans, a major decline from fiscal year 2000 when the number peaked at 1.6 million apprehensions.²⁴

18. See Phillip Molnar, *Is Tijuana a Viable Housing Alternative for San Diegans?*, SAN DIEGO UNION TRIB. (Oct. 7, 2016, 9:00 AM), <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/business/real-estate/sd-fi-tijuana-housing-20161006-htmllstory.html>.

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.*

21. John Gramlich & Luis Noe-Bustamante, *What's Happening at the U.S.-Mexico Border in 6 Charts*, PEW RES. CTR.: FACTTANK NEWS IN THE NUMBERS (Apr. 10, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/whats-happening-at-the-u-s-mexico-border-in-6-charts/> (“Non-Mexicans accounted for 80% of apprehensions in fiscal 2019, marking the fourth consecutive year in which they outnumbered Mexicans.”).

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* (the data begins from fiscal year 2000).

24. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera & Jens Manuel Krogstad, *What We Know About Illegal Immigration from Mexico*, PEW RES. CTR.: FACTTANK NEWS IN THE NUMBERS (June 28, 2019), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/03/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

“The decline in apprehensions reflects a decrease in the number of unauthorized Mexican immigrants coming to the [United States].”²⁵ Mexican immigration, both documented and undocumented, has lowered, and the number of Mexicans leaving the United States has increased.²⁶ Between 2005 and 2010—for the first time in four decades—net migration flow from Mexico to the United States decreased to zero.²⁷ In fact, “from 2009 to 2014, 1 million Mexicans and their families (including U.S.-born children) left the [United States] for Mexico, according to data from the 2014 Mexican National Survey of Demographic Dynamics.”²⁸ Similarly, “U.S. census data for the same period show[s] [that] an estimated 870,000 Mexican nationals left Mexico to come to the [United States], a smaller number than the flow of families from the [United States] to Mexico.”²⁹ Thus, contrary to popular rhetoric, the number of Mexicans illegally immigrating to the United States has diminished.

The decrease in illegal immigration is also attributable to people increasingly attaining proper documentation and becoming naturalized. Mexican immigrants have worked to successfully integrate into the United States. Some Mexican immigrants seek to immigrate to the United States to study and invest. Activities like studying and investing in the United States can help Mexican immigrants and their families understand the system and fully integrate. Pew Research Center estimates that “there were 11.6 million immigrants from Mexico living in the United States in 2017, and fewer than half of them (43%) were in

25. *Id.*

26. Jeffrey S. Passel, D’Vera Cohn & Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero — and Perhaps Less*, PEW RES. CTR.: HISPANIC TRENDS (Apr. 23, 2012), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2012/08/06/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less> [hereinafter *Net Migration*]; Jeffrey S. Passel & D’Vera Cohn, *Mexicans Decline to Less than Half the U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population for the First Time*, PEW RES. CTR.: FACTTANK NEWS IN THE NUMBERS (June 12, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/us-unauthorized-immigrant-population-2017/>.

27. *Net Migration*, *supra* note 26.

28. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *More Mexicans Leaving than Coming to the U.S.*, PEW RES. CTR. (Nov. 19, 2015), <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/11/19/more-mexicans-leaving-than-coming-to-the-u-s/>.

29. *Id.*

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the country illegally.”³⁰ Since 2007, there has been a decrease of two million: “[i]n 2017, 4.9 million unauthorized immigrants from Mexico lived in the [United States], down from a peak of 6.9 million in 2007.”³¹ Moreover, Mexico represents the largest group of legal immigrants; in 2015, approximately 2.5 million Mexican immigrants had naturalized and “another 3.5 million were eligible to naturalize.”³² Nevertheless, “Mexican immigrants have long had among the lowest U.S. naturalization rates (42%) of any origin group.”³³

The data illustrates how Mexican nationals, in pursuit of a better life, abide by the legal framework to make the United States their home. Although many people of Mexican descent may be viewed as illegal immigrants, they are part of a “Mexamerican” population.³⁴ This group is partly comprised of Mexicans who were born in the United States and who encourage their family members to seek admission to the United States through legal channels.³⁵ Moreover, the high number of Mexicans eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship demonstrates that not all Mexican immigrants cross the border illegally. Myths to the contrary do not help develop better border practices or accomplish comprehensive immigration reform.

30. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera & Jens Manuel Krogstad, *What We Know About Illegal Immigration from Mexico*, PEW RES. CTR. (June 28, 2019), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/03/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

31. *Id.*

32. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera & Jens Manuel Krogstad, *Naturalization Rate Among U.S. Immigrants up Since 2005, with India Among the Biggest Gainers*, PEW RES. CTR. (Jan. 18, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/18/naturalization-rate-among-u-s-immigrants-up-since-2005-with-india-among-the-biggest-gainers/>. For its analysis on naturalization rates, Pew Research Center considered “all lawful immigrants who are age 18 or older and have been in the U.S. for at least five years (three for those married to a U.S. Citizen)” as eligible to apply for citizenship. *Id.*

33. *Id.*

34. FEY BERMAN, *MEXAMÉRICA: UNA CULTURA NACIENDO* 11-13 (Primera edición, edicionesproceso Agosto 2017).

35. *See id.*

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B. Myth Two: “The Border Is an Unsafe, Dangerous, and Inefficient Place”

1. The Trump Administration Versus the Data

On January 8, 2019, President Trump addressed the nation on the crisis at the border.³⁶ In portraying the border and explaining the crisis, President Trump stated the following:

Our southern border is a pipeline for vast quantities of illegal drugs, including meth, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl. Every week, 300 of our [American] citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90[%] of which floods across from our southern border. . . . In the last two years, ICE officers made 266,000 arrests of aliens with criminal records, including those charged or convicted of 100,000 assaults, 30,000 sex crimes, and 4,000 violent killings. Over the years, thousands of Americans have been brutally killed by those who illegally entered our country, and thousands more lives will be lost if we don't act right now.³⁷

President Trump's statement intended to emphasize the need for a border wall.³⁸ He sought to epitomize a false border crisis that justified Congress' approval of a \$5.7 billion plan to finance a border wall.³⁹ All of these arguments are used to legitimize one of President's Trump fundamental promises to his electorate: the construction of a border wall between the United States and Mexico.⁴⁰ According to the President and supporters within the GOP, this commitment would finally extinguish an unsafe, dangerous, and inefficient border.⁴¹ It is natural to feel empathy and fear when hearing about loss of life or about data regarding drugs and criminal activities. However, the use of these

36. President Donald J. Trump, President Donald J. Trump's Address to the Nation on the Crisis at the Border (Jan. 8, 2019), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-address-nation-crisis-border/>.

37. *Id.*

38. *Id.*

39. *Id.*

40. See *Trump's Campaign Promises—Has He Delivered on Them?*, BBC NEWS (Dec. 24, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-37982000>.

41. See President Donald J. Trump, *supra* note 36.

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stories to build generalized perceptions of the U.S.-Mexico border as a highly dangerous zone (including raising questions about the port authorities' efficiency at tackling criminal activities) disregards the progress that has been made in border security and impedes future improvements.

Contrary to President Trump's statements, there is data supporting the argument that areas near the border are safer than portrayed. Looking at data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports for 2017, the Cato Institute concluded that counties situated along the border have a substantially lower per capita crime rate than U.S. counties that are not next to the border.⁴² Furthermore, "22 of the 23 border counties are safer than similarly sized counties elsewhere."⁴³ In CaliBaja, "[t]he city of San Diego consistently ranks among the safest big cities in the [United States], but [in 2017]— when it came to violent crime — it was the safest."⁴⁴ Consequently, many theories have emerged to explain the decreasing crime rate, particularly in large U.S. cities like San Diego. One theory suggests that San Diego's large immigrant population contributes to preventing a high crime rate because "certain characteristics of immigrants act as a sort of buffer against crime."⁴⁵ Those characteristics involve a tendency for immigrants "to arrive with families that include children and grandparents who go on to live in the same house. More adults in a house can mean higher incomes and more supervision for children"—factors that can influence whether one engages in criminal activity.⁴⁶ From my own experiences, I have found that the vast majority of Mexican immigrants are hardworking, peaceful people who made the difficult choice to leave behind everything they

42. Alex Nowrasteh, *Crime Along the Mexican Border Is Lower than in the Rest of the Country*, CATO INST.: CATO AT LIBERTY (Jan. 8, 2019, 4:54 PM), <https://www.cato.org/blog/crime-along-mexican-border-lower-rest-country>.

