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Mexico: A Crucial Crossroads

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A decade into the 21st century, Mexico finds itself at a crucial crossroads with its northern neighbor the United States, where about 10 percent of its citizens live.

US immigration reform, championed by then-President George W. Bush, would have legalized millions of Mexican immigrants living in the United States illegally, but legislation failed in the US Congress in 2006 and 2007.

Instead, the Bush administration began strictly enforcing existing laws, continued to build fences — real and virtual — along the US-Mexico border, and increased the number of worksite enforcement raids.

The deep economic recession that began in late 2007 affected US demand for labor, including low-skilled immigrants from Mexico, and caused remittances to Mexico to fall by more than 15 percent in 2009 compared with 2008.

President Barack Obama, who took office in January 2009, won the election in part due to support from Hispanic voters who expected him to take on immigration reform early in his tenure, despite other pressing issues. The US Congress could seriously tackle immigration reform this year, but prospects for passage are uncertain.

In December 2006, Felipe Calderón was sworn in as Mexico's president. From the very beginning, his administration has made clear that in contrast to his predecessor, he did not intend to prioritize migration within Mexico's complex relationship with the United States.

For the Calderón government, regaining the rule of law and fighting drug trafficking and organized crime became a priority. The resulting violence and kidnappings have pushed some Mexicans to flee northward in search of asylum.

This updated profile examines Mexicans in and Mexican migration to the United States, as well as US immigration policy. But it also looks at Mexico's role as a transit country, remittances, government policy toward the Mexican diaspora, and immigrants and refugee and asylees in Mexico.

Changes and Continuities in Mexican Flows to the United States

While discussions of Mexican migration frequently evoke images of heavily guarded US borders, migrant deaths, and undocumented immigration, Mexico is a country that embodies several dimensions of the migration phenomenon: emigration primarily to the United States, transit migration mainly by Central Americans seeking to reach the United States; and temporary immigration from Central American and other countries.

Yet, despite these other facets, Mexico is first and foremost a country of emigrants, authorized and unauthorized.

Mexican migration to the United States dates back to the late 19th century. Current Mexican migration to the United States began during World War II, when Mexico was asked and agreed to contribute to the US war effort by providing temporary agricultural labor.

The first "Bracero program," in which Mexico provided the United States with mostly temporary agricultural workers, started in 1942; the last Bracero program was terminated in 1964. Mexico supplied an estimated 4.5 million workers to the United States during this period, peaking at

almost 450,000 workers per year during the late 1950s.

However, the flows did not stop, a pattern seen with the end of temporary worker programs in other countries. In fact, Mexican migration became part of both the Mexican and US economies. Migration networks — involving relatives, friends, subcontractors, and smugglers — have become one of the most effective means for sustaining Mexico-US migration no matter the enforcement measures in place.

Based on migrants' histories collected by the Mexican Migration Project of the University of Pennsylvania, it is estimated that by age 40, most men in the communities surveyed have made at least one trip to the United States. "Go north for opportunity" is thus an idea deeply embedded in the Mexican population.

Given the sizable number of unauthorized immigrants to the United States, estimates of migration flows and stocks vary, at times significantly. After the Bracero programs ended, the number of US apprehensions of Mexicans along the US-Mexico border began to increase, peaking at 1.7 million per year in the mid-1980s. (Note: Apprehension figures count events, not individuals, meaning the same person can be apprehended more than once. Nonetheless, it is a widely used proxy for the volume of migration.)

After a relative lull, associated with the US legalization programs of the late 1980s, the apprehensions figure grew again and ranged between about 1 million and 1.7 million through 2000. Since then, the total number of apprehensions has been dropping more or less steadily. In both 2007 and 2008, the US Department of Homeland Security reported fewer than 1 million apprehensions. Of the 792,000 apprehensions in 2008, 88 percent were of Mexican nationals (see the **Spotlight on Immigration Enforcement in the United States**).

Over time, Mexican migration changed: moves gradually became more permanent, rather than circular and temporary, during the 1980s. As numerous scholars have noted, this trend is related to increased US border enforcement, which made it more difficult and costly (in terms of smuggler fees) for Mexicans to cross back and forth.

The approximate number of Mexicans settling permanently in the United States annually — with or without US authorization — has increased steadily since the 1970s; it grew from less than a quarter of a million per year in the 1980s to well above the 300,000 mark in the 1990s, and approached the half-million mark in the early 2000s. Demographers Rodolfo Corona and Rodolfo Tuirán consider the early-2000s figure to be too high because it might include some temporary migrants; they estimate a figure in the range of 400,000 per year.

