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Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less

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About the Pew Hispanic Center

The Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve public understanding of the diverse Hispanic population in the United States and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. It does not take positions on policy issues. The Center is part of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank” based in Washington, D.C., and it is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, a Philadelphia-based public charity. All of the Center's reports are available at www.pewhispanic.org.

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About this Report

This report analyzes the magnitude and trend of migration flows between Mexico and the United States; the experiences and intentions of Mexican immigrants repatriated by U.S. immigration authorities; U.S. immigration enforcement patterns; conditions in Mexico and the U.S. that could affect immigration; and characteristics of Mexican-born immigrants in the U.S.

The report draws on numerous data sources from both Mexico and the U.S. The principal Mexican data sources are the Mexican decennial censuses (Censos de Población y Vivienda) of 1990, 2000 and 2010; the Mexican Population Count (Conteos de Población y Vivienda) of 2005; the Survey of Migration in the Northern Border of Mexico (la Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México or EMIF-Norte); the Survey of Demographic Dynamics of 2006 and 2009 (Encuesta Nacional de Dinámica Demográfica or ENADID); and the Survey of Occupation and Employment for 2005-2011 (Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo or ENOE). The principal U.S. data sources are the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) monthly data for 1994 to 2012; the CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement conducted in March for 1994 to 2011; the American Community Survey (ACS) for 2005-2010; U.S. Censuses from 1850 to 2000; U.S. Border Patrol data on apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border; and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics on legal admissions to the U.S. and aliens removed or returned. The report also uses data from the World Bank and the United Nations Population Division.

This report was written by Senior Demographer Jeffrey Passel, Senior Writer D'Vera Cohn and Research Associate Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. Paul Taylor provided editorial guidance in the drafting of this report. Rakesh Kochhar and Mark Hugo Lopez provided comments on earlier drafts of the report. Seth Motel and Gabriel Velasco provided research assistance. Gabriel Velasco and Eileen Patten number-checked the report. Marcia Kramer was the copy editor.

A Note on Terminology

Because this report views migration between Mexico and the U.S. from both sides of the border, descriptions of “immigrants” and “emigrants” or “immigration,” “emigration,” “migration flows” specify the country of residence of the migrants or the direction of the flow.

United States:

“Foreign born” refers to persons born outside of the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories to parents neither of whom was a U.S. citizen. The terms “foreign born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably in this report.

“U.S. born” refers to an individual who is a U.S. citizen at birth, including people born in the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories, as well as those born elsewhere to parents who are U.S. citizens. U.S.-born persons also are described as “U.S. natives.”

The “legal immigrant” population is defined as people granted legal permanent residence; those granted asylum; people admitted as refugees; and people admitted under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for longer-term residence and work. Legal immigrants also include persons who have acquired U.S. citizenship through naturalization. “Unauthorized immigrants” are all foreign-born non-citizens residing in the country who are not “legal immigrants.” These definitions reflect standard and customary usage by the Department of Homeland Security and academic researchers. The vast majority of unauthorized immigrants entered the country without valid documents or arrived with valid visas but stayed past their visa expiration date or otherwise violated the terms of their admission. Some who entered as unauthorized immigrants or violated terms of admission have obtained work authorization by applying for adjustment to legal permanent status or by obtaining Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Data are very limited, but this “quasi-legal” group could account for as much as 10% of the unauthorized population. Many could also revert to unauthorized status.

U.S. censuses and surveys include people whose usual residence is the United States. Consequently, migrants from Mexico who are in the U.S. for short periods to work, visit or shop are generally not included in measures of the U.S. population. “Immigration” to the United States includes only people who are intending to settle in the United States.

“Removals” are the compulsory and confirmed movement of inadmissible or deportable aliens out of the United States based on an order of removal. An alien who is removed has administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent re-entry.

“Returns” are the confirmed movement of inadmissible or deportable aliens out of the United States not based on an order of removal. These include aliens who agree to return home.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security uses the term “removal” rather than “deportation” to describe the actions of its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to expel foreign nationals from the U.S. “Deportations” are one type of removal and refer to the formal removal of a foreign citizen from the U.S. In addition, a foreign citizen may be expelled from the U.S. under an alternative action called an expedited removal. Deportations and expedited removals together comprise removals reported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Mexico:

In Mexican data, “U.S. born” refers only to persons born in the United States and not to the citizenship at birth.

“Return migration” is a concept based on a census or survey question about prior residence, specifically residence five years before the census or survey. A “return migrant” to Mexico is a person who lived outside of Mexico (usually in the U.S.) five years before the census or survey and is back in Mexico at the time of the survey.

“Recent migrants” are identified through a question in Mexican censuses and surveys that asks whether any members of the household have left to go to the U.S. in a prior period, usually the previous five years. The recent migrants may be back in the household or elsewhere in Mexico (in which case they have “returned” to Mexico) or they may still be in the U.S. or in another country.

“U.S.-born residents with Mexican parents” are people born in the United States with either a Mexican-born mother or father. The Mexican data sources do not have a direct question about the country of birth of a person’s mother and father. Consequently, parentage must be inferred from relationships to other members of the household. About 89-91% of U.S.-born children in the Mexican censuses can be linked with one or two Mexican-born parents, only about 2% can be linked only with non-Mexican parents, and the remaining 7-9% are in households without either parent.

Both:

“Adults” are ages 18 and older. “Children,” unless otherwise specified, are people under age 18.

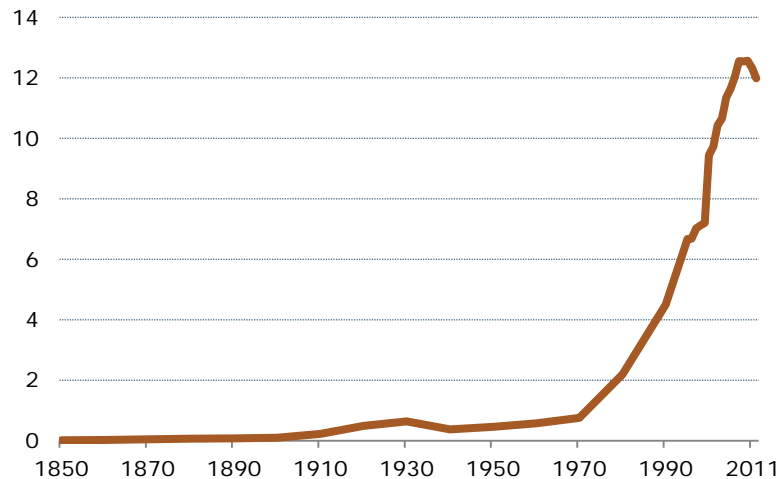
Table of Contents

About the Pew Hispanic Center	1
About this Report	2
A Note on Terminology	2
1. Overview	4
2. Migration Between the U.S. and Mexico	9
3. Mexicans Sent Back to Mexico by U.S. Authorities	20
4. U.S. Immigration Enforcement	24
5. Mexico, by the Numbers	27
6. Characteristics of Mexican-Born Immigrants Living in the U.S.	32
References	34

1. Overview

The largest wave of immigration in history from a single country to the United States has come to a standstill. After four decades that brought 12 million current immigrants—most of whom came illegally—the net migration flow from Mexico to the United States has stopped and may have reversed, according to a new analysis of government data from both countries by the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center.

