# The Genesis of the Network of Mexican Consulates in the United States

## La génesis de la red de consulados mexicanos en Estados Unidos

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#### Abstract:

The complexity and intensity of Mexico's relations with the United States are made clear by the extensive consular network that Mexico has deployed in that nation. In this article, the authors recount the construction of the Mexican consular network in the United States within the framework of the historical processes that marked the diplomatic relationship over the 19th and 20th centuries.

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La complejidad y la intensidad de las relaciones de México con Estados Unidos se expresan en la amplia red consular que México ha desplegado en esa nación. En este artículo, los autores hacen un recuento de la construcción de la red consular de México en Estados Unidos en el marco de los procesos históricos que han marcado la relación diplomática durante los siglos XIX y XX.

#### Key Words:

Consular network of Mexico, consular functions, border, migration, protection of Mexicans abroad.

#### Palabras clave:

Red consular de México, funciones consulares, frontera, migración, protección a mexicanos en el exterior.

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## Laura Beatriz Moreno Rodríguez and Gregorio Joaquín Lozano Trejo

## Introduction

The complex and intense nature of Mexico's relations with the United States, defined in the first instance by its status as a neighbor, but above all by the articulation of the asymmetries in its economic development as a result of their individual and respective historical conditions, is expressed in the extensive network of consular offices that Mexico has deployed in that nation. Currently, of the 67 permanent consular representations of Mexico around the world, the consular network in the United States comprises 51 such representations, classified as follows: 15 consulates, 15 career consulates, 20 general consulates and 1 consular section, making it the most important country for Mexico.

As part of the activities undertaken by the consulates, the specific components and implications of domestic foreign policy are deployed in a wide-ranging and concrete manner, as well as the terms of bilateral relations. Hence the importance of closely studying the role and effects of these representations and, in the specific case of this article, analyzing the development

Government of Mexico, "México en el mundo," section "Consulados," at https://www.gob.mx/gobierno/mexico-en-el-mundo (date consulted: December 13, 2022).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), "Red Consular de México en los Estados Unidos de América," at https://www.gobmx/sre/documentos/red-consular-de-mexico-en-los-estados-unidos-de-america (date consulted: December 13, 2022).

of the Mexican consular network in the United States within the framework of the historical processes that have marked the relationship between the two countries.

The functions of consulates as an aspect of national representation have clearly evolved with regard to historical determinants and contexts. Initially functioning as commercial offices with an inherent obligation to protect merchants, businesses and their assets, they gradually became administrative bodies for the promotion of foreign policy in different spheres: economic, political, cultural, as well as for the protection of national citizens resident in other countries.

Until the 19th century, the main function of the consulates lay in the promotion and protection of commercial activity. In the case of the Latin American countries that had won their independence at the beginning of that century, this meant they were established as an exercise in independence and sovereignty, in a context in which trade was part of a world market. This strategic role meant that trade agencies were established even before friendship and trade treaties between nations were signed. With the signing of these instruments of international law, the presence of consulates as national representations was consolidated.

As a result, after 1824 Mexico began to establish commercial agencies or consulates through its diplomatic agents to develop a commercial network, initially with the main centers of trade: Europe and the United States. The cities of the Hanseatic League, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands were among the first where Mexico promoted this type of representations. As it gradually strengthened its international relations, Denmark, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland joined the Mexican consular network. During the first half of the 19th century, the Mexican consular network laid the foundations for connections with Latin America, establishing agencies and consulates in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela (see Table 1).

In order to regulate the activity of these representations, the decree on the establishment of Mexican legations and consulates of October 31, 1829 was promulgated,<sup>3</sup> indicating that the general consulates, private con-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Angel Nunez Ortega, *Los primeros consulados de México, 1823-1872*, Mexico, SRE, 1974, p. 59.

Representation	City	Country	Year
Consulate	London	Great Britain	1824
Diplomatic agency	Hamburg	Hanseatic League	1824
Diplomatic agency	Bremen	Hanseatic League	1824
Diplomatic agency	Lubeck	Hanseatic League	1824
Commercial agency	Marseilles	France	1825
Commercial agency	Le Havre	France	1825
Commercial agency	Bayonne	France	1825
Commercial agency	Nantes	France	1825
Commercial agency	Cette	France	1825
Commercial agency	Dunkirk	France	1825
Commercial agency	Bordeaux	France	1825
Commercial agency	Martinique	France	1826
Consulate	Paris	France	1827
Consulate	Amsterdam	Netherlands	1828
Vice consulate	Antwerp	Netherlands	1830
Vice consulate	Glasgow	Great Britain	1830
Vice consulate	Falmouth	Great Britain	1830
Consulate	Liverpool	Great Britain	1837
Vice consulate	Cadiz	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Malaga	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Valencia	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Barcelona	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Santander	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Coruña	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Bilbao	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Alicante	Spain	1837
Vice consulate	Tarragona	Spain	1837
Consulate	Havana	Spain	1837