43. *Will the Courts Let Donald Trump Build His Wall?*, ECONOMIST (Feb. 21, 2019), <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2019/02/21/will-the-courts-let-donald-trump-build-his-wall>.

44. Lyndsay Winkley & Lauryn Schroeder, *San Diego Boasted Lowest Violent Crime Rate of Biggest Cities Last Year*, SAN DIEGO UNION TRIB. (Sep. 26, 2018, 6:10 PM), <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/sd-me-fbi-crime-20180925-story.html>.

45. *Id.*

46. *Id.*

know to seize opportunities in other countries that offer hope for a better life.

Contrary to the Trump Administration's position that narcotics enter the United States because of an inadequate southern border wall, most drugs entering through the U.S.-Mexico border pass through legal ports of entry.⁴⁷ According to CBP's statistics on drug seizures that occurred between October 17, 2017, and July 18, 2018, 90% of heroin seized along the border, 88% of cocaine, 87% of methamphetamine, and 80% of fentanyl was caught during smuggling attempts at legal crossing points.⁴⁸ Therefore, the data reveals that the Trump Administration's position does not accurately reflect the reality of the U.S.-Mexico border. To counteract the false portrayal of the U.S.-Mexico border, people involved in the dynamics of a unique binational community such as CaliBaja often share cross-border success cases.

Those success cases often emphasize the mutual benefits that a cross-border connection generates. CaliBaja is often referred to as an interdependent region.⁴⁹ For example, "[t]he economies of San Diego, Imperial, and Baja California are complementary, relying on one another to supply labor."⁵⁰ Additionally, Mexico is San Diego's main trading partner.⁵¹ "San Diego's exports to Mexico, at almost \$6 billion per year, are five times its exports to Canada [its second largest trading partner,] . . . [which is] due [largely] to cross border production with

47. Gina Martinez & Abigail Abrams, *Trump Repeated Many of His Old Claims About the Border to Justify the State of Emergency. Here Are the Facts*, TIME (Feb. 15, 2019, 2:39 PM), <https://time.com/5530506/donald-trump-emergency-border-fact-check/>.

48. Adam Isacson, *The U.S. Government's 2018 Border Data Clearly Shows Why the Trump Administration Is on the Wrong Track*, WOLA (Nov. 9, 2018), <https://www.wola.org/analysis/us-government-2018-border-data-trump-immigration-asylum-policy/>.

49. See, e.g., San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, *Cross-Border Business Forum*, SDCHAMBER (May 30, 2018), <https://sdchamber.org/event/cross-border-business-forum-7/>; WOODROW WILSON INT'L CTR. FOR SCHOLARS, *supra* note 10, at 6, 11-12, 51.

50. WORLD TRADE CTR. SAN DIEGO, *TRADE AND COMPETITIVENESS IN NORTH AMERICA: A FOCUS ON THE CALI BAJA MEGA-REGION* (June 2018), <https://www.sandiegobusiness.org/sites/default/files/Trade%20and%20Competitiveness%20in%20North%20America%20-%20SEP.compressed.pdf>.

51. *Id.*

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Tijuana.”⁵² Moreover, “[o]ne third of San Diego’s exports to Mexico are destined for neighboring Baja California.”⁵³ Notably, CaliBaja’s manufacturing industry has advanced to produce expensive and complex commodities, employing approximately 418,000 workers and “emerg[ing] as one of the world’s strongest cross border supply chains.”⁵⁴ Moreover, the Mexican and U.S. government have a close relationship that extends beyond trade. I have personally experienced many examples of the relationship between both governments, such as San Diego and Tijuana’s “memorandum of understanding” favoring greater cross-border cooperation, the International Boundaries and Water Commission’s binational meeting addressing environmental issues at the border, and CBP-led binational meetings addressing ports of entry infrastructure and border crossings. Accordingly, the CaliBaja border region has transformed into a place of innovation and prosperity, emerging as a dynamic, vibrant, and business-friendly community with a talented, resilient workforce.