Although the immigrant population in the United States has grown over the last 40 years, the size of the Mexican-born population has increased even faster, making Mexicans the country's dominant immigrant group. Between 1970 and 1980, according to US Census Bureau data, Mexican immigrants went from the fourth largest to the largest immigrant group in the United States, with about 16 percent of the total immigrant population at the time.

The size of the Mexican immigrant population nearly doubled from 2.2 million in 1980 to 4.3 million in 1990, and more than doubled to 9.2 million in 2000, at which point Mexicans made up 30 percent of all immigrants in the United States.

Growth has slowed in the last few years. As of 2006, the Mexican immigrant population stood at just over 11.5 million, about 31 percent of all immigrants, dropping slightly to 11.4 million in 2008; more than half reside in the United States illegally according to estimates from the Pew Hispanic Center Annual flows from Mexico to the United States declined from 1 million to 600,000 from 2006 to 2009, largely as a result of a drop in illegal immigration.

About 85 percent of Mexican immigrants in 2008 were between the ages of 18 and 65, compared to 63 percent of the total US population.

About 2.5 million Mexican-born immigrants (22 percent) were naturalized US citizens in 2008. According to DHS data, about 232,000 were naturalized in 2008 alone.

Of course, the Mexican-origin population in the United States (US born and Mexico born) has grown as well. By 2008, it surpassed 30 million, with more than 18 million US citizens of Mexican origin.

The US recession may have caused a longer-term shift in migration flows. Although there has been no "massive return" of Mexicans from abroad, fewer Mexicans have left the country since the

recession began.

Data from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) show that 33.5 percent fewer Mexicans left Mexico during the second quarter of 2009 than in the same quarter of 2008 and 61.0 percent fewer than in the same period of 2006 (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

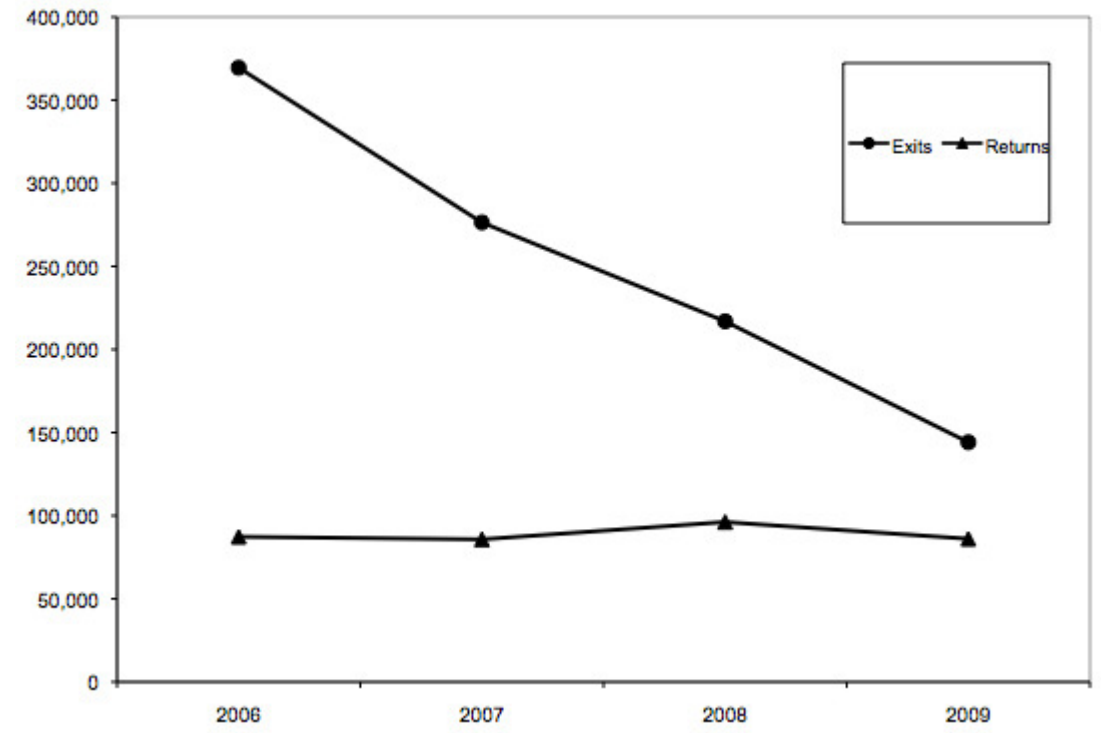
The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that the stock of unauthorized population in the United States might be leveling off. How the size of the population changes will depend on how quickly US employers resume hiring and how effective US enforcement prove.