Figure 1.1
Mexican-Born Population in the U.S., 1850-2011
(in millions)



Source: For 1850 to 1980: Gibson and Jung (2006); For 1990 to 2010: Pew Hispanic Center estimates from augmented March Current Population Surveys and Decennial Censuses adjusted for undercount

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The standstill appears to be the result of many factors, including the weakened U.S. job and housing construction markets, heightened border enforcement, a rise in deportations, the growing dangers associated with illegal border crossings, the long-term decline in Mexico's birth rates and broader economic conditions in Mexico.

It is possible that the Mexican immigration wave will resume as the U.S. economy recovers. Even if it doesn't, it has already secured a place in the record books. The U.S. today has more immigrants from Mexico alone—12.0 million—than any other country in the world has from all countries of the world.¹ Some 30% of all current U.S. immigrants were born in Mexico. The next largest sending country—China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan)—accounts for just 5% of the nation's current stock of about 40 million immigrants.

¹ Russia has 12.3 million residents who are classified by the United Nations as immigrants, but the vast majority were born in countries that had been a part of the Soviet Union prior to its breakup in 1991.

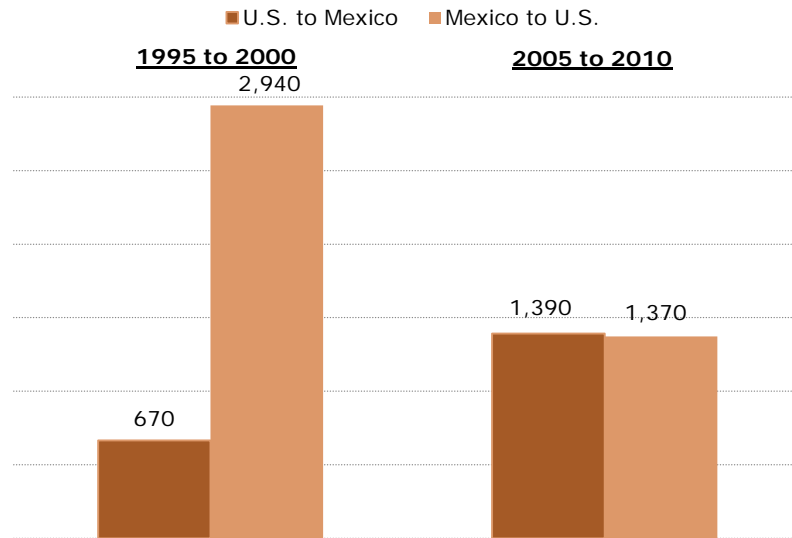
Looking back over the entire span of U.S. history, no country has ever seen as many of its people immigrate to this country as Mexico has in the past four decades. However, when measured not in absolute numbers but as a share of the immigrant population at the time, immigration waves from Germany and Ireland in the late 19th century equaled or exceeded the modern wave from Mexico.

Beyond its size, the most distinctive feature of the modern Mexican wave has been the unprecedented share of immigrants who have come to the U.S. illegally. Just over half (51%) of all current Mexican immigrants are unauthorized, and some 58% of the estimated 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. are Mexican ([Passel and Cohn, 2011](#)).

The sharp downward trend in net migration from Mexico began about five years ago and has led to the first significant decrease in at least two decades in the unauthorized Mexican population. As of 2011, some 6.1 million unauthorized Mexican immigrants were living in the U.S., down from a peak of nearly 7 million in 2007, according to Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Over the same period, the population of authorized immigrants from Mexico rose modestly, from 5.6 million in 2007 to 5.8 million in 2011.

The net standstill in Mexican-U.S. migration flows is the result of two opposite trend lines

Figure 1.2
Five-Year Migration Flows Between the U.S. and Mexico, 1995-2000 and 2005-2010
(in thousands)



Note: Estimates are for February 1995 through February 2000 and June 2005 through June 2010. Migration from U.S. to Mexico includes persons born in Mexico, the U.S., and elsewhere; Mexico to U.S. includes Mexican-born persons only.

Source: U.S. to Mexico: Pew Hispanic Center estimates from population, household and migrant microdata samples of Mexican censuses of 2000 and 2010; Mexico to U.S.: Based on Pew Hispanic Center estimates in Figure 1.3 from various sources; see Methodology

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that have converged in recent years. During the five-year period from 2005 to 2010, a total of 1.4 million Mexicans immigrated to the United States, down by more than half from the 3 million who had done so in the five-year period of 1995 to 2000. Meantime, the number of Mexicans and their children who moved from the U.S. to Mexico between 2005 and 2010 rose to 1.4 million, roughly double the number who had done so in the five-year period a decade before. While it is not possible to say so with certainty, the trend lines within this latest five-year period suggest that

return flow to Mexico probably exceeded the inflow from Mexico during the past year or two.

Of the 1.4 million people who migrated from the U.S. to Mexico since 2005, including about 300,000 U.S.-born children, most did so voluntarily, but a significant minority were deported and remained in Mexico. Firm data on this phenomenon are sketchy, but Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on government data from both countries suggest that 5% to 35% of these returnees may not have moved voluntarily.

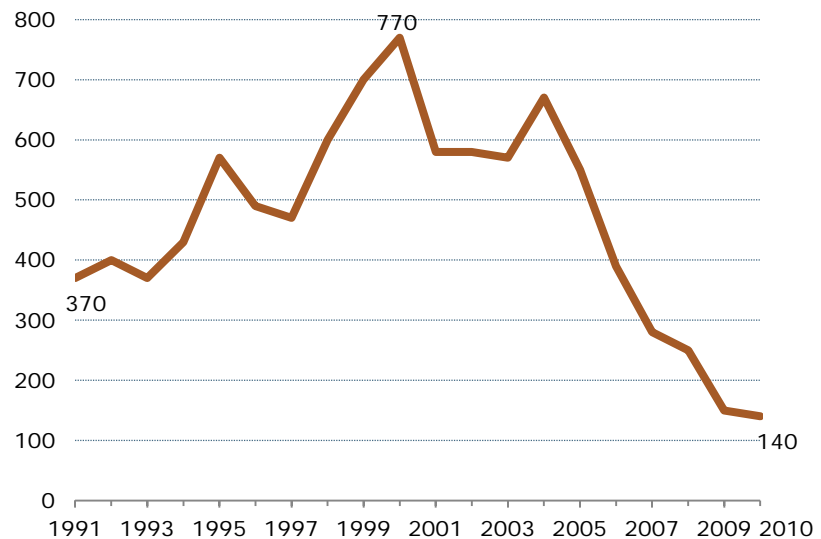
In contrast to the decrease of the Mexican born, the U.S. immigrant population from all countries has continued to grow and numbered 39.6 million in 2011, according to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.