Table 1. First Mexican consulates in the world (except the United States)

Consulate	Manila	Spain	1839
Consulate	Valparaiso	Chile	1839
Vice consulate	Rome	Papal States	1839
Consulate	Genoa	Kingdom of Sardinia	1840
Vice consulate	Lima	Peru	1840
Vice consulate	Guayaquil	Ecuador	1842
Vice consulate	Southampton	Great Britain	1843
Vice consulate	Ancona	Papal States	1845
Vice consulate	Naples	Kingdom of the Two Sicilies	1845
Vice consulate	Lisbon	Portugal	1851
Vice consulate	Basel	Switzerland	1852
Vice consulate	Payta	Peru	1853
Consulate	Cartagena	Colombia	1853
Vice consulate	Panama	Colombia	1853
Vice consulate	Manchester	Great Britain	1853
Vice consulate	Livorno	Grand Duchy of Tuscany	1854
Consulate	Jamaica	Great Britain	1855
Consulate	Belize	Great Britain	1856
Vice consulate	Hull	Great Britain	1856
Vice consulate	Montevideo	Uruguay	1856
Vice consulate	Gibraltar	Great Britain	1857
Vice consulate	Voltri	Kingdom of Sardinia	1857
Vice consulate	Porto	Portugal	1857
Vice consulate	Matanzas	Spain	1860
Vice consulate	Santiago de Cuba	Spain	1860
Vice consulate	Civita Vecchia	Papal States	1861
Vice consulate	La Guaira	Venezuela	1872

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Ángel Núñez Ortega, Los primeros consulados de México 1823-1872, Mexico, SRE (Collection of the Mexican Diplomatic Historical Archive, Documentary Series, 7), 1974.

sulates and vice-consulates had the objective of "protecting national commerce." This meant their functions revolved around this activity, but they could also be expanded if there was no national legation in the country in question. In a detailed and summarized manner (according to Article 31), the obligations shared by all consular agents were:

- Protect Mexican trade by all means at their disposal.
- Try to settle amicably the differences that arise between Mexicans and the subjects of the nation of their residence.
- Amicably repair and decide by means of arbitrators disputes that arise between Mexican captains, sailors and businessmen, and provide them with data and news about the political and commercial state of the country.
- Take all the necessary measures to save the crews and cargoes of Mexican ships that shipwreck on the coasts of the territory of the respective consulates.
- Act in accordance with the previous obligation with regard to the movable and immovable property of Mexicans who die in the territory of the respective consulates or vice-consulates.
- Receive the protests or declarations that Mexicans or foreigners make before the consuls or vice-consuls on matters involving the interests of Mexicans, and issue the corresponding documents that will be considered fully valid in the courts of the Republic.
- Issue visas or passports to individuals who come to the Republic.
- Send each month to the Foreign Ministry, through the diplomatic agent where there is one, and in his absence directly, a report of the passports or visas that they issue, and another of the Mexican ships that arrive at the port of residence, and of the foreigners that leave it to travel to the Republic.
- Stamp all documents that they authorize, legalize or endorse with the seal of the consulate or vice-consulate.

To be a consul, it was required to be Mexican by birth, to hold citizenship rights, and be over 30 years of age; in the case of vice-consuls, the position was opened to foreigners (Articles 11, 23 and 24).

The conditions of the consuls were updated in subsequent legislation such as the Decree on the establishment of general and private consular offices and vice-consulates (1834), and the Regulations of the Mexican Consular Corps (1871). The latter set out the different roles in detail: general consuls, private consuls, vice-consuls, commercial, public and private agents, and visa clerks.<sup>4</sup>

## Independence and origin of the consular network in the United States

Upon independence, the first Mexican governments were aware of the importance that the relationship with the United States would have, not only because of its inherent proximity, but also because of the economic vitality of the young nation, which was emerging as a serious competitor to the European powers. In this regard, the Foreign Relations Commission created by the Government of the Mexican Empire in 1821, in the Opinion presented before the Sovereign Government Junta in December of that year, proposed:

To notify the United States of our independence and the establishment of the sovereign government, and express to it our willingness to engage in trade useful to both powers in specific areas, excluding items and articles that may harm the agriculture and industry of the Empire and the equality of rights indicated to other nations, ratify the boundary treaty, and repair any excess that has been engaged in by either of the nations.<sup>5</sup>

General consulates and consulates are independent from one another in practice; while the vice-consulates and consular agencies depend on the general consulates or consulates, meaning that there is a hierarchical relationship between them that is defined in their specific powers. Meanwhile, the visa clerks were the private secretaries of the consuls.