Table 1. Exits and Returns of Mexicans, 2006 to 2009 (Second Quarter Each Year)

Absolute values		
	Exits	Returns
2006	369,493	87,315
2007	276,407	85,759
2008	216,920	96,196
2009	144,181	86,089
Difference (%)		
	Exits	Returns
2007-2006	-25.2	-1.7
2008-2007	-21.5	12
2009-2008	-33.5	-10.5
2009-2006	-61.0	-1.4

Source: **Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía**.

Figure 1. Exits and Returns of Mexicans, 2006 to 2009 (Second Quarter Each Year)



Source: **Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía**.

Drivers of the Mexico-US Migration System

Migration from Mexico to the United States is primarily economically motivated. Nominal wage

differentials have been hovering for years at about a 10 to 1 ratio in favor of the United States for manual and semiskilled jobs. Moreover, sustained US economic growth led to a strong demand for Mexican workers, who are found primarily in the low ends of the labor market: seasonal agriculture, high-turnover manufacturing, construction, and service industries.

Until the 1970s, Mexican migrants originated mainly from the rural areas of central Mexico and were mostly confined to the US agricultural sector, largely in the Southwest.

Over the last two decades, however, US-bound migration has originated in nearly every corner of the country and has spread throughout the United States. The south, southeast and other nontraditional emigrant regions of Mexico rapidly became "high emigration areas."

Furthermore, migrants came from small, medium, and large cities, not only from rural areas, and found employment in the Midwestern, southeastern, and eastern parts of the United States in construction, food processing, sundry services, and agriculture, which remains a mainstay employment niche. Supply-push factors in Mexico were thus matched by demand-pull factors on the US side.

As hundreds of thousands of Mexicans born in the 1970s and 1980s have reached working age, the Mexican labor market has not been able to absorb them. Mexico's large economic restructurings since the 1980s have cost many workers their jobs.

Since the middle of the 1960s, the "maquiladora industry" (export-oriented subcontracting activities) mainly along Mexico's northern border has been providing job opportunities to Mexico's growing labor force. In 1993, maquiladoras employed about 540,000 Mexicans. At its peak, in 2000, the industry accounted for a record 1.3 million jobs. Since then, the industry has continued to provide jobs for more than 1 million workers although many manufacturing jobs have moved to lower-wage countries in Asia, particularly China.

US and Mexican officials believed that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which went into force in 1994, would reduce illegal immigration to the United States.

However, the agreement appears to have done little to significantly modify migratory patterns as other factors have proved more important.

These factors boil down to the combination of favorable circumstances in the United States — high economic growth during most of the 1990s that translated into a continued demand for workers — and unfavorable circumstances in Mexico, including recurrent crises, insufficient economic growth, low demand for workers, and an abundant supply of labor.

While estimates vary, employment in Mexico's informal sector slightly increased between 2006 and 2009, from more than 26 percent to barely above 28 percent of the economically active population. It is estimated that almost a third of those employed earn less than the minimum daily wage of 57 pesos (roughly US$5), which in real pesos has experienced yearly, on average, negative growth since 1994. Wages for workers in the formal sector, with health and pension benefits, have barely moved in real terms and stand at about 230 pesos (roughly US$20) per day.

NAFTA certainly has not stopped the protracted rural exodus to urban areas and to the United States. According to many observers, the agreement might have accelerated this movement by restructuring the agricultural sector, which in turn adversely affected production of traditional crops like maize.

Poverty, in terms of income capacity (*pobreza de patrimonio*), an eloquent indicator of Mexico's economic distress, grew significantly between 2006 and 2008, from 42.6 percent to 47.4 percent of the population, or from 44.7 million to 50.5 million people. Estimates of extreme poverty (*pobreza alimentaria*, or unable to buy basic food) also show an increase for the same period, from 13.8 percent to 18.2 percent (14.4 million to 19.5 million Mexicans).

It is near impossible to gauge future US demand for immigrant labor or Mexico's economic growth. However, one thing is certain: the number of working-age people in Mexico will continue to expand rapidly into the 2010s, but because fertility rates began dropping in the 1970s, the growth in the number of working-age people thereafter will rapidly diminish.

Types and Characteristics of Mexican Migrants to the United States

Mexican migration flows have changed in many ways over the years. Recent indicators suggest that the characteristics of migrants are becoming as diverse, in terms of migrants' origin,

educational, and occupational levels, as the characteristics of the Mexican population at large.