In addition, the number of Mexican-Americans in the U.S.—both immigrants and U.S.-born residents of Mexican ancestry—is continuing to rise. The Mexican-American population numbered 33 million in 2010.² As reported previously ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2011](#)), between

Figure 1.3

Annual Immigration from Mexico to the U.S.: 1991-2010

(in thousands)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates compiled from various sources; see Methodology

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² Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of 2010 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

2000 and 2010 births surpassed immigration as the main reason for growth of the Mexican-American population.

The population of Mexican-born residents of the U.S. is larger than the population of most countries or states. Among Mexican-born people worldwide, one-in-ten lives in the United States.

This report has five additional sections. The next section analyzes statistics on migration between Mexico and the United States from data sources in both countries. The third uses mainly Mexican data to examine characteristics, experience and future intentions of Mexican migrants handed over to Mexican authorities by U.S. law enforcement agencies. The fourth, based on U.S. data, examines trends in border enforcement statistics. The fifth looks at changing conditions in Mexico that might affect migration trends. The report's last section looks at characteristics of Mexican-born immigrants in the U.S., using U.S. Census Bureau data. The appendix explains the report's methodology and data sources.

Among the report's other main findings from these sections:

Changing Patterns of Border Enforcement

- In spite of (and perhaps because of) increases in the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents, apprehensions of Mexicans trying to cross the border illegally have plummeted in recent years—from more than 1 million in 2005 to 286,000 in 2011—a likely indication that fewer unauthorized migrants are trying to cross. Border Patrol apprehensions of all unauthorized immigrants are now at their lowest level since 1971.
- As apprehensions at the border have declined, deportations of unauthorized Mexican immigrants—some of them picked up at work sites or after being arrested for other criminal violations—have risen to record levels. In 2010, 282,000 unauthorized Mexican immigrants were repatriated by U.S. authorities, via deportation or the expedited removal process.

Changing Characteristics of Return Migrants

- Although most unauthorized Mexican immigrants sent home by U.S. authorities say they plan to try to return, a growing share say they will not try to come back to the U.S. According to a survey by Mexican authorities of repatriated immigrants, 20% of labor migrants in 2010 said they would not return, compared with just 7% in 2005.

- A growing share of unauthorized Mexican immigrants sent home by U.S. authorities had been in the United States for a year or more—27% in 2010, up from 6% in 2005. Also, 17% were apprehended at work or at home in 2010, compared with just 3% in 2005.

Demographic Trends Related to Mexican Migration

- In Mexico, among the wide array of trends with potential impact on the decision to emigrate, the most significant demographic change is falling fertility: As of 2009, a typical Mexican woman was projected to have an average 2.4 children in her lifetime, compared with 7.3 for her 1960 counterpart.
- Compared with other immigrants to the U.S., Mexican-born immigrants are younger, poorer, less-educated, less likely to be fluent in English and less likely to be naturalized citizens.

2. Migration Between the U.S. and Mexico

The number of Mexican-born immigrants who left the U.S. for Mexico rose sharply from 2005 to 2010, even as the flow of new immigrants to the U.S. from Mexico fell steeply, according to a Pew Hispanic Center analysis of data from both countries.

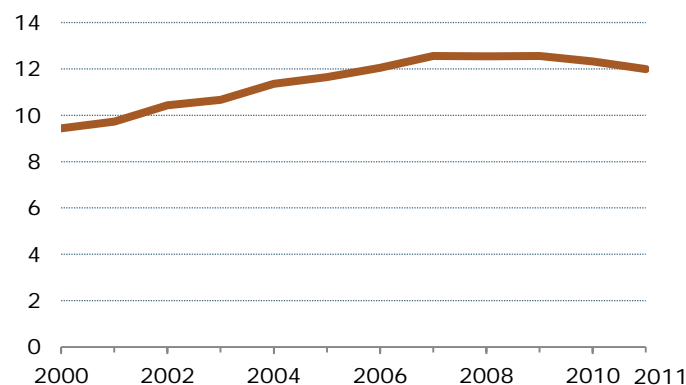
As a result, net Mexican immigration to the U.S. is at a standstill, and the Mexican-born population in the U.S. leveled off and then declined in the last half of the most recent decade. The Mexican-born population grew 23% from 2000 to 2005, peaked in 2007 at 12.6 million and stabilized for two years before declining slightly in 2010. In 2011, the Mexican-born population in the U.S. decreased still further, to 12.0 million.

These developments represent a notable reversal of the historic pattern of Mexican immigration to the U.S., which has risen dramatically over the past four decades. Mexico is the leading country of origin of U.S. immigrants, and Mexicans in the U.S. are by far the largest population worldwide from any origin country.

From 2005 to 2010, 1.4 million Mexicans and their families (including U.S.-born children) left the U.S. to move to Mexico, according to data from the 2010 Mexican census. That is about double the 670,000 who did so a decade earlier, from 1995 to 2000. While most of these immigrants returned voluntarily, an estimated 5% to 35% returned as a result of deportations between 2005 and 2010 (for more details, see Section 3).

U.S. data on Mexican inflows tell the rest of the migration story from this side of the border. Flows—the number of people added to the U.S. population each year—dropped markedly from

Figure 2.1
Mexican-Born Population in the U.S., by Status, 2000-2011
(in millions)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on augmented March Current Population Surveys, adjusted for undercount

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2005 to 2010, totaling 1.4 million for the five-year period, according to estimates based on U.S. Census Bureau data. This represents a marked break from previous years: Total inflows reached about 3 million in each of the two preceding five-year periods.

Mexican Census Data: Return Flows

It has been clear for several years that immigration flows to the U.S. from Mexico have been dwindling since 2006 ([Passel and Cohn, 2009](#)), but until recently there had been little hard evidence that flows back to Mexico had grown over the same period. That gap has been filled by new data from the 2010 Mexican census, which show that about twice as many Mexicans returned home in the five years previous to the 2010 census than had done so in the five years before the 2000 census.

This analysis draws on two sets of questions in the Mexican census. One asks all respondents where they had been living five years before the census was taken; the

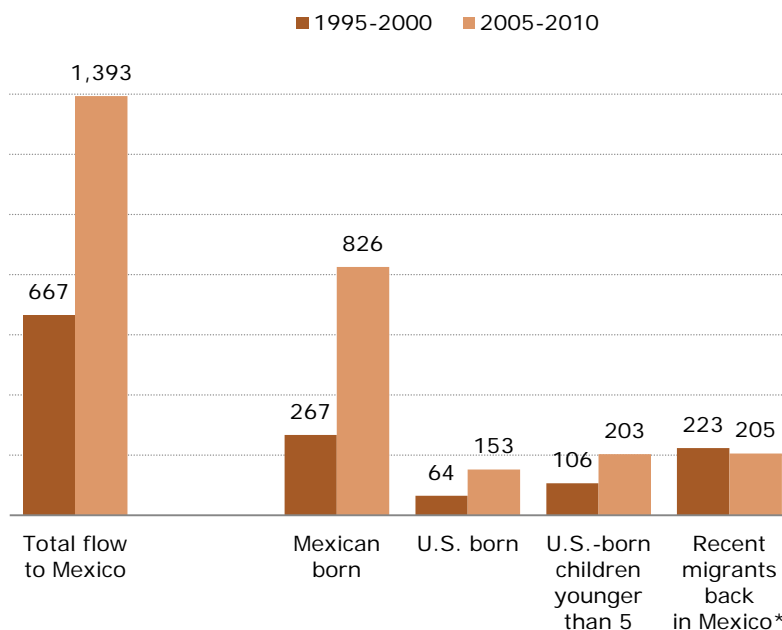
answers provide a count of people who moved from the U.S. to Mexico during that period. A separate question targets more recent emigrants: It asks a sample of all households whether anyone from the household had left for another country during the previous five years; if so, additional questions are asked about whether and when that person or persons came back.

