

UZBEKISTAN AND LATIN AMERICA: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, INSTITUTIONAL VISIBILITY AND SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

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Abstract. *This article examines how Uzbekistan can strengthen its public diplomacy and institutional visibility in Latin America despite limited resident diplomatic infrastructure in the region. Drawing on qualitative document analysis, it argues that the distance between Uzbekistan and Latin America is not only geographic, but also institutional, informational and cultural. The findings identify Brazil, Mexico and Argentina as complementary entry points for cooperation in agriculture, education, tourism, logistics, culture and academic exchange. The article concludes that Uzbekistan can build a pragmatic, non-polarized Latin American strategy through digital diplomacy, academic partnerships, tourism promotion, cultural branding and selective sectoral cooperation.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan; Latin America; public diplomacy; South-South cooperation; soft power; institutional visibility.*

Introduction

Uzbekistan's foreign policy has become more open, pragmatic and internationally active since the beginning of the reform period. Official foreign policy documents describe the country's external orientation as open, mutually beneficial and constructive, while the Uzbekistan-2030 strategy links national development with economic modernization, international cooperation and the country's integration into global production and connectivity networks [1; 2]. This foreign policy orientation creates space for new relationships beyond the country's immediate neighborhood, including regions that have not traditionally occupied a central position in Tashkent's diplomatic agenda.

Latin America is one of these underexplored spaces. Uzbekistan has diplomatic relations with a number of Latin American countries, including Mexico since 1992 and Argentina since 1993, but the region remains weakly visible in Uzbekistan's public



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diplomacy and in Latin America's own perception of Central Asia [3; 4]. The problem is not simply the absence of large trade volumes or resident embassies. It is a broader visibility gap: limited media knowledge, few academic networks, weak cultural circulation and insufficient public narratives connecting Uzbekistan with Latin American societies.

The research question is therefore: how can Uzbekistan strengthen its public diplomacy and institutional visibility in Latin America despite limited diplomatic infrastructure? The central argument is that embassy expansion is useful but not the only available instrument. Uzbekistan can develop a gradual Latin American presence through public diplomacy, digital communication, university partnerships, tourism promotion, cultural heritage narratives and sectoral cooperation. These tools are especially important for middle and small states that cannot maintain dense diplomatic networks in every region, but still need recognition, credibility and partnerships beyond their immediate geography [5; 6].

Conceptual framework: visibility, public diplomacy and non-resident diplomacy

Public diplomacy refers to the communication and relationship-building practices through which states, institutions and societies seek to influence foreign publics, not only foreign governments. Joseph Nye's concept of soft power emphasizes attraction rather than coercion, while Nicholas Cull's approach to public diplomacy distinguishes listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting as interrelated instruments [5; 6]. For a country such as Uzbekistan, these categories are useful because public diplomacy can turn cultural heritage, educational cooperation and development narratives into durable international visibility.

This article also uses the idea of non-resident or low-infrastructure diplomacy. Diplomatic presence does not always require a resident embassy in every country. States frequently use non-resident accreditation, honorary consuls, digital platforms, academic partnerships and multilateral settings to manage relationships where resources are limited. The official consular district of Uzbekistan's embassy in Washington, D.C., for instance, includes Brazil and Cuba, showing how some relations in the Americas are managed through wider regional coverage rather than resident

missions [7]. This model is functional, but it also produces a visibility cost because foreign publics may not know where or how to engage with Uzbekistan.

Finally, the article places Uzbekistan-Latin America relations within South-South cooperation. This does not imply an ideological bloc or automatic solidarity among developing countries. Rather, it describes a practical field of cooperation among states that face comparable development challenges: diversification, agricultural modernization, tourism promotion, education, infrastructure, institutional reform and external visibility. In this sense, Uzbekistan and Latin American countries may learn from each other without reducing cooperation to great-power competition.