This development is in line with the recent trend of migration becoming a nationwide phenomenon. According to Mexican municipal-level data, only a few dozen municipalities failed to register some type of migratory activity between 1995 and 2000.

Mexican migrants tend to come from middle-to-lower segments of Mexico's socioeconomic structure. Most Mexican migration thus still fits into the "manual labor migration" type. Indeed, 61 percent of the 9 million Mexican immigrants age 25 and older in 2008 had less than a high school diploma.

However, greater numbers of professionals and skilled persons are among the migrants. As of 2008, there were about 468,000 Mexican immigrants with a bachelor's degree or higher, representing about 5 percent of all Mexican born age 25 and older. In Mexico, almost 7 million people have at least a bachelor's degree, meaning that nearly 7 percent of all Mexican professionals live in the United States.

According to researchers Elena Zúñiga and Miguel Molina, between 1997 and 2007, the number of Mexicans with a bachelor's degree or higher rose at an average annual growth rate of 6 percent in Mexico, but the number of Mexican-born professionals living in the United States almost doubled, at the rate of 11 percent.

Increasingly, the distinction between circular and settled migrants is becoming blurred. Circular migrants tend to be younger and predominantly male, while settled migrants are more evenly split between men and women, more urban, and better educated (meaning eight years of school). Among settled Mexican immigrants, just 5.3 percent worked in agricultural occupations in 2005, according to researchers Silvia Giorguli, Selene Gaspar, and Paula Leite.

However, many permanent migrants began their journey to the United States as circular migrants, often in unauthorized circumstances, although many also entered legally.

It's also worth noting that Mexican immigrants are still concentrated in California (37.3 percent of the 11.4 million total) and Texas (21.0 percent), as well as Illinois (6.3 percent), according to 2008 figures from the US Census Bureau. But they have settled in states across the West and Southeast over the last 20 years. These include Arizona (5.4 percent), Georgia (2.5 percent), Florida (2.3 percent), North Carolina (2.2 percent), Colorado (2.2 percent), New York (2.1 percent), and Nevada (2.0 percent).

Mexicans in Canada

Although the Mexican-immigrant population in Canada is tiny compared to the population in the United States, it has increased mainly since the 1990s, more than doubling from 22,000 in 1991 to about 50,000 in 2006, according to Statistics Canada.

Economist Richard Mueller has argued that a good portion of Canada's Mexican population consists of the descendants of Canadian Mennonites who settled in Mexico in the 1920s and have since "returned," enabled in part by claims to Canadian citizenship. However, Mueller finds that the number of non-Mennonite Mexican born has grown faster.

Some recent arrivals likely include Mexicans who entered through Canada's points system for highly skilled immigrants. In 2005, enterprising Canadian immigration lawyers saw an opportunity when border enforcement became a hot political topic in the United States. They began advertising legal migration to Canada, both in Mexico and Arizona.

Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), which began over 40 years ago, originally relied on workers from Caribbean countries but has included Mexican workers since 1974. In 2009, about 17,000 Mexicans came to work temporarily on Canadian farms.

Mexico has been among the top origin countries for asylum applicants in Canada. But as the Mexican government stepped up its fight against violent drug gangs in 2008-2009, the number of Mexicans seeking asylum in Canada increased. In response, Canada in July 2009 began requiring Mexican citizens to have visas before they can travel to Canada.