The 2010 Mexican census tallied nearly 1.4 million people—the vast majority of them Mexican adults—who had moved from the U.S. to Mexico between 2005 and 2010. (This combines

Figure 2.2

Flows from U.S. to Mexico by Type of Migrant, 1995-2000 and 2005-2010

(in thousands)



Notes: "Others in U.S. five years ago" not shown separately (fewer than 10,000).

* "Recent migrants" are persons who left Mexico in the five years before the census and returned by the time of the census. Figures adjusted to exclude persons living in the U.S. five years ago and U.S.-born children younger than 5.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations from population, household and migrant microdata samples of Mexican censuses of 2000 and 2010

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answers to both questions.) That is nearly double the 667,000 people who had moved to Mexico from the U.S. from 1995 to 2000, according to 2000 Mexican census numbers analyzed by the Pew Hispanic Center.

The total number of U.S.-Mexico migrants consists of four main groups. The largest is Mexican born, largely (90%) adults, who lived in the U.S. in five years before the census and in Mexico at the census date. These Mexican-born return migrants more than tripled to 826,000 in 2010 from 267,000 in 2000.

The second group is U.S. born, largely (75%) children, who were in the U.S. five years before the census. This group more than doubled to 153,000 in 2010 from 64,000 in 2000. The third consists of children under 5 who were born in the U.S. and brought to Mexico by the census date. Almost all of these are children of Mexican-born parents, and their number almost doubled to 203,000 from 106,000.

The final large group we designate as “recent migrants.” These people were in Mexico five years before the census but moved to the U.S. in the intervening period and returned to Mexico by the census date.³ There were slightly fewer of the recent migrants in 2010 (205,000) than in 2000 (223,000). Since this group is initially part of the flow of migrants to the U.S. in the period just before the census, the drop undoubtedly reflects the overall drop in Mexico-U.S. migration in recent years.⁴

The structure of the flow is similar in the two periods. Mexican-born adults are just under three-quarters of the total flow in both periods; Mexican-born children are about 5%. U.S.-born children of Mexican parents are the remaining 20%.

U.S.-Born Children

Those who had lived in the U.S. in 2005 but were living in Mexico in 2010 included more than 826,000 Mexican-born migrants ages 5 and older (more than 90% adults) and more than 100,000 U.S.-born children ages 5 and older with Mexican parents.⁵ In the 2000 Mexican

³ The remaining migrants, persons born in countries other than Mexico or the U.S., represent less than 1% of the flow.

⁴ In the Mexican census data, there is some overlap between the recent migrants and those in the U.S. five years before the census. In our estimates of five-year flows, the overlapping counts are removed.

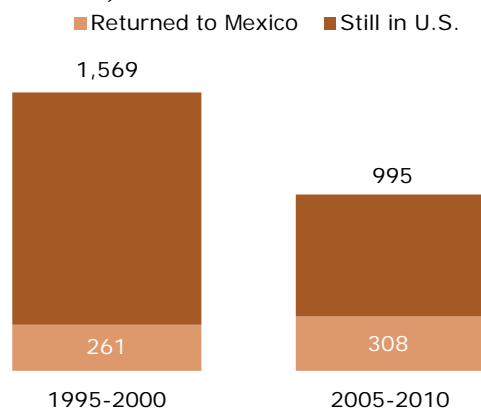
⁵ Children are defined as persons ages 17 and younger.

census, the comparable numbers who had lived in the U.S. five years earlier (1995) were about 267,000 Mexican-born migrants ages 5 and older (again, mainly adults) and about 37,000 U.S.-born children ages 5 and older of Mexican parents.

The 2010 Mexican census also counted more than 182,000 U.S.-born children under age 5 with Mexican parents living in Mexico, compared with about 99,000 counted in the 2000 census. These children are considered part of the five-year migration total but they are not captured by the “residence five years ago” question because they were not yet born. The U.S.-born children under 5 represent an estimated 5% to 10% of the roughly 2.5 million children born in the U.S. to Mexican-born parents during the 2006-2010 period.

The total number of U.S.-born children of Mexican parents counted in the 2010 Mexican census was about 500,000, compared with about 240,000 in 2000.⁶ (According to Pew Hispanic estimates, most of these 500,000 children would have moved to Mexico in the 2005-2010 period.)

Figure 2.3
Recent Migration from Mexico to the U.S. by Current Residence, 1995-2000 and 2005-2010
(in thousands)



⁶ These are conservative estimates because the children who are included in this category are only those living in the same household with their parents. In addition, there were another 52,000 children ages 17 and younger in 2010 who could not be linked with a parent living in the same household. Most are probably U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants to the U.S.

It is possible that some U.S.-born children were accompanying parents who were sent back to Mexico by U.S. authorities. The Department of Homeland Security recently provided Congress with the first official data on the number of parents removed from the U.S. who say they have U.S.-born citizen children.

Note: Includes persons reported in the Mexican census as having left Mexican households for the U.S. in the five years before the census (1995-February 2000 or June 2005-June 2010). Some people are back in the same households, some are elsewhere in Mexico and the rest are in the U.S.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of 10 percent microdata samples from Mexican censuses of 2000 and 2010.

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According to the report (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012), more than 46,000 immigrants removed from the U.S. during the first six months of 2011 said they had U.S.-citizen children. However, the report did not specify the countries of birth of the parents who were repatriated, the total number of U.S.-born children of these migrants or whether the U.S.-born children remained in the United States.⁷

Children born to immigrant parents in the U.S. have automatic right of citizenship at birth. U.S.-born children of Mexican-born parents automatically acquire dual nationality and thus become citizens of both the U.S. and Mexico. Although each country has its own citizenship laws and policies, both countries allow the automatic acquisition or retention of a foreign nationality, acquired by birth in a foreign country, or through a parent who is a national of another country.⁸

More Recent Migrants

The same trends shown above for migrants to Mexico who had been living in the U.S. in 2005 apply to Mexicans who had not been in the U.S. in 2005 but moved to the U.S. after that—more recent migrants. The 2010 Mexican census counted a smaller number of recent emigrants than the 2000 census, but a higher number (and share) of returnees from this group.

The 2010 Mexican census counted 995,000 Mexicans who had left for the U.S. since June 2005 and about 310,000 who returned by June 2010. The 2000 Mexican census counted 1.6

⁷ The report (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012) was ordered by Congress in response to a 2009 estimate by the inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security ([U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2009](#)) that more than 100,000 parents of U.S.-born children had been deported during the nine-year period from 1998 to 2007. The inspector general report with that estimate stated that DHS did not consistently track U.S.-citizen children.

