

Points of Migration

Center for Migration and Development
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June 2004, Quarterly Issue

Is it Time for President Bush's Immigration Proposal?

Douglas S. Massey, Princeton University

Many cringe at the possibility of granting temporary work visas to undocumented Mexicans. Won't it reward "lawbreakers" and encourage more migration? Won't it raise costs to American taxpayers? A look at history helps to answer these questions.

With the exception of a short break during the Great Depression, Mexicans have been coming to the United States continuously since the early 1900s. Before World War One they were recruited privately. When we entered the fray, government stepped in to help. Once southern and eastern European migration was ended by Congress in 1920, immigration from Mexico surged.

A massive deportation campaign and a decade of joblessness in the 1930s were needed to curtail the early flows from Mexico. After Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government renewed recruitment and expanded it until the 1960s, by which time millions of Mexicans had acquired the knowledge and social connections needed to migrate on their own. From 1965 to 1985 the rate of out-migration fluctuated with the rhythms of the Mexican and American economies, increasing at a slow but steady pace. Despite alarmist rhetoric, the border was never "out of control." Most Mexicans went north hoping to address economic needs but intending to return home. Eighty-five percent of those who entered the U.S. ultimately went back to Mexico.

Beginning in 1986, however, the U.S. adopted a schizophrenic policy. On the one hand, we sought to create an integrated North American market with free movement of goods, capital, information, and services. On the other hand, we devoted more time and money to prevent the movement of labor. From 1986 to 2002, the Border Patrol went from 2,000 to 12,000 officers and the budget rose from \$200 million to \$1.3 billion.

Expanded border enforcement did not reduce the rate of undocumented entry but it dramatically decreased the probability of return migration, causing an unprecedented growth in the undocumented population. Equivalent numbers of people entered the U.S. but, reluctant to face the new costs and risks associated with border crossing, they didn't go home—they stayed longer and brought families. Militarizing the border, while promoting North American economic integration, transformed a circular movement of workers into a permanent settlement process.



A fallen barbed wire fence, only barrier between Mexico and the United States near Sasab, Arizona, as illegal migrants cross. (Associated Press)

Hence the need for a legalization program. Migrants are already here and staying longer than they want. Their undocumented status and large numbers impose serious costs on the U.S. Offering them temporary work visas would allow them to return home thus reducing the number of settled migrants in the U. S. and lowering the costs of migration. The de-facto system we have now offers the worst of all possible worlds: massive in-migration, little out-migration, and the accumulation of a costly, marginalized population north of the border. We have little to lose by trying something different. ■

Migration Reform in the Age of Globalization

Stephen Castles, University of Oxford

The socio-political changes associated with globalization have had important effects on the volume, direction and characteristics of migration. In 2000, there were 175 million international migrants (defined as people who had lived outside their country of birth for at least 12 months), that is, approximately 3 percent of the world's population. The global total has doubled since 1970. Sixty percent of migrants now live in developed regions—Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan—where one in 10 persons is an international migrant, compared with one in 70 in developing countries. The trend is thus towards an acceleration of South-North Migration.

International borders help to maintain inequality. Yet, key borders are no longer between nation-states but between regions—that is between powerful industrial nations in the North and the poorer countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America in the South. People move

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both to escape impoverishment and human rights abuse. Such ‘multiple motivations’ create a ‘migration-asylum nexus’ that makes it hard to distinguish with any precision between economic migrants and refugees. What some perceive as a ‘migration crisis’ is really a crisis in North-South relations, caused by uneven development and gross disparities in standards of living. From that perspective, migration control is mainly about regulating North-South relations.

Globalization is transforming the character of migration. In the past, people moved to settle either permanently or temporarily in areas of destination. Now they are able to go back and forth thanks to cheap transportation and nimble communication technologies. This can lead neither to settlement nor return, but to repeated sojourns of varying duration, punctuated by visits to the country of origin. The same process also alters the way immigrants are incorporated into receiving societies. In the past, most migrants were treated either as permanent settlers, to be assimilated, or as temporary workers to be kept separate from the host population. Now, people can live their lives across borders. Transnational communities—groups based in two or more countries whose members engage in recurrent and significant cross-border activity—are a visible result of this situation.

All this points to an obvious contradiction: while migration is being propelled by growing economic integration at the world level, policies to control migration continue to follow a national logic. Policy is doomed to failure unless it addresses the causes of economic and forced migration under current patterns of global inequality. Transnational networks will undermine migration control, as long as it is based on a national logic that ignores policies on aid, trade, development, and governance. Only when the objective of migration policy is to reduce North-South inequality can migration control succeed and, eventually, be rendered superfluous. ▀

Immigration Policy and its Pitfalls

Alejandro Portes, Princeton University

A large gap exists between manifest objectives and concrete realities in the field of immigration policy. Legally enshrined goals dictate that foreigners enter the nation only after meeting government requirements. In fact, a massive subterranean flow, composed mainly of low-skilled workers, continues to come year after year in direct opposition to the spirit of the law and, for the most part, American public opinion.

By themselves, disparities in wages and economic opportunities between countries do not lead to sustained migration. Other conditions must be met. First, people in sending nations must be made aware of opportunities abroad. American cultural hegemony is what motivates people in the first place to move to the country from which that culture emanates. In that sense, “what goes around comes around.” Mexico’s proximity intensifies that process.