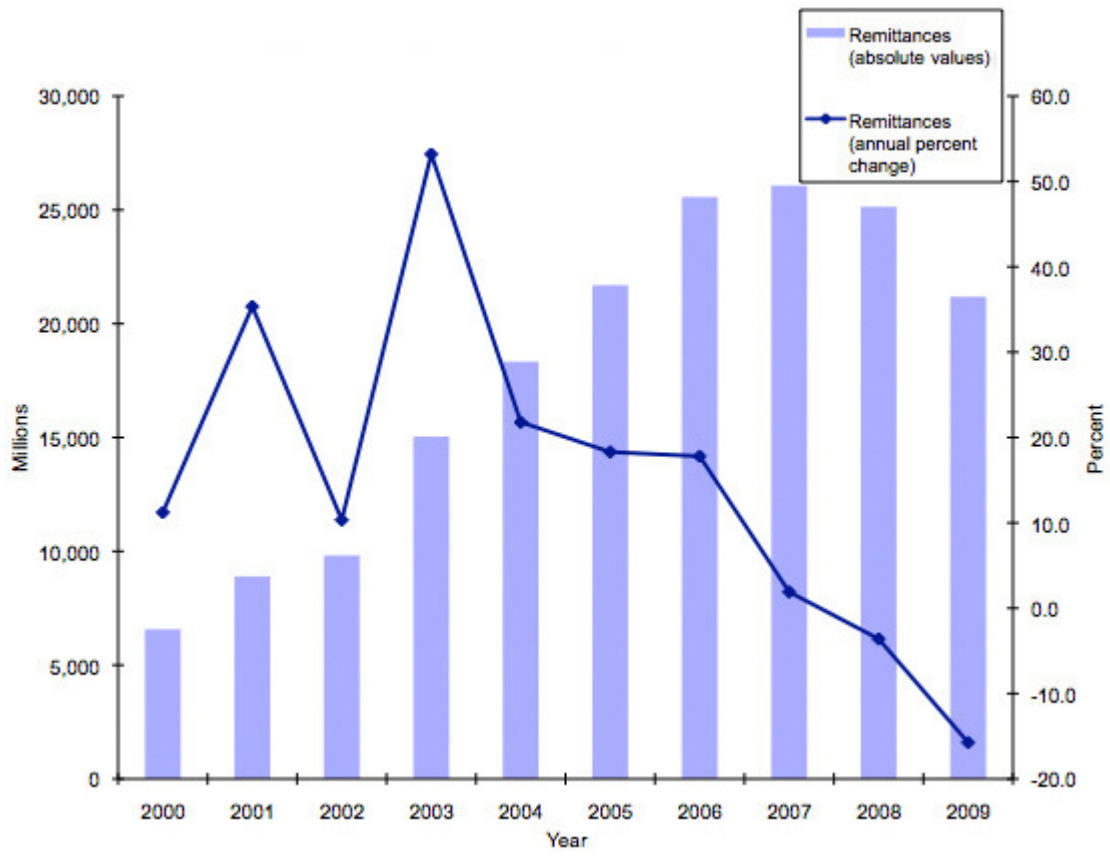
Mexico became Canada's top source country for asylum applications in 2008. Although claims from Mexico have almost tripled since 2005, only 11 percent of claims reviewed in 2008 were accepted.

The Importance of Remittances and the Diaspora

Remittances, like migration, had important but mostly regional effects until the 1980s, when emigration became more common across Mexico. Since then, remittances have increased in volume and importance, from $6.6 billion in 2000 to $26.1 billion in 2007 according to Banco de México, partly due to more accurate accounting.

The severe recession in the United States, which especially hit sectors that employed Mexican immigrants, has affected these flows. Remittances declined 3.6 percent in 2008 and more steeply in 2009 (-15.7 percent) to $21.2 billion (see Figure 2). This drop might mean a relapse into poverty for many families, particularly in rural areas, and a slowdown of economic activity at the community level.

Figure 2. Remittances to Mexico, 2000 to 2009



Source: Banco de México, Sistema de Información Económica (SIE).

Remittances have important macroeconomic and indirect effects. Although they represent less than 4 percent of Mexico's GDP, remittances have become the second source of foreign income, after oil exports. The stronger and most direct effects, however, are regional, particularly at the local and household levels.

Researcher Jesús Arroyo has estimated that in 2007, about three-fourths of remittances were spent on everyday expenses, like food and rent, about 8 percent on house acquisition and improvement, 6 to 7 percent on debt redemption, and 3 to 4 percent on land acquisition, agricultural implements, and business-related expenses. The remainder included unspecified expenses and purchases of items such as cars and electric appliances.

Since 1986, the government has been trying to encourage a more development-oriented and productive use of remittances. In 1999, previous programs evolved into the Three-for-One Program (*Programa 3 x 1*), which matches every dollar from a migrant with one dollar each from federal, state, and municipality governments. In the 2005-2008 period, between two-thirds to three-fourths of program funds went to infrastructure projects — from road pavement to school improvements — and other social works, including public buildings and church embellishments. However, the program accounts for less than 1 percent of all remittance dollars.

In 1990, the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (*Programa para las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior* or PCME) was established with the objectives of helping migrants keep cultural links with their country, encouraging investments in their communities of origin, and helping them to secure their rights while abroad.

In 2003, PCME and another initiative were merged to create the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (*Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior* or IME). In addition to previous objectives, one of IME's goals is to collect proposals from Mexicans communities with the aim of improving their living conditions abroad (Mexican communities include the hometown associations of Mexican nationals in the United States as well as associations of US citizens of Mexican origin) (for more on IME, see the MPI report ***Protection through Integration: The Mexican Government's Efforts to Aid Migrants in the United States***).