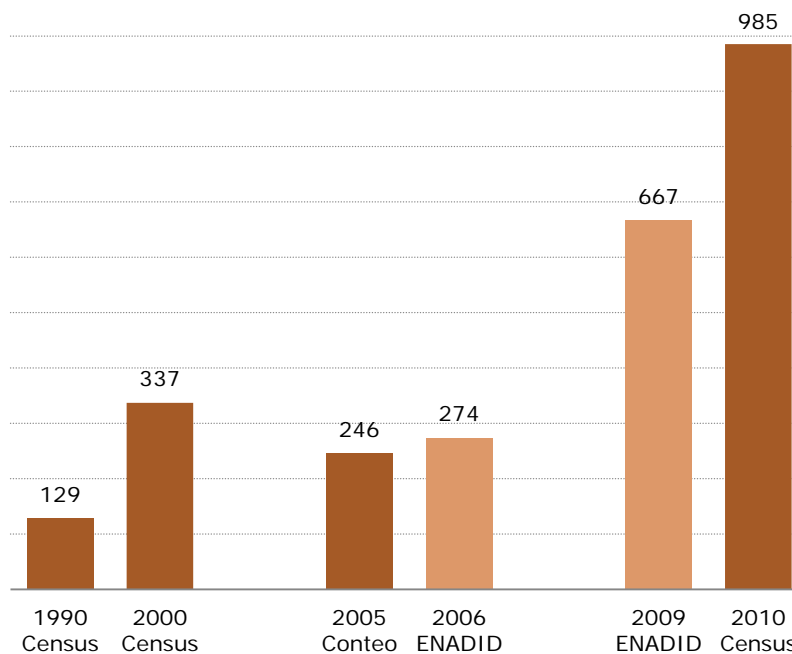
⁸ In the case of Mexico, citizenship may also be acquired through a parent who is a naturalized Mexican citizen. Mexico started allowing its citizens to hold dual nationality in 1998. Foreign nationals, who had previously lost their Mexican nationality prior to 1998, may regain their Mexican nationality through an administrative process at a Mexican Embassy or Consulate.

million Mexicans who had left since February 1995 and 261,000 who returned by February 2000.

Analyzed by share, the 2010 census showed that nearly one-in-three (31%) of those who had left for the U.S. within the previous five years had returned. That compares with about one-in-six (17%) for those who had left for the U.S. within the five years previous to the 2000 Mexican census.⁹

When Did Return Flows Rise?

Figure 2.4
Return Migration to Mexico of Mexicans Living in the U.S. 5 Years Before the Mexican Census or Survey: 1990-2010
(in thousands)



⁹ Not all of the recent migrants who returned to Mexico by the time of the census are included in the overall estimate U.S.-Mexico migration shown above. There is some overlap between the recent migrants (i.e., people who reported moving to the U.S. between 2005 and 2010) and people who reported living in the U.S. in 2005. We have removed the overlap—about 100,000 in 2010 and 40,000 in 2000—in the estimates of total flow but not in our discussion of recent migration patterns.

When did return flows to Mexico begin to rise? Evidence from various sources points to sometime late in the decade. A 2005

Note: Populations include persons born in Mexico, the U.S. and elsewhere who were counted in Mexico and reported living in the U.S. five years earlier.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations from population, household and migrant microdata samples of 1990, 2000 and 2010 Mexican censuses, 2005 Conteo and 2006 and 2009 ENADID

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sample survey by Mexico’s chief statistical agency (INEGI) counted a lower number of returnees who had lived in the U.S. five years earlier (246,000) than either the 2000 Mexican census or the 2010 Mexican census. (The survey, intended to update the 2000 Mexican census, asked fewer questions so more detailed breakdowns about U.S.-born children are not available.)

Another Mexican source that points to increased flows in the last half of the decade is ENADID (Encuesta Nacional de la Dinamica Demografica), or “National Survey of Demographic Dynamics.” The 2006 demographic survey shows about 274,000 people who had lived outside of Mexico in 2001 and had returned to Mexico by 2006. The number was notably higher in the 2009 demographic survey—about 667,000 people who had lived in the U.S. in 2004 and had gone to Mexico in 2004-2009.

Mexican Census Results Help Explain Earlier Contradictory Data

The Mexican census results help to explain findings from another Mexican household survey that did not show an increased return flow of Mexicans back to their homeland. Mexico’s National Survey of Employment and Occupation (ENOE), which had been cited in a previous Pew Hispanic Center report ([Passel and Cohn, 2009](#)) and elsewhere (Rendall et al. 2011) on this issue, indicated that return flows appeared to be stable from 2006 through February 2009. Subsequent ENOE data show decreasing return flows.

However, the employment and occupation survey is designed to measure movement to and from existing households in Mexico that are part of the sample. It does not include moves by entire households, an important contributor to return migration flow. This design feature causes ENOE to understate return migration flows. Furthermore, if patterns of return migration changed, ENOE might not capture the trend over time.

The 2010 Mexican census results indicate that a substantial share of return migrants come back to Mexico with their entire households. These households account for almost half of people counted as returnees in the 2000 and 2010 Mexican censuses, according to the Pew Hispanic analysis.

Net Migration From Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less

Recent Flows from U.S. and Mexican Data

Annual inflows of Mexican immigrants to the U.S. can be estimated using census data from the U.S. and Mexico. The U.S. figures are gross numbers that do not account for people who leave the U.S. Data from both countries point to inflows that peaked around 2000 and plunged beginning in 2007.

Looking at arrivals of Mexican immigrants since 1990, U.S. Census Bureau data analyzed by the Pew Hispanic Center indicate that more than 700,000 a year came to the U.S. in 1999-2000, during a time

when the U.S. economy was thriving. Annual arrivals dropped to about 580,000 with the onset of the early-decade recession. Numbers began rising again; by 2004, annual arrivals exceeded 670,000 annually.

Immigration from Mexico dropped after the U.S. housing market (and construction employment) collapsed in 2006. By 2007, gross inflows from Mexico dipped to 280,000; they continued to fall to 150,000 in 2009 and were even lower in 2010.

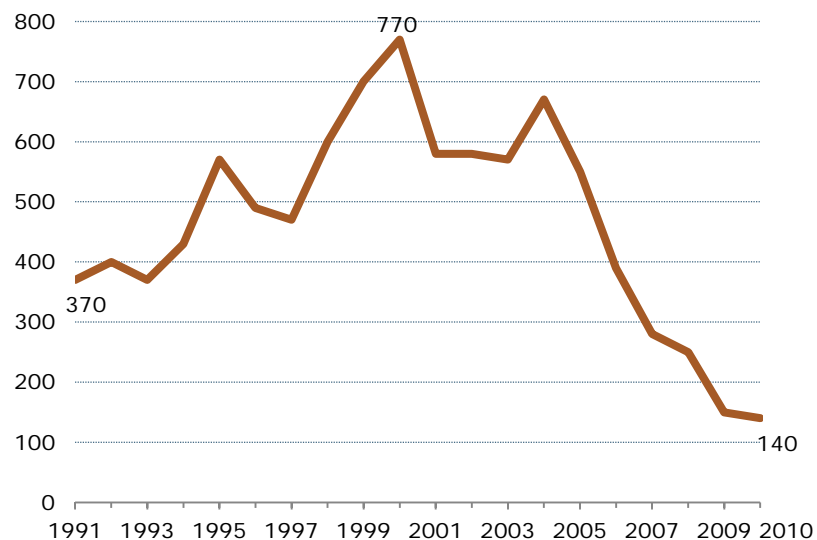
The Mexican employment survey (ENOE) shows the same general trends in annual flows from Mexico as the U.S. data do. By 2010, according to ENOE, the flow was only 38% of the 2006 flow to the U.S. Both the U.S. and Mexican data suggest a further slight drop in 2011.