C. Myth Three: “Mexican and U.S. Authorities at the Border Do Not Coordinate with Each Other”

1. Tackling the 2018 Crisis in Tijuana

In 2018, the arrival of thousands of immigrants from Central America to the border city of Tijuana was widely deemed a crisis.⁵⁵ That event posed one of the greatest challenges for Mexican and U.S. authorities in the past year.⁵⁶ The Central American immigrants’ arrival posed a threat to the U.S.-Mexico border dynamic, implicating more than the United States’ national security.⁵⁷ CBP’s large-scale

52. *Id.*

53. *Id.*

54. *Id.*

55. See Elisabeth Malkin, *Migrant Caravan Is Just Yards from U.S. Border, but Long Wait Lies Ahead*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 18, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/18/world/americas/mexico-tijuana-migrants-caravan.html>.

56. *See id.*

57. See Jean Guerrero, *When San Diego-Tijuana Border Closes, Interconnected Life Is Disrupted*, NPR (Nov. 28, 2018, 5:06 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/28/671429534/when-san-diego-tijuana-border-closes-every-day-life-is-affected>.

operational readiness exercises and increased security measures at ports of entry throughout Baja California and San Diego risked compromising cross-border transit and commerce.⁵⁸ CBP's response held the media captive, provoking political debate surrounding the issue.⁵⁹ Consequently, the "migrant caravan" (as referred to by politicians and the media) served as the Trump Administration's justification for its decisions on border security, such as deploying troops to the area.⁶⁰ These Trump Administration actions negatively impacted border crossings, trade, and tourism.⁶¹

Unfortunately, the media's portrayal of a disorderly crisis overshadowed the people in CaliBaja working tirelessly to address an ever-dynamic issue. Few people knew that the main actors responsible for tackling the consequences of this mass migratory flow were those outside of Washington's political debate. I was involved in this issue from the beginning, and I witnessed the private and public sector join to confront the challenge. Contrary to the myth, Mexican and U.S. authorities coordinated with each other in CaliBaja and successfully ameliorated the situation.

San Diego and Tijuana's history shaped the depth of coordination between Mexican and U.S. authorities in CaliBaja. San Diego has been Tijuana's sister city since 1993.⁶² Their proximity and interconnectedness has been a cause for celebration rather than a source

58. *Id.*; Press Release, U.S. Customs and Border Prot., CBP to Close Lanes at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa (Nov. 12, 2018), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-close-lanes-san-ysidro-and-otay-mesa>.

59. Annie Correal & Megan Specia, *The Migrant Caravan: What to Know About the Thousands Traveling North*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 26, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/world/americas/what-is-migrant-caravan-facts-history.html>.

60. *Id.*; *Migrant Caravan: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?*, BBC NEWS (Nov. 26, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45951782>.

61. *See, e.g.*, Jose A. Del Real & Jennifer Medina, 'A Critical Time': Border Businesses Jolted by \$5.3 Million Loss in Crossing Shutdown, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 26, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/26/us/san-ysidro-border-caravan-mexico-migrants.html>.

62. *Archives: Tijuana*, SAN DIEGO INT'L SISTER CITIES ASS'N, <http://www.sandisca.org/Sister%20Cities/tijuana-mexico/> (last visited Nov. 6, 2019).

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of conflict.⁶³ Due to this neighborly relationship, federal, state, and local government representatives, including some of the region's chambers of commerce, held monthly binational coordination meetings to address issues impacting both sides of the border. Key examples include the Passenger Working Group meetings, the Cargo Working Group meetings, and the Protocols and Border Security Group meetings. Although these examples demonstrate the level of coordination between Mexican and U.S. authorities in CaliBaja, the question remains, *was this binational coordination truly effective?* The best way to determine the binational coordination's success is through examining the work done to address "migrant caravan" issues.

The first group of immigrants from Central America made their way to the northern Mexican border on November 11, 2018.⁶⁴ At the time, Mexico had a newly-elected president, Andres Manuel López Obrador.⁶⁵ Although this migration was underway during the presidential transition period, Obrador's team worked with the former administration to address it.⁶⁶ Despite the transitional period in government, Enrique Peña Nieto, former president of Mexico, devised an immigration campaign, 'Estas en Tu Casa,' with the objective of persuading Central American immigrants to consider Mexico as an alternative to seeking asylum in the United States.⁶⁷ This executive order was backed by a strong coordination effort between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its American counterpart.