These programs have shown the Mexican government the economic and political importance of the Mexican and Mexican-American populations.

Transit Migration and Detention

For years, the seasonal, economic migration of Guatemalans to Mexico was mostly seen as a regional and localized phenomenon, with no major national spillovers.

However, civil wars in the 1980s in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua meant that many displaced Central Americans transited through Mexico to seek asylum or look for jobs in the United States. Over the years, migrants from other parts of the world, particularly from South America (e.g., Ecuador) and Asia (e.g., China), have used Mexico as a transit country. This trend has been a cause of concern for the Mexican government.

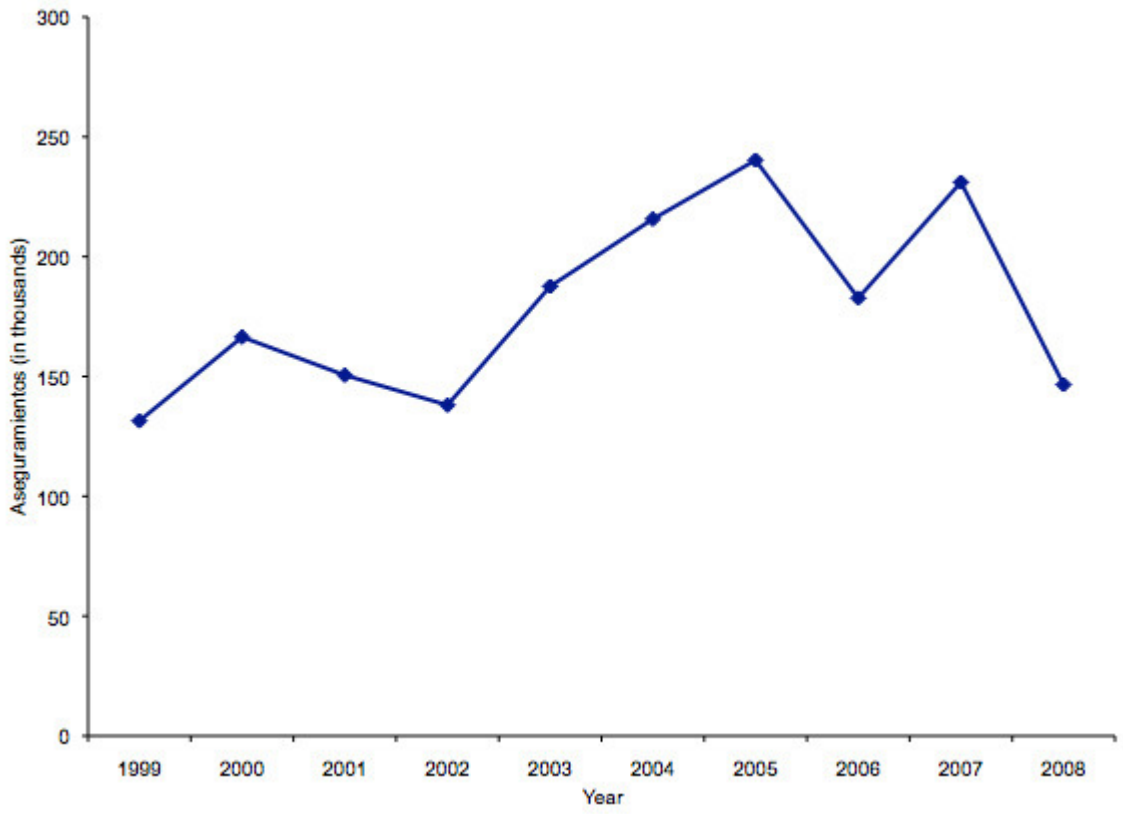
In the 1990s, transit migration gained importance as the United States put pressure on Mexico to better control its southern border so that fewer Central Americans could enter the United States illegally via Mexico.

Rather than erect a border fence, Mexico chose to increase interior enforcement by, for example, setting up checkpoints along major highways. It also stepped up deportations, signing agreements with Guatemala and other Central American countries that allow Mexico to turn over all unauthorized Central Americans to their countries of origin.

The number of transit migrants, after sustained increases from the 1980s through the 1990s, has more recently experienced some ups and downs.

As in the United States, one way to measure this flow is by looking at the number of *aseguramientos*, seizures of potentially deportable foreigners; these are counted as events, not as individuals. Aseguramientos generally increased between 1999 and 2005, but declined relatively steeply from 2007 to 2008 (see Figure 3). On average, around 90 percent of these events ended in actual deportations.