These estimates of immigration flows from Mexico represent new arrivals of both legal immigrants and unauthorized immigrants. For most of the period, the bulk of the flow was unauthorized but for the last several years, it appears that most of the new arrivals are likely to be legal residents. Legal admissions from Mexico averaged about 170,000 per year for 2000-

Figure 2.5

Annual Immigration from Mexico to the U.S.: 1991-2010

(in thousands)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates compiled from various sources; see Methodology

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2009 and 140,000 per year for 2010-2011. These legal admissions do not represent all newly arrived immigrants, as a significant share are people who are living in the U.S. but are “adjusting their status” from temporary to legal permanent resident.

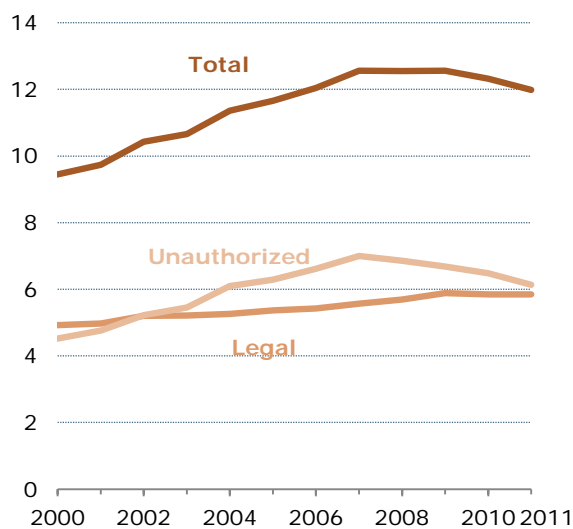
Recent Population Trends

The Mexican-born population in the U.S. decreased to 12.0 million in 2010 from its peak of 12.6 million in 2007, and the change entirely reflects reduced unauthorized immigration, according to a Pew Hispanic analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. There were 6.1 million unauthorized Mexican immigrants in the U.S. in 2011, according to Pew Hispanic estimates based on Current Population Survey data, compared with a peak of 7 million in 2007.

By comparison, legal Mexican immigrants (including those with temporary status) numbered 5.8 million in 2011, which is a small increase from 5.6 million in 2007. The overall foreign-born population has continued a relatively steady growth, to 39.6 million in 2011, according to Current Population Survey data.¹⁰

The decline in the Mexican-born population is a marked change of pattern for the massive wave of migration from Mexico that began in the late 1960s. It may become the first sustained loss since the 1930s, when the Mexican-born population shrank during the Great Depression. The contemporary decrease is due to the combination of reduced inflows and increased outflows; it cannot be explained by the relatively small number of deaths in the Mexican immigrant population.

Figure 2.6
Mexican-Born Population in the U.S.,
by Status, 2000-2011
(in millions)



Source: Pew Hispanic estimates based on augmented March Current Population Surveys, adjusted for undercount.

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¹⁰ The numbers are augmented and adjusted for omissions, especially of unauthorized immigrants. It should be noted that the American Community Survey (ACS) shows a slightly different pattern, and somewhat lower numbers, for the Mexican-born population. (The ACS estimates have not been adjusted to reflect undercounts but have been reweighted to reflect the impact of the 2010 Census on estimates for earlier years.) According to the ACS, the Mexican-born population did not change from 2009 to 2010 (11.7 million in both years), in contrast to a small decline (from 12.6 million in 2009 to 12.3 million in 2010) shown in the Current Population Survey.

Mexican Migration History: U.S. Perspective

For the past century, a large share of Mexican migration has been temporary, so-called circular migration, in which Mexicans (mainly men) came to the U.S. for work, often in agriculture, and returned to their families in Mexico during the off-season. Until the 1970s, the size of the permanent Mexican-born population in the U.S. grew slowly, and there was little in the way of border enforcement ([Rosenblum and Brick, 2011](#)).

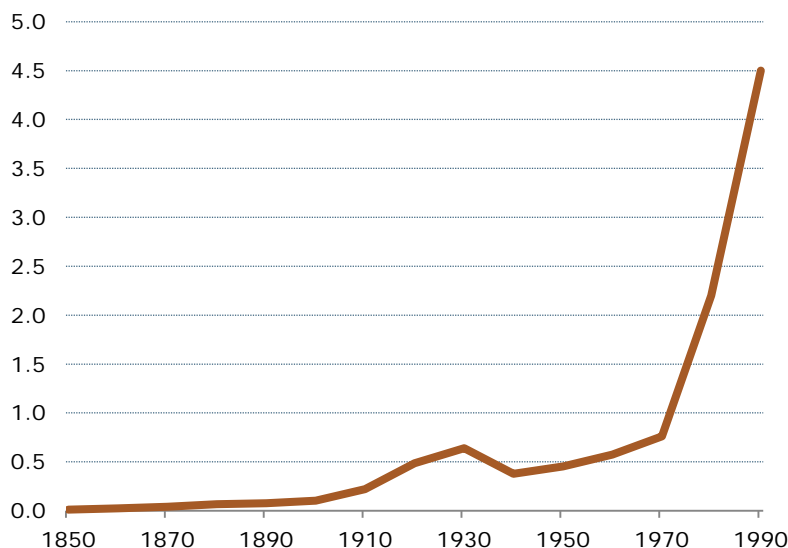
The Mexican-born population in the U.S., which numbered about 100,000 in 1900, reached about 640,000 in 1930 ([Gibson and Jung, 2006](#)). The population fell in the 1930s, as mass unemployment deterred would-be immigrants during the Great Depression and many Mexicans in the U.S. were forcibly deported to Mexico.

By 1970, Mexican-born numbers had risen to about 760,000, but Italy, Great Britain, Germany, and Canada surpassed Mexico as leading countries of origin. Rapid growth began in the 1970s—by 1980 there were 2.2 million Mexican immigrants, and Mexico had become the top country of origin for U.S. immigrants. The Mexican-born population in the U.S. has more than quintupled since then. The next largest sending country—China—accounts for just 5% of the nation's current stock of about 40 million immigrants.

The share of all immigrants who are Mexican born nearly doubled from 1980 (15.6%) to 2010 (29%). At its peak in 2004-2009, the Mexican-born population constituted nearly one-third (32%) of the nation's foreign-born population.