63. See, e.g., *Celebrating Our Sister-City Tijuana, Mexico (January 2017)*, CITY OF SAN DIEGO, <https://www.sandiego.gov/digitalarchives/community/archival-exhibits/tijuana-mexico> (last visited Nov. 20, 2019).

64. Maya Srikrishnan, *Border Report: A Caravan Within the Caravan Has Arrived in Tijuana*, VOICES OF SAN DIEGO (Nov. 12, 2018), <https://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/news/border-report-a-caravan-within-the-caravan-has-arrived-in-tijuana/>.

65. Azam Ahmed & Elisabeth Malkin, *Mexico's New Leader Faces Clash with Trump over Migrant Caravan*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 26, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/26/world/americas/mexico-lopez-obrador-migrants.html>.

66. See, e.g., *id.*

67. Reuters, *Mexico Offers Temporary Permits to Caravan Migrants Seeking Asylum*, THE GUARDIAN (Oct. 26, 2018, 8:43 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/27/mexico-offers-temporary-permits-to-caravan-migrants-seeking-asylum>.

2. The Consulate General of Mexico's Coordination Efforts

In coordination efforts to address the “migrant caravan,” the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego played a crucial role by taking advantage of its strong regional presence in CaliBaja. Efficient communication and coordination between authorities posed a critical challenge. Consequently, the Consulate undertook to represent CaliBaja’s stakeholders before the Mexican headquarters. In various meetings with the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Luis Videgaray, I voiced stakeholders’ concerns, laid out critical scenarios, and proposed action-plans to address issues like food and shelter infrastructure in CaliBaja, American retaliations to potential mass illegal crossings, and disruptions in cross-border transit and commerce likely to result from a border shutdown. Additionally, the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego was one of the leading actors in the two coordination groups dealing with the “migrant caravan”: the Protocols and Border Security Group and the Consejo Estatal de Atención al Migrante de Baja California (CEAM).

The binational Protocols and Border Security Group meetings brought together Department of Homeland Security representatives, including officials from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Border Patrol, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Mexican authorities, including federal, state, and municipal police, the National Immigration Institute, the Mexican Attorney General’s Office, and the Mexican intelligence agency. This group’s main objective was to have an open dialogue regarding border issues and to work together to find real, feasible solutions. Even though the other group, CEAM, is comprised of Mexican authorities only, the issues it discusses are of binational relevance. During November and December 2018, the following attainments evidenced these groups’ success in coordinating to address and resolve many issues: no port of entry in CaliBaja was shut down or permanently closed; all legitimate asylum seekers were provided with shelter, food, and clothes while they waited in Mexico for their cases to be heard; no action by any authority on either side of the border came as a surprise to the other; and although businesses located at or near the border suffered some economic loss, neither trade nor commerce suffered large-scale disruption. Today, the “migrant caravan” has stopped being a crisis and has become another item on the CaliBaja coordination groups’ agenda. The caravan raised questions

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about the need for immigration reform, but it also served as a gateway for new forms of multilateral cooperation between Mexico and Central American countries.⁶⁸

The Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego served as the main liaison to bring together authorities on both sides of the border. Contrary to the myth, the reality is that at a regional level, federal, state, and local authorities view their Mexican counterparts as partners, not adversaries. This understanding has allowed discussions about complex and relevant issues involving the border, including immigration, border trade and infrastructure, and tourism and cultural affairs. As a cross-border consul, I have personal experience with the successful collaboration between Mexican and U.S. authorities in expressing their demands as one collective voice. Ultimately, that collective perspective helped me convey a coherent message at the federal level to promote a prosperous border region.⁶⁹

D. Myth Four: “Mexicans Who Come to the United States Steal Americans’ Jobs and Do Not Contribute to U.S. Economic Development”

“Go back to your country” is a popular phrase that has been used to address someone perceived to be an immigrant. This expression is typically intended to make someone feel as though he or she has no right to live or work in the United States.⁷⁰ If you type these five words into a web search engine, they will likely render hundreds of videos,

68. See, e.g., *Tricamex Initiative*, MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS, <https://micicinitiative.iom.int/micicinitiative/tricamex-initiative> (last visited Nov. 6, 2019) (“The consulates of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras launched the initiative ‘TRICAMEX’ in the city of McAllen, [Texas], in the United States of America. This consular coordination group aims at promoting communication, synergies and exchanges of experiences and lessons learned in the field of protection and consular services.”).