Second, there must be demand for the labor of newcomers in areas of destination. In the U.S. that demand originally existed in agriculture but it has expanded to other labor-intensive sectors such as meatpacking, construction, landscaping, and personal services

Third, social networks linking places of origin and destination must exist to sustain migrant flows, especially when the bulk arrives surreptitiously. Supported by social ties and lured by the perennial hunger for low-wage labor north of the border, Mexican migration continues apace despite a succession of U.S. government attempts to suppress it.

Border enforcement has not deterred migrants from crossing into the U.S. but it has spurred unanticipated effects. It has shifted entry points from urban centers like Laredo, El Paso, and San Ysidro to remote desert locations in Arizona, California, and Texas, sensibly increasing the number of migrant deaths and the fees charged by *coyotes* or people smugglers. Bottled up by stepped up enforcement on the U.S. side, migrants have started to move to nontraditional destinations. That explains the fast growth of the Mexican population in states like Georgia, North Carolina, and New York.

More importantly, the halting of cyclical labor migration has compelled many unauthorized migrants to bring their families. The children of people who are poor and without legal status face singular disadvantages. They are forced to relocate frequently as parents move from place to place searching jobs. Their impoverished families settle in dilapidated inner-city neighborhoods where good schools are not available. Neither migrant families nor their weak transient communities have the resources to bolster children’s academic progress or protect them from the lure of drugs and street gangs. A large proportion of this second generation is thus at risk of downward assimilation, compounding the nightmare of poverty, unemployment, and violence in American inner cities. That the offspring of today’s labor migrants might join the descendants of African Americans and

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Puerto Ricans in a “rainbow underclass” is enough reason to focus national attention on immigration reform.

A temporary labor program granting legal entry to migrants with a work contract, allowing them to go back and forth during the duration of their permit, and to renew it on evidence of good conduct, would go a long way toward restoring the cyclical character of the flow and eliminate the perverse effects of the current state of affairs. Letting migrants respond to labor demand in U.S. agriculture and other labor-intensive sectors, while keeping their residences and families at home, would simultaneously favor the American and Mexican economies while preventing the worst social consequences of a permanent, settled population. ■

A Flashlight Through the Fog...

*Donald W. Light, University of Pennsylvania
Center for Bioethics*

President Bush began the year with a sympathetic speech about the plight of undocumented workers. Recalling how the great wave of immigrants a century ago “helped make our economy the largest in the world” and then fought the Great War, President Bush proposed that millions of aliens be given temporary, but renewable, worker permits. The President also suggested that immigrants get credit toward retirement benefits from contributions to Social Security and tax-deferred programs. Almost immediately, reactions erupted from the right and the left.

In a bulletin entitled *Stop Bush’s Immigration Plan!* the United Farm Workers claims that the proposal “offers no new path for hard-working immigrants to earn a green card.” As an alternative, the UFW emphasizes an agreement with growers to support S. 1645, a comprehensive alternative endorsed by an equal number of Democrats and Republicans. From the point of view of the UFW, Bush’s proposal would de-rail months of negotiation for a better solution.

On the right, a report from the Cato Institute points out that we have illegal immigrants because we created the laws that make them “illegal.” Rescind those laws and the problem will be solved in a stroke. In agreement with orthodox economics, the Cato group notes that when there are jobs, more people come. When a recession hits, they go back home. Allow markets, not governments, to regulate migration.

Still others point out that the prospect of benefits to immigrants would strictly depend on employers offering them, which they probably would not. In a letter to me, a leader of Latino health care states, “We doubt [Bush} will actually introduce legislation, and if he does it will have wording that will fall far short of what was expected or promised.”

In the end, whether President Bush’s proposal becomes a reality or not, it is the *details* of the legislation that will matter, not the general, overdue idea. ■

CMD Prize Awarded to... **Molly Spieczny**

In her important and ambitious project, *When Workers Take Over: Reclaimed Factories in Argentina*, Molly Spieczny, Princeton University Class of 2004, investigates what happened after Argentinean workers seized factories abandoned by bankrupt owners during the country’s financial collapse in 2001. To achieve her objectives, she completed an extensive review of several bodies of literature, conducted participant observation, and interviewed workers, plant owners, public officials and intellectuals, including the famous sociologist Torcuato DiTella, Argentina’s Secretary of Culture. In the words of her adviser, Viviana Zelizer, this lucidly written Senior Thesis “shows the mark of an energetic, inquisitive and creative mind at work.

A CMD Honorable Mention was also awarded to Ana Barfield ’04 for her Senior Thesis entitled *Sculpting the Nation: A Comparative Look at the Impact of Past Legacies on the Emerging National Identities in Central Asia*. This Thesis offers deep insight into how new nations in Central Asia are taking shape. Well written and elegantly organized, it is likely to be regarded as a major contribution to the literature on national identity.

Conference Announcement

***HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care; Fostering
Local and Lasting Social Change***

June 7 - 9, 2004

Hosted by The Office of Population Research and The Center for Migration and Development, Princeton University.

For more information visit:

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