<sup>5 &</sup>quot;Dictamen presentado a la soberana junta provisional gubernativa del Imperio Mexicano, por la Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores, en 29 de diciembre de 1821, primero de la independencia," in Juan Francisco de Azcárate, *Un programa de política internacional*, Mexico, SRE (Mexican Diplomatic History Archive Collection, 37), 1932, p. 34.

For this purpose, the United States could be a political and commercial ally, depending on its economic progress.

In this sense, the contacts between the governments of Mexico and the United States for the purpose of requesting recognition and, consequently, the establishment of bilateral relations took place through the Foreign Minister, José Manuel de Herrera, who wrote to the head of the State Department, John Quincy Adams, on November 30, 1821. As a result of these efforts, in December 1822 the first extraordinary and plenipotentiary envoy, José Manuel Zozaya Bermúdez, arrived in that country, at the same moment as the U.S. recognized Mexico.

The Mexican envoy, in addition to starting negotiations for the signing of a friendship treaty between the two nations, also proposed the establishment of the first consulates in that territory. He expressed his interest in establishing a consulate in New York, and proposed it be headed up by Roberto Meade, a banker from Philadelphia. However, with the fall of the Government of Agustín de Iturbide this idea foundered. Similarly, a consular agency was proposed for Natchitoches, Louisiana, for the purpose of monitoring the Sabina River border.

With the first republican government in charge of Guadalupe Victoria, the first Mexican consulate would be installed in New Orleans, with Manuel García Sosa appointed as consul general in 1824.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the commercial functions that characterized this type of diplomatic representation, this consulate was strategic in promoting the independence of Cuba, monitoring the border, and reporting on the proclivities and actions of the population of the southern United States. During that same government, five more representations were established: the vice-consulates of Baltimore in 1825, Philadelphia in 1826, and Boston in 1827. Similarly, the Natchitoches consulate was opened in 1826. A proposed consulate for New York took shape with the establishment of a consular agency in 1826 under the responsibility of Ventura Obregón. Its first consul would be Sebastián Mercado in 1835, and it would acquire the rank of general consulate in 1842.

<sup>6 &</sup>quot;Manuel Garcia Sosa. Nombrado Cónsul de México, en Nueva Orleans, Estados Unidos de Norte América," Diplomatic Historical Archive "Genaro Estrada," SRE (AHDGE), LE-1615, ff. 9-30.

Unfortunately, in the first decades after independence, political and social instability resulted in successive governments rocked by violence, a circumstance that had a decisive impact on Mexico's scant economic development. Without question, this affected the possibilities of maintaining the consulates in the United States, meaning that, on the one hand, foreigners had to be used as vice-consulates and, on the other, some of them had to be closed because they could not be supported financially. This was the case of the representation in Philadelphia, which lacked a consul from 1835 to 1864.

The economic difficulties and the independence of Texas, which clearly led to political tensions with the United States, did not stop the Mexican State, which continued its efforts to install vice consulates in Mobile, Charleston, and Pensacola in 1836, and Pittsburgh in 1841. The consulate of St. Louis, Missouri was established in 1832, but was closed in 1838, and would be replaced by that of Independence, Missouri, around 1843.

## War and border adjustments

The expansionist logic of the United States, which had become apparent as soon as it won independence and thanks to which it had successfully added to the initial Thirteen Colonies the territories it was gaining to the west, as well as those ceded by France and Spain, was decisive to the bilateral relationship with Mexico with the annexation of Texas, which had become independent in 1836. As a result of this circumstance and under the pretext of adjusting the borders of this state, Mexico and the United States began a war that would result in the loss of Mexican territory in favor of its neighbors.

The adjustment of the borders between both countries by means of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits and Definitive Agreement between the United States of Mexico and the United States of America of 1848, also known as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, also implied a new territorial make-up and therefore a new frontier, as well as a new economic, demographic, and political dynamic. Mexican interests were concentrated in the new southern states of the American Union. The Mexican consular network was expanded and at the same time so were the functions of these representations, largely due to the effects of the provisions and implications of the

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. To the traditional tasks involving trade were added those of transferring Mexicans from those states to national territory, of guarding the new border and, in particular, that of protecting Mexicans who decided to remain in what was now the territory of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

In the year the war ended, a consulate was opened in the city of San Francisco, California, which would become a consulate general in 1895. Meanwhile, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, another consulate would be established in 1849, but closed in 1895.