Methodology

The study follows a qualitative and interpretive methodology based on document analysis. It reviews official Uzbek foreign policy sources, diplomatic information on relations with Latin American countries, recent official statements on Uzbekistan-Brazil cooperation, publicly available information about Uzbekistan's diplomatic coverage in the Americas, and academic literature on public diplomacy and soft power. The objective is not to measure public opinion or trade flows econometrically, but to identify practical opportunity areas and interpret how public diplomacy can compensate for limited institutional visibility.

The empirical discussion uses three Latin American reference points. Brazil is analyzed as a political and economic anchor because recent high-level contacts have explicitly identified it as one of Uzbekistan's important partners in Latin America [8]. Mexico is treated as a cultural, academic and media gateway because of its diplomatic relation with Uzbekistan since 1992, its large university system and its position as a Spanish-language public sphere with regional influence [3]. Argentina is included as an agrifood and educational partner because relations date back to 1993 and official Argentine information shows that trade has historically been limited and concentrated, which indicates both weakness and untapped potential [4]. Türkiye is used only as an internal comparative reference, not as the object of the article, because its Latin American public diplomacy provides practical lessons in cultural, educational and development cooperation [9; 10].

Findings

The first finding is that Uzbekistan's limited resident diplomatic infrastructure in Latin America should be understood as a problem of visibility rather than a sign of irrelevance. The country has formal diplomatic relations and some institutional channels, but the absence of dense regional representation limits public recognition. This is particularly important because public diplomacy works through familiarity: students, journalists, universities, businesses and cultural actors need repeated contact points before a country becomes part of their cognitive map.

The second finding is that Brazil can function as Uzbekistan's first Latin American anchor. In May 2026, the foreign ministers of Uzbekistan and Brazil discussed political dialogue, trade, investment, agriculture, logistics, education, cultural and humanitarian exchanges, tourism, and cooperation in BRICS and the United Nations [8]. Uzbek official information also reported approximately USD 300 million in bilateral trade by the end of 2025 and pointed to potential in agriculture, energy, aviation and pharmaceuticals [11]. This creates a concrete base for public diplomacy because cultural visibility can be linked to real economic agendas.

The third finding is that Mexico and Argentina offer different but complementary opportunities. Mexico's value is not only economic. It has a large Spanish-language media environment, strong universities, active cultural diplomacy and regional symbolic influence. Argentina's value lies in agrifood, higher education and scientific cooperation. Official Argentine information shows that the bilateral relationship with Uzbekistan has existed since 1993, but that trade has remained small and highly concentrated, especially in soybean-related exports and cotton yarn imports [4]. Such limited exchange should not be interpreted only as a weakness; it also shows the possibility of designing a

more diversified agenda.

Table 1. Public diplomacy opportunity matrix

Dimension	Current limitation	Opportunity for Uzbekistan	Latin American counterpart
Institutional visibility	Few resident diplomatic contact points in the region	Non-resident diplomacy plus digital platforms	Brazil, Mexico, Argentina
Academic exchange	Limited Central Asia content in Latin American universities	Webinars, visiting lectures, joint research	UNAM, UBA, Brazilian universities
Cultural diplomacy	Low public knowledge of Uzbek heritage	Silk Road heritage, cuisine, textiles, cinema	Festivals, museums, cultural centers
Economic diplomacy	Low and concentrated trade flows	Agriculture, logistics, aviation, tourism, textiles	Brazilian and Argentine agrifood sectors
Tourism diplomacy	Low recognition of Uzbekistan as a destination	Spanish/Portuguese promotion of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva	Travel fairs, universities, digital media

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Source: author's elaboration based on document analysis.

Comparative lesson from Türkiye

Türkiye offers a useful comparison because it has built visibility in Latin America through a mix of cultural diplomacy, development cooperation, educational programs and public communication. TİKA describes its mission as supporting economic, social and human development through sustainable projects across many regions, including Latin America, while the KATIP program presents language and cultural training for foreign public officials, diplomats, academics and researchers as a tool for long-term professional networks [9; 10]. The lesson for Uzbekistan is not to copy Türkiye's model mechanically, but to observe how distance can be reduced by recurring programs, scholarships, language exposure and symbolic familiarity.