Figure 3. Seizures of Potentially Deportable Foreigners (Aseguramientos) in Mexico, 1999 to 2008



Source: **Instituto Nacional de Migración**.

These apprehensions also provide an indication of who enters Mexico without authorization. In 2008, of all deported foreigners, 45.9 percent were from Guatemala, 33.3 percent from Honduras, and 15.4 percent from El Salvador. The remaining 5.4 percent was divided among a number of countries, including Nicaragua with 1.7 percent.

Mexico has more than doubled its number of detention facilities since 2000, from 22 to 48 as of 2008.

Despite an executive order that outlines detainees' rights and accommodations, human rights and Mexican civil-society groups have issued reports pointing out that many detention facilities are overcrowded and unhygienic, and that detainees receive poor treatment.

Partly as a response to such reports, the Mexican Migration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración* or INM) in 2006-2007 began implementing new detention procedures that allow citizens of Central American countries to sign a repatriation form that may expedite their removal from Mexico. It is also worth noting that Mexico recently changed its immigration law so that illegal presence is no longer a criminal offense.

Sin Fronteras, a migrant rights organization, continues to point out that corruption has not been eliminated and that organized criminal groups pray on many migrants.

Immigrants in Mexico

Immigration into Mexico, compared to emigration of its nationals and transit migration, is comparatively meager.

The foreign-born population increased between 1990 and 2000 by slightly more than 150,000, amounting to around 500,000, about 0.5 percent of Mexico's total population.

Among those age 5 and older, the US born were the dominant group with 63 percent of the total, up from 57 percent in 1990. Although Mexico is home to a small number of US retirees, the vast majority of US citizens in the 2000 census were children, 90 percent of whom had at least one parent born in Mexico. Moreover, according to INEGI, more than 90 percent of all foreigners below the age of 10 were born in the United States.

Those from Europe, particularly from Spain, accounted for 11.9 percent of all foreign born, followed by those born in Central America (11.2 percent), South America (7.3 percent), and the Caribbean (2.4 percent). The remaining 4 percent came from the rest of the world.

Refugee and Asylum Policy

At specific historical junctures, Mexico has had very generous responses to refugees and asylum seekers, most notably in the 1930s for exiles during the Spain Civil War, and in the 1980s and 1990s for people fleeing their political systems in several South and Central American countries.

In 2000, Mexico ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In March 2002, the Mexican government began adjudicating asylum claims on its own, thus replacing the eligibility determinations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in place since 1982.

A common complaint by rights advocates is the lack of transparent regulation regarding the adjudication process.

In 2008, Mexico received about 300 asylum applications and granted refugee status to a little more than 100 of the applicants. Exceptionally, more than half of these refugees came from Haiti. Roughly another fifth were from other Latin American countries (Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela); the remainder came from all over the world.

Mexico experienced a small surge in asylum applications from Hondurans who fled after President Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a coup in June 2009. By the fall, the government had denied at least 13 asylum applications from Hondurans because the government claimed the political situation in Honduras was not related to those individuals leaving the country. However, it is possible for asylum applicants to be granted humanitarian visas and remain legally in Mexico.

Around two-thirds of all asylum applications are filed from detention centers within Mexico. The majority of refugees use Mexico as a route to reach other countries, especially the United States and Canada.

US Immigration Policy and Its Consequences

In February 2001, presidents Fox of Mexico and Bush of the United States engaged their administrations to find mutually acceptable responses to a lingering migration issue that often had placed the two countries at odds.

Interpreted by the main Mexican officials involved as negotiations, the high-level contacts and discussions centered on legalizing the status of Mexicans already residing in the United States without authorization, establishing a guest worker program, enhancing border enforcement conditions, and on increasing the number of US visas available for Mexicans. Expectations of arriving at a far-reaching agreement were high until the September 11, 2001, attacks struck the United States.

This bilateral attempt was meant to find a meaningful answer to the long-lasting Mexico-US migration issue. After the termination of the Bracero program in 1964, Mexico tried, in vain, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to renegotiate temporary worker programs with the United States.

In view of the US unwillingness in those years to engage the issue and the realization that Mexican migrants continued to cross the border and to find work in the United States, the Mexican government eventually retrenched into "a policy of no policy;" i.e., it let migration flows run loose and unmanaged.

At the same time, Washington also recognized that the termination of the Bracero programs did not end Mexican migration to the United States; instead, it simply continued in illegal forms, in the context of a permissive attitude by both countries.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 was the first serious attempt to curtail the migration of *indocumentados*. However, one of the most important long-term unintended consequences of IRCA's generous legalization component was that it helped transform Mexican migration from a predominantly circular pattern to a more permanent one.