Figure 2.7

Mexican-Born Population in the U.S., 1850-1990 (in millions)



Source: For 1850 to 1980: Gibson and Jung (2006); for 1990: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on augmented 1990 Decennial Census adjusted for undercount

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Over the years, an increasing share of Mexican migrants to the U.S. became permanent residents with year-round jobs in a broader range of sectors than agriculture. Most immigrants from Mexico (51% in 2011) are unauthorized, according to Pew Hispanic estimates based on Current Population Survey data. Mexicans make up the majority of the nation’s unauthorized immigrant population. (See Section 6 of the report for more detail about the characteristics of Mexican-born residents of the U.S.)

Analysts generally agree that the sharp, four-decade rise in Mexican immigration after 1970, especially of unauthorized migrants, was driven by a combination of factors. The U.S. and Mexico had formally agreed in 1942 to establish the “bracero” temporary-worker program, but when it expired in 1964, the demand in the U.S. for low-skilled labor remained strong. Major changes to U.S. immigration law in 1965 favored immigrants who wanted to rejoin their families in the U.S., not those who came to work. Economic troubles and other problems in Mexico also encouraged people to migrate north.¹¹

Although much of the cross-border movement was unauthorized, few of the migrants settled in the U.S. before the 1970s. The tripling of the Mexican-born population between 1970 and 1980 was driven in part by the large-scale settlement of unauthorized immigrants. By 1980, about half of Mexican immigrants living in the United States were unauthorized (Warren and Passel, 1987).

Once the new migration pattern was established, flows to the U.S. waxed and waned in conjunction with changes in U.S. border policy and immigration law, trends in the U.S. economy and conditions in Mexico. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 had several provisions that allowed unauthorized immigrants to acquire legal permanent resident status. About 2 million formerly unauthorized Mexican immigrants became legal U.S. residents by the early 1990s. These new immigrants, along with changes in U.S. immigration law, reinforced the existing migration patterns and spurred continued legal immigration and increasing unauthorized immigration. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. more than doubled, and between 1990 and 2000 the numbers doubled again.

The Mexican-born population continued to grow until 2007. At that point, the combined effects of the failing U.S. economy, increased border enforcement, more expensive and

¹¹ For example, see National Research Council (2011) and Rosenblum and Brick (2011).

dangerous crossings, violence at the border, and changes with the Mexican population and economy brought this population growth to a halt.

In recent years, there appears to be less short-term seasonal migration between Mexico and the U.S., perhaps because of the increased costs and risks of crossing the border ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2011](#)). The new results from the 2010 Mexican census also show a decline in the shortest migration trips. In 2000, answering the question of when they had last left for the U.S., nearly half (49%) of the “recent” migrants to the U.S. had departed in the previous 12 months.¹² In 2010, only a quarter of the much-reduced migrant population (27%) had left for the U.S. in the previous 12 months.

Emigration to the U.S.: Mexican Perspective

Mexican emigrants living in the U.S. now represent a substantial share of the Mexican-born population. No other nation in the world has as many of its citizens living abroad as does Mexico, and 97% of them live in the U.S. ([Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012](#)).

In 1970, when Mexico’s population was 48 million, only 1.6% of the combined Mexican population of the two nations lived in the U.S. In 2010, with Mexico’s population at 112.3 million, the Mexican-born population in the U.S. had risen to 10% of the combined totals in both countries. The shares are even higher among those in the prime working ages, 30 to 44 ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2011](#)).

¹² This is the group in Figure 2.3 as departing between 1995 and 2000 and still living in the U.S. as of 2000.

3. Mexicans Sent Back to Mexico by U.S. Authorities

A Pew Hispanic Center analysis of a long-running survey of Mexican migrants who have been handed over to Mexican authorities by U.S. law enforcement agents finds changes over the past decade in migrants' experiences and future intentions.

Migrants sent home in 2010 were more likely to have lived in the U.S. for at least a year than those apprehended five years earlier or 10 years earlier. Those removed in 2010 also were more likely to have been apprehended at home or work rather than while crossing the border. And the more recently repatriated migrants were less likely to say they would try to cross again shortly after apprehension or to say they plan to return to the U.S. someday.

The changes found in migrants' experiences and intentions appear to be linked to the changing dynamics of U.S. border flows and enforcement, as well as U.S. economic conditions. The number of Mexicans trying to cross the southwest border illegally has declined in recent years. One result of this decline is that there has been a decrease in apprehensions by the U.S. Border Patrol.

Most Mexican migrants expelled by U.S. authorities are returned to their home country—usually within days of crossing the border—by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, acting without an order of removal. As fewer Mexicans attempt to cross the border, this

How many of the “immigrants” to Mexico were sent back by U.S. authorities?

Of the 1.4 million Mexican immigrants and their children who returned to Mexico from the U.S. between 2005 and 2010, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that anywhere from 5% to 35% were sent back by U.S. authorities at some point during that five-year period and remained in Mexico as of 2010. The other 65% to 95% returned to Mexico voluntarily.

The estimate range is so wide because data on who is sent back and what happens to them are sketchy; neither the U.S. nor Mexican government has any way of knowing where the returnees end up in later years.

Pew Hispanic's estimates start with the 4.4 million Mexican citizens deported, removed or returned to Mexico by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security between 2005 to 2010. Based on reviews of data from both countries, the Pew Hispanic analysis estimates that only about 15-25% of these returnees would have been living in the U.S. long enough to appear in U.S. data sources as immigrants. The remainder were apprehended at or near the border shortly after they entered.

Furthermore, Pew Hispanic's analysis of the EMIF-Norte survey, a Mexican government survey of persons returned by the U.S. government, finds that only about 16% of those who resided in the U.S. in 2005 and spent at least a year in the country said they would not try to go back to the U.S. About six-in-ten said they would try to re-enter the U.S. within a week, and an additional quarter said they would go back “some day.”

While it is impossible to know how many succeed, scholars who have studied Mexico-U.S. migration have concluded that almost everyone who is determined to get into the U.S. illegally eventually

number has been dropping. Of those sent home, there has been an increase in the number of immigrants sent back based on an order of removal.

The data in this section come from a survey of Mexican migrants who were handed over to Mexican authorities by U.S. law enforcement agents, both migrants who agree to be returned without a formal order and those sent home with an order of removal. The migrants are handed over at transfer points along the U.S. border and at several Mexican airports included in an agreement between the two countries. This survey, called Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México (EMIF-Norte), has been conducted regularly since 1993 (see the appendix for methodological details).

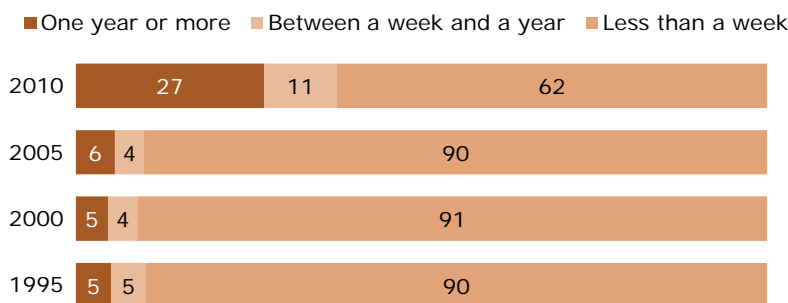
How Long in U.S.?