One of the territories in which a number of consulates and vice-consulates were established during the period was Texas: Brownsville in 1849, Franklin in 1850, Galveston in 1854, and San Antonio in 1861. One in Tucson, Arizona was also established in 1871.

With the relative political stability achieved in Mexico during the Porfiriato (1876-1910), relations with the United States also settled down, and consular activity saw an uptick with the creation of more new consulates, not only in the border states, where they continued to be concentrated, but also in other important cities across the United States.

In 1881, consulates were established in San Diego, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Laredo, and Rio Grande City. The following year, they were set up in Chicago, Nogales, Rome and Tombstone. The latter two, in Texas, had a short-lived existence and were closed in 1895. That same year, a commercial agency was opened in Bisbee, Arizona, and would become a vice-consulate in 1899. Representations for Corpus Christi, Deming, Denver, Kansas City, Pascagoula, and Phoenix were also created in 1895.

The Mexican consular network in the United States during the Porfiriato was complemented by representations in Portland in 1896; Los Angeles in 1897; Port Arthur and Norfolk, in 1899; Yuma in 1901; Cincinnati in 1902; Calexico, Douglas, Louisville, and Solomonville in 1905; Tacoma and Clifton in 1906.

In this way, the political stability and economic growth during the Porfiriato allowed a significant expansion of the Mexican consular network,

Alfonso Rodea Sandín, La actividad consular de México en los Estados Unidos de América como casos tipo los consulados en: New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, y Washington, D.C., thesis, Mexico, UNAM, 1989, p. 53.

which in some way also represented a growth in terms of binational relations and interests.

## Migration and establishment of consulates in the 20th century

By the beginning of the 20th century, the economic development of the United States had become a pole of attraction for workers from different parts of the world, including Mexicans. As a result, United States legislation concerning the control of migrants began to have an impact on Mexico's policies. At the same time, in Mexico, the period of stability ended with a violent social uprising that led to the armed confrontation of different revolutionary factions, and gave way to the installation of a new regime that established new bases for economic development. Despite the relative success it achieved in this regard, it did not reduce the asymmetries that, together with other factors of an external nature, were accelerating the migration of Mexicans to the United States.

The world wars and the Great Depression of 1929 had decisive effects on bilateral relations in relation to the Mexican population living in the United States, forcing the consulates to gradually intensify their role as bodies providing assistance to compatriots.

Meanwhile, the Organic Law of the Mexican Consular Service of 1910 and the Regulations derived from it brought substantial changes with respect to honorary consulates, which was the definition that nominally replaced vice consulates, as representations that could be put in charge of foreign residents. Under this new regulation, consulates of this type would assume their own costs, including the salaries of their staff, so they would no longer represent a burden for the treasury in the form of salaries and payment for consular responsibilities. In their favor, these types of representations had a percentage of the procedures and commercial transactions that they could carry out within their powers for the purpose of paying the expenses of the office and its emoluments.

Despite the economic effects caused by the Mexican Revolution in the domestic sphere, this ensured that the governments of the period did not halt the promotion of new consular representations, relying precisely on the

possibilities offered by honorary consulates, which in many cases allowed temporary action without the need to maintain them in the long term. The growth of the consular network during this period can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Mexican consulates in the United States (1910-1934)			
Category	City	State	Year
Consulate	Salt Lake City	Utah	1912
Consulate	Del Rio	Texas	1912
Consulate	Marfa	Texas	1913
Consulate honorary	Tampa	Florida	1913
Consulate honorary	Buffalo	New York	1913
Consulate	Texas City	Texas	1911
Consulate	Seattle	Washington	1913
Consulate	Newport News	Virginia	1913
Honorary consulate	Washington	D.C.	1913
Honorary vice-consulate	Gulfoort	Mississippi	1914
Consulate	Presidio	Texas	1920
Consulate	Dallas	Texas	1920
Consulate	Jacksonville	Florida	1920
Consulate	Zapata	Texas	1920
Consulate	Hidalgo	Texas	1920
Consulate	San Fernando	Texas	1920
Consulate	Albuquerque	New Mexico	1920
Consulate	Amarillo	Texas	1920
Consulate	Boise	Idaho	1920
Consulate	Columbus	New Mexico	1920
Consulate	Detroit	Michigan	1920
Honorary consulate	Fort Worth	Texas	1920
Consulate	Houston	Texas	1920
Consulate	Juneau	Alabama	1920
Consulate	Oklahoma City	Oklahoma	1920
Consulate	Orange	Texas	1920