Later on, since 1993-1994, the US enactment and pursuit of increasingly robust immigration control policies prompted the Mexican government to shift its position from one of deliberate nonengagement to a stance of increasing dialogue with Washington.

At the same time, NAFTA provided a more mature framework for bilateral immigration dialogue and understandings.

Although the dialogue did much to enhance exchanges of information, institutionalize and increase the effectiveness of consular protection, and expand certain forms of cooperation at the border, it did not prevent the deployment of Border Patrol operations or the enactment of the restrictive Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996.

This legislation, together with the strong message sent in 1994 by Proposition 187 in California, convinced many Mexican US permanent residents to naturalize as a way to protect themselves from curtailments of many of their social rights.

This restrictive climate indirectly motivated Mexico to pass a law in 1996 allowing its citizens to have dual citizenship and probably strengthened Mexico's determination to protect its nationals abroad in a more systematic way.

Since the years of the Bracero programs, but particularly since the 1980s, Mexico has built out its consular network in the United States. As of 2009, Mexican had 50 consulates tasked with reaching out to all Mexicans, regardless of their legal status.

Among the policies the Mexican government has implemented is the *matrícula consular*, an ID card for migrants. After September 11, Mexico stepped up its efforts to provide these ID cards. Nearly a million matrículas were issued in 2003. The matrícula, which is valid for five years, can be used to open bank accounts at hundreds of US financial institutions.

As the United States stepped up border enforcement in California in the 1990s, the flows shifted east to the harsh deserts of Arizona. One of the unintended consequences has been an increase in the number of deaths as migrants take ever-greater risks to reach the United States. This has become an important stress point in the US-Mexico relationship.

A New Approach toward the United States

At the end of the Fox government, in 2005, the Mexican government made an unprecedented effort to discuss migration policy. The result was a document entitled "Mexico and the Migration Phenomenon." Both houses of the legislature — in a rare unanimous vote — adopted it in 2006 in a "verbal resolution" (*resolución*).

The document sets forth important guiding principles, recommendations, and commitments to update Mexico's migration policy on topics such as undocumented migration, border and regional security, human smuggling and trafficking, and international cooperation.

Mexico has long sought for the United States to view the management of Mexican migration flows as bilateral in nature. In this instance, however, the key concept was "shared responsibility," indicating Mexico's willingness to do its part regarding migration management.

In the document, Mexico takes explicit responsibility for improving economic and social opportunities in the country and recognizes the important implications migration represents for its development. Explicit mention is made of encouraging and easing the return and reincorporation of Mexicans into their home communities. Components of this strategy include better use of remittances and enhancement of relations with Mexicans abroad.

One of the document's aims was to influence legislative discussions on various immigration reform bills introduced, since 2005, in the US Congress. However, the document did not have the intended effect on any specific piece of immigration legislation, none of which Congress has passed. The most recent immigration reform bill, introduced in early 2010, has not had much traction.

Probably as a reaction to such developments, the Calderón government has opted to use a subtler, low-key approach on migration matters.

Ongoing Concerns

The most pressing task facing the Mexican government should be seriously reengaging the United States in negotiations on the migration issue.

Arguing in favor of a thoughtful resolution of these issues is the realization that tightened

immigration enforcement is unlikely to change the economic and social realities that build migration pressures.

However, the Calderón administration seems to be aware that US policy is unlikely to change, even more so given the recession and high unemployment in the United States.

The government believes that development and job creation in Mexico are key to breaking Mexico's migration cycle. But the strategy for job creation rests almost exclusively on sound conditions to attract and promote private — domestic and foreign — investment.

While the Calderón government has prioritized national security, the rule of law, and the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime, it has made several attempts to professionalize migration personnel and to modernize migration facilities to better manage transit migration. Several programs have also been enacted to regularize "transborder migrants" in the southern regions.

A fair amount of rethinking will be needed to honestly address the contradictions of migration policies heavily driven by restrictive considerations in increasingly interlocked contexts. The challenge will be to understand clearly the enduring nature of the economic, social, and communications forces at work even while looking at the entire process through the security lens.

The current dilemmas facing Mexico and the United States with regard to migration are the same old ones. Either the two countries accept the reality of Mexicans entering the United States — whether temporarily or permanently — and open avenues for orderly movement, or both countries engage forcefully and cooperatively to achieve a real "partnership for prosperity" within a framework of multifaceted integration.

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