69. A central point of that message involved explaining that Washington, D.C. and Mexico City are far removed from the border and those communities directly surrounding it. Accordingly, federal actors need to involve themselves directly and coordinate with local regional actors who are immersed in border communities’ day-to-day activities and who can best explain the challenges they face, and the types of solutions needed.

70. Christopher Mathias, *Have You Been Told to Go Back to Your Country?*, HUFFPOST (July 22, 2019, 4:12 PM), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/go-back-to-your-own-country-database-huffpost-propublica_n_5d35cd58e4b020cd99470021.

articles, and blog-posts showing a person approach, often aggressively, someone they suspect to be an immigrant; then, the person demands that the suspected immigrant stop taking something exclusively reserved for American citizens, such as a job or social benefit.⁷¹ Ultimately, bolstered by an institutionalized federal anti-immigration rhetoric,⁷² these expressions of rejection and intolerance promote discrimination. A significant part of countering this myth involves demonstrating that Mexicans in the United States do not take jobs from Americans but rather contribute significantly to U.S. economic development, particularly in CaliBaja.

1. Immigrants: Key Contributors to the U.S. Economy

In 2015, immigrants constituted 27.3% of California's population and almost 34% of its total labor force.⁷³ "As workers, business owners, taxpayers, and neighbors, immigrants are an integral part of California's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all."⁷⁴ "Nearly 880,000 immigrant business owners accounted for 38.2[%] of all self-employed California residents in 2015 and generated \$21.8 billion in business income."⁷⁵ In 2014, "[i]mmigrant-led households in [California] paid \$56.5 billion in federal taxes and \$26.4 billion in state and local taxes."⁷⁶ Moreover, if California's undocumented immigrants were granted legal status, their state and local tax contributions would increase by \$500 million.⁷⁷

71. See, e.g., KHOU 11, *Man to Waitresses: 'Go Back to Your Country,'* YOUTUBE (July 16, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_OuwjXF4UQ.

72. See *Federal Policy on Immigration, 2017-2020*, BALLOTPEDIA, https://ballotpedia.org/Federal_policy_on_immigration,_2017-2020 (last visited Nov. 6, 2019).

73. AM. IMMIGRATION COUNCIL, *IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA 1-2* (2017), https://americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_california.pdf. The most current data from 2017 shows immigrants make up 27% of California's population. PUB. POLICY INST. OF CAL., *IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA* (May 2019), <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/jtf-immigrants-in-california.pdf>.

74. AM. IMMIGRATION COUNCIL, *supra* note 73.

75. *Id.*

76. *Id.*

77. *Id.*

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On a larger scale, Mexican immigrants are essential to the U.S. economy, “contribut[ing] about 4[%] to . . . [the] GDP and . . . represent[ing] nearly 60[%] of unauthorized workers.”⁷⁸ Contrary to the argument that Mexicans steal jobs from Americans, evidence shows immigration generates economic growth.⁷⁹ “[W]hile immigrants represent about 15[%] of the general U.S. workforce, they account for around a quarter of entrepreneurs and a quarter of investors in the [United States], and . . . over one third of new firms have at least one immigrant[] entrepreneur in its initial leadership team.”⁸⁰ On an even broader scale, Hispanics represent a fundamental segment of the U.S. labor market. In 2015, foreign-born Hispanic households’ “spending power totaled [approximately] \$322.1 billion[,] . . . [and they] play[ed] an important role [in] sustaining America’s Medicare and Social Security programs.”⁸¹ Additionally, in some areas, such as Guymon, Oklahoma, immigrant labor can help address shortages in American labor, “particularly [for] industr[ies] [like pork production] where jobs frequently go unfulfilled by others.”⁸²

This data contradicts the anti-immigrant political rhetoric that reemerged in 2016 with Donald Trump’s presidential run and suggests its purpose was to appeal to unemployed Americans, and to justify targeting immigrants as enemies, ultimately to fulfill a nationalist political agenda. Nonetheless, polls have shown that the majority of Americans do not align with the views expressed in White House statements.⁸³ According to a 2016 poll, “76[% of Americans] believe undocumented immigrants are as honest and hard-working as U.S.

