



Highlights of [GAO-08-931T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Mission in Mexico is the Department of State's largest consular operation. In fiscal year 2007, it processed 1.5 million of the 8 million nonimmigrant visas (NIV) State handled worldwide. The U.S. Mission in Mexico also provided services, including passport processing and emergency assistance, to 20,000 American citizens in fiscal year 2007. This already significant consular workload is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years as millions of NIV Border Crossing Cards issued in Mexico between fiscal years 1998 and 2002 expire and need to be renewed. In addition, the implementation of new travel requirements under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) will, for the first time, require U.S. citizens to carry passports, or other approved documentation, when traveling between the United States and Mexico.

This testimony addresses (1) State's estimates of the workload for consulates in Mexico through 2012 resulting from, in particular, new travel requirements and the reissue of Border Crossing Cards; and (2) the actions State has taken to ensure consulates in Mexico keep pace with projected workload increases through 2012. This testimony is based on work currently in process that involves analyzing State's workload forecasts and forecast methodology, interviewing State officials, and visiting five posts in Mexico. GAO discussed this testimony with State officials, who agreed with GAO's findings.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-931T](#). For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

## BORDER SECURITY

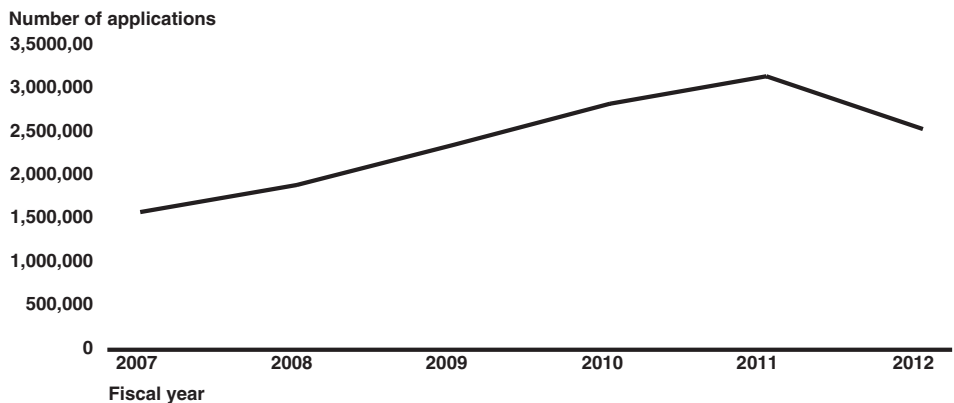
### State Department Expects to Meet Projected Surge in Demand for Visas and Passports in Mexico

#### What GAO Found

According to State forecasts, as of April 2008, the U.S. Mission in Mexico's (Mission Mexico) NIV demand will peak at slightly over 3 million applications in fiscal year 2011, about twice the number from fiscal year 2007. State acknowledges there are uncertainties regarding the number of Border Crossing Card holders who will renew their cards and the number of first time NIV applicants, which may affect the accuracy of its forecasts. State will be revising the forecasts on a periodic basis as new data become available. In addition to its increase in NIV workload, Mission Mexico will also be facing increases in its passport workload due to the implementation of WHTI. The exact magnitude of the increase in passport workload is more difficult to forecast than for NIVs, because there is not the same historical precedent. There is also a great deal of uncertainty as to how many U.S. citizens actually live in Mexico or the number of these citizens likely to apply for a passport.

In anticipation of this surge in demand for NIVs and U.S. passports, State is taking steps to ensure consulates in Mexico keep pace, including adding consular interview windows to several high-demand posts and planning to hire about 100 temporary adjudicating officers. Consular officials GAO met with at several posts in Mexico generally agreed that these efforts to expand resources should be adequate for Mission Mexico to keep pace with expected workload increases, and GAO's analysis indicates the mission will generally have enough interviewing windows during the surge. Several posts will rely on the addition of temporary adjudicators to keep pace with increased NIV demand and would face backlogs if these slots cannot be filled or if the temporary staff are not as productive as expected. However, State is confident that it has an adequate pool of potential applicants. Mission Mexico may also gain additional capacity from a pilot program, currently under way at two posts, that outsources a portion of the NIV application process to off-site facilities; however, the pilot was implemented too recently to assess its potential impact on productivity, fraud, or security.

**Mission Mexico NIV Demand Forecast**



Source: GAO analysis of State data.