Honorary consulate	Rowood-Ajo	Arizona	1920
Honorary consulate	Sacramento	California	1920
Consulate	Sweetwater	Texas	1920
Consular agency	Tijuana	California	1920
Honorary consulate	Beaumont	Texas	1922
Honorary consulate	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	1923
Consulate	McAllen	Texas	1923
Honorary consulate	Indianapolis	Indiana	1923
Honorary consulate	Toledo	Ohio	1928
Honorary consulate	Oakland	California	1930
Honorary consulate	Savannah	Georgia	1930
Consular agency	San Bernardino	California	1930
Honorary consulate	Cleveland	Ohio	1925
Consular agency	Fresno	California	1931
Honorary consulate	Providence	Rhode Island	1925
Consulate	Monterrey	California	1933
Honorary consulate	Miami	Florida	1934

Source: Alfonso Rodea Sandín, La actividad consular de México en los Estados Unidos de América como casos tipo los consulados en: New York, Philadelphia, Richmond y Washington, D.C., thesis, Mexico, UNAM, 1989; and AHDGE documentation.

The consulates in this period faced the challenge of assisting the Mexican population in situations such as the First World War, ensuring that Mexicans were not enrolled in the United States army as if they were citizens of that country, and the repatriation of thousands of nationals and the protection of their interests established in that country, as a result of the adverse effects of the Great Depression of 1929.

The gradual growth of migration throughout the 20th century also demanded the increasingly active participation of consulates. The establishment of Mexican labor contracting programs such as the Bracero Program in 1942, as part of the dynamics of collaboration against the backdrop of World War II, as well as illegal hiring by U.S. employers, were the subject of attention of the consular personnel, who to this day focus on respect for the labor and human rights of Mexicans who migrate to the United States.

It is no coincidence that a large proportion of the consular offices are located in the border states, where the Mexican migrant population is concentrated and who, in some cases, have formed important population centers that make consular work essential for the protection of their rights and attention to administrative procedures for Mexican citizens (see Table 3).

Table 3. Mexican consulates in the United States (1935-1987)			
Category	City	State	Year
Honorary consulate	Berkeley	California	1936
Consulate	Austin	Texas	1940
Consulate	Santa Ana	California	1945
Consulate	Saint Paul	Minnesota	1947
Honorary consulate	Santa Barbara	California	1947
Consulate	San Angelo	Texas	1949
Special office in reception center for migrant workers	Harlingen	Texas	1949
Consulate	Eagle Pass	Texas	1949
Special office in reception center for migrant workers	El Paso	Texas	1949
Special office in reception center for migrant workers	Nogales	Arizona	1949
Special office in reception center for migrant workers	Calexico	California	1949
Consulate	Atlanta	Georgia	1951
Consulate	Spokane	Washington	1951
Consulate	Harlingen	Texas	1951
Consulate Honorary	Honolulu	Hawaii	1952
Consulate Honorary	Neenah	Wisconsin	1956
Consulate	Lubbock	Texas	1959
Consulate	Memphis	Tennessee	1971
Consulate	San Jose	California	1971
Honorary Consulate	Omaha	Nebraska	1973
Office in detention center of the U.S Immigration and Naturalization Service	El Centro	California	1973

Office in detention center of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service	El Paso	Texas	1973
Office in detention center of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service	Fresnos	Texas	1973
Office in detention center of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service	Chula Vista	California	1973
Honorary consulate	Madison	Wisconsin	1973
Honorary consulate	Richmond	Virginia	1975
Consulate	Charlotte	North Carolina	1981
Consular agency	Oxnard	California	1987

Source: A. Rodea Sandin, op. cit.; and AHDGE documentation.

## Conclusions

The extensive Mexican consular network in the United States, which covers practically all the states of that country, arises from the intense and wide-ranging relationship that exists between the societies of both nations, reflected in the presence of Mexican nationals in the United States as a consequence of the historical process that frames the binational relationship, both in commercial terms and in terms of labor mobility.

On top of the natural political and commercial interests that explain the existence of this type of representation in any part of the world, in the case of the United States are added the effects of a dynamic that, facilitated by its proximity and stimulated by differentiated economic development, has promoted a significant migration of Mexican citizens who require the support of government representations to safeguard their rights.

Similarly, in recent years the presence of Mexican economic interests in that country as a result of the growing interconnection of the economies of both nations has assigned consulates an important role in the promotion of Mexican goods and services, while acting as centers of diffusion of Mexican culture, helping to maintain and strengthen the identity of nationals living there.

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