78. Mamta Badkar, *Here’s the Real Economic Impact of Mexican Immigrants on the US*, BUS. INSIDER (July 29, 2012, 10:58 AM), <https://www.businessinsider.com/mexican-immigration-us-economy-2012-7>.

79. Brennan Hoban, *Do Immigrants “Steal” Jobs from American Workers?*, BROOKINGS: BROOKINGS NOW (Aug. 24, 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2017/08/24/do-immigrants-steal-jobs-from-american-workers/>.

80. *Id.*

81. NEW AM. ECONOMY, HOW HISPANICS CONTRIBUTE TO THE U.S. ECONOMY 2 (Dec. 2017), http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/12/Hispanic_V5.pdf.

82. *Id.* at 6.

83. See, e.g., Mary Jo Dudley, *These U.S. Industries Can’t Work Without Illegal Immigrants*, CBS NEWS, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/illegal-immigrants-us-jobs-economy-farm-workers-taxes/> (last updated Jan. 10, 2019, 3:55 PM) (discussing a 2017 Cornell poll and a 2016 Pew Research Center poll).

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citizens, while 71[%] said they mostly fill jobs that Americans aren't willing to do."⁸⁴

III. A CROSS-BORDER APPROACH TO CONSULAR DIPLOMACY

When people ask me what it means to be a cross-border consul, I find myself discussing what the CaliBaja mega region has demanded from me more than what I have been able to offer after years of experience in the Mexican foreign service. When I was assigned to the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego, I devoted myself to understanding the CaliBaja region's dynamics. As I encountered the special intricacies of this mega region, I recognized that my classical conception of consular diplomacy was an outdated and ineffective approach for addressing the needs of a binational community.

During my work, I frequently encountered the four myths represented by the statements I examined in this essay, and I was compelled to question their veracity. Through that critical inquiry, I discovered the CaliBaja region's success in economic and social integration. I realized that opportunity existed in this discrepancy between myths and realities. If CaliBaja was able to thrive despite detrimental mischaracterizations operating to impede its success, I believed more could be achieved by promoting an accurate understanding of the region. Thus, I adapted the classical model of consular diplomacy to create a cross-border approach. I tailored this new model of consular diplomacy to CaliBaja's needs. When implemented, this new model allowed me to contribute to CaliBaja's success by increasingly sharing its success stories with a larger audience. I was able to share CaliBaja's case throughout my consular jurisdiction, across CaliBaja, and ultimately in Mexico City, where the Mexican federal government resides. Those of us working in CaliBaja's cross-border diplomacy acknowledge it is a profoundly intertwined binational region facing challenges that require multi-party approaches toward joint solutions.

This cross-border consular diplomacy model, framed by classical rules of Mexican diplomacy, entails the Consulate General of San Diego's active participation in all matters relevant to the border dynamic: immigration, commerce, border infrastructure, cultural

84. *Id.*

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affairs, and tourism. Cross-border diplomats can serve to facilitate cooperation between the private sector, Mexican and U.S. authorities in the CaliBaja mega region, and the Mexican Federal Government. With this new model in place, the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego was able to assume a more active role, proposing ideas for solving pressing border issues. Since its implementation, this cross-border consular diplomacy model has managed to address every challenge or issue presented, such as the “migrant caravan,” the Tijuana River sewage contamination, and the separation of families at the border.

The most beneficial part of this cross-border diplomacy model is its focus on the binational community’s unique nature. Consequently, people in CaliBaja have become more receptive to the work done by the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego. Still, progress demands that society continuously work toward promoting an increasingly accurate understanding of the world around us by critically considering the danger of single stories and by sharing untold stories. This is especially critical for international areas, such as the U.S.-Mexico border. With this essay, I hope that challenging the four major myths about the United States’ southern border inspires readers to visit the CaliBaja mega region to experience first-hand all that it has to offer and to actively participate in countering the false border narrative.