For Uzbekistan, the most realistic version of this approach would be selective and modest. A first stage could consist of annual online seminars on Uzbekistan for Latin American universities; Spanish and Portuguese digital material about Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and contemporary reforms; small academic fellowships; participation in tourism fairs; and Uzbek culture days organized through existing embassies, universities or multilateral venues. UNESCO describes Samarkand as a crossroads of world cultures, Bukhara as a major historic city on the Silk Roads, and Khiva as a center of education, science and culture [12; 13; 14]. These assets are highly compatible with Latin American audiences interested in heritage, identity, tourism and world history.

Table 2. Strategic entry points for Uzbekistan in Latin America

Entry point	Main value for Uzbekistan	Possible instrument
Brazil	Political-economic anchor and BRICS dialogue	Business forums, agribusiness, aviation, tourism and education projects
Mexico	Spanish-language visibility and academic gateway	University agreements, public lectures, media and cultural diplomacy
Argentina	Agrifood, science and higher education complementarities	Agricultural cooperation, scientific exchange, student mobility
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Discussion: what Latin America can offer Uzbekistan

The relationship should not be designed as one-directional promotion. Latin America can also offer Uzbekistan significant resources. Brazil can contribute agribusiness experience, aviation, energy, food security expertise and links to BRICS discussions. Mexico can offer academic networks, Spanish-language communication capacity, cultural industries, media visibility and a bridge to North American and Latin American debates. Argentina can offer agricultural technology, food production experience, public universities and scientific cooperation.

Latin America also offers a laboratory of public diplomacy experiences. The region contains countries that have long used literature, cinema, gastronomy, music, football, heritage and diaspora narratives to build international recognition. Uzbekistan can learn from these experiences while presenting its own heritage not as an exotic image, but as part of a contemporary reforming state that connects Central Asia, Eurasia and the wider Global South. This approach avoids geopolitical polarization and frames cooperation around education, tourism, culture, agriculture and institutional exchange.

Policy recommendations

Four recommendations follow from the analysis. First, Uzbekistan should create a Spanish- and Portuguese-language digital public

diplomacy package, including short policy briefs, tourism materials, university presentations and social media content. Second, Uzbekistan should develop an annual “Uzbekistan-Latin America Academic Forum” with rotating partners in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. Third, cultural diplomacy should be connected to concrete sectors such as tourism, textiles, gastronomy, agriculture, logistics and education. Fourth, non-resident diplomacy should be reinforced through honorary consuls, university focal points and business chambers where resident embassies are not yet feasible.

These recommendations are low-cost compared with opening multiple resident embassies. They are also consistent with Uzbekistan’s official foreign policy of constructive cooperation and its development strategy, which emphasizes education, economic modernization, global production and stability [1; 2]. The purpose is not to turn Latin America into a priority that competes with Central Asia, Europe, China, Russia or the Middle East. The purpose is to create a flexible outer ring of cooperation that can generate reputation, knowledge and future economic opportunities.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan’s relationship with Latin America remains underdeveloped, but this should be read as an opportunity rather than a dead end. The main obstacle is not only geographic distance; it is the lack of public visibility, repeated institutional contact and narrative familiarity. Public diplomacy can address these problems by linking culture, education, tourism, digital communication and sectoral cooperation.

The article has shown that Brazil, Mexico and Argentina represent different entry points for Uzbekistan. Brazil provides an economic and political anchor; Mexico provides a cultural and academic gateway; Argentina provides agrifood and educational complementarities. Türkiye’s experience suggests that visibility in a distant region can be built gradually through culture, education and development cooperation. For Uzbekistan, the most effective strategy would be pragmatic, non-polarized and incremental: not a grand geopolitical project, but a public diplomacy architecture capable of making Central Asia more visible in Latin America and Latin America more visible in Uzbekistan.

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