A growing share of repatriated Mexican immigrants has spent at least a year in the United States before being sent back to Mexico. In 2010, more than a quarter (27%) reported they had lived in the U.S. for at least a year, compared with 6% in 2005 and 5% in 2000 and in 1995. Most of these (26% of the total) had been in the U.S. for two years or more.

The longer stays in the U.S. of these Mexican migrants may in part reflect the growing number of immigrants who spend time in detention before being sent back to their home countries. This is likely true for those who spent less than two years in the U.S. However, the share of Mexican migrants sent back to Mexico who spent five years or more in the U.S. also rose dramatically between 2005 and 2010, from 2% to 17%.

Figure 3.1

Time Spent in the U.S. Before Repatriation (%)



Notes: Responses of “Don’t know,” “Refused” and “Unspecified” are not shown. Question wording: “This last time, how long did you stay in the United States?” Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México (EMIF-Norte).

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Where Apprehended?

About one-in-six migrants sent back to Mexico (17%) were apprehended at work or at home in 2010. This share represents a notable increase from previous years—in 2005, only 3% were apprehended at home or at work.

By contrast, a declining share of Mexican migrants report being apprehended at the border—25% in 2010, compared with 33% in 2005 and nearly half (49%) in 1995.

Due to backlogs in processing of removal cases in U.S. immigration courts, people apprehended at work or home and handed over to Mexican authorities in 2010 might have been captured during enforcement actions in prior years. According to [some sources](#), in recent years immigration courts spent about a year to complete cases involving Mexican nationals. In addition, the increased share of migrants apprehended at home or work might reflect reduced arrivals of Mexican immigrants and the lower number of apprehensions at the border.

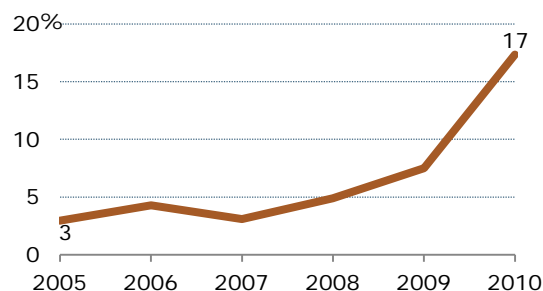
Will Go Back to the U.S. After Repatriation?

A large majority of migrants handed over to Mexican authorities said they had come to the U.S. for work or to look for a job (83% in 2010). Among these labor migrants, a majority say they will try to return to the U.S. Those handed over in recent years to Mexican authorities, however, are less likely than their counterparts of a decade earlier to say they will try to re-enter the U.S. within a week of repatriation. They are also more likely to say they would never go back to the U.S. to look for work.

Intention to Re-enter Within a Week

In 2010, six-in-ten (60%) Mexican labor migrants who were sent back said they would try to re-enter within seven days—a significant decrease from an average 81% who said so in 2005-2008.

Figure 3.2
Share Caught at Work or Home



Notes: Question wording: "This last time you crossed, in what location were you detained by the U.S. migration authorities (la migra)?"

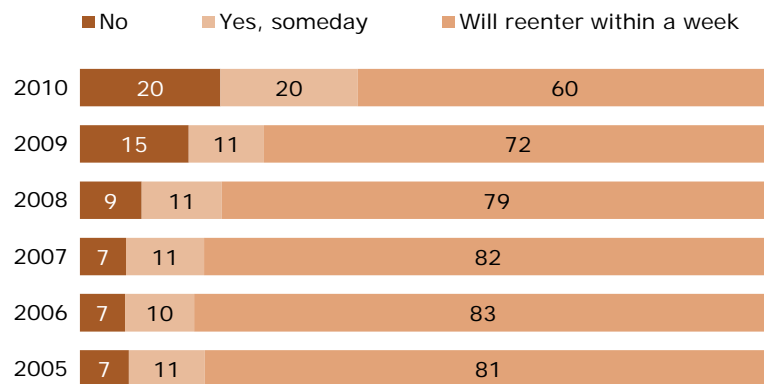
Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México (EMIF-Norte).

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This trend change is partly a reflection of a generalized decrease in the intention to re-enter the U.S. In 2010, the share saying they will try to go back to the U.S.—either within seven days or someday—dropped by 13 percentage points from 92% in 2005. According to the survey, the sharpest change in the intention to re-enter the U.S. shortly after repatriation was among those who spent a year or more in the U.S.

In 2010, 71% of those who had come to the U.S. for work and had stayed for less than a week before being apprehended declared they would attempt entry again within seven days. This share is down from a high of 85% of labor migrants in 2007.

Figure 3.3
Intention to Re-enter the U.S. After Repatriation
(% of labor migrants)



Notes: Responses of “Don’t know,” “Refused” and “Unspecified” are not shown. Question wording: “Do you plan to cross again to the United States in the next 7 days?” and “Do you plan to go back to work or look for work in the United States someday?” Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México (EMIF-Norte).

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Among those who had spent at least a year in the U.S., fewer than half said they plan to try to re-enter within a week. Intention to come back to the U.S. within a week for this group declined to 43% in 2010 from a recent high of 69% in 2006.

More Likely to Never Go Back to the U.S.

Among repatriated Mexican migrants who had originally come to the U.S. for work, a rising share say they will not try to return to the U.S. again—20% in 2010, compared with 7% in 2005.

When analyzed by time spent in the U.S., those who spent less than a week in the U.S. prior to being removed show a similar trend. The share who reported they had no intention of ever coming back to the U.S. rose to 18% in 2010 from 6% in 2005.

The trend was not as clear among longer-term residents of the U.S.—those who had spent a year or more before being sent home. Among this group of labor migrants, 21% in 2010 said

they had no intention of returning to the U.S. This was slightly lower than the share who said so in 2009 (26%) but higher than the share who said so in 2005 (11%). Furthermore, from 2009 to 2010, a rising share said they would return someday to look for work—36%, compared with 22%—even as the share of those intending to try to re-enter immediately dropped in these years.

Demographic Characteristics of Repatriated Migrants

In 2010, fully 87% of those sent back to Mexico were male, which is much higher than the share of men in the overall Mexican immigrant population (54%). Just under half (46%) were single, 34% were married and 14% were living with an unmarried partner. About half (53%) were head of their household, 6% were spouses of the household head and a third (34%) were the child of the household head.

There was little change in the basic demographics of those handed over to Mexican authorities from 2005 to 2010, except that a somewhat higher share now (14%) report they live with an unmarried partner, compared with past years. Also, in 2010, three-quarters (74%) said they do not speak English, but that proportion declined from 2005, when it was 93%.

4. U.S. Immigration Enforcement

In recent years, the U.S. government has ramped up spending and staffing on immigration enforcement at the U.S.-Mexico border and in the nation's interior. Some of its enforcement actions have a particular impact on Mexican immigrants, who constitute a majority (58%) of nation's unauthorized immigrants ([Passel and Cohn, 2011](#)). In addition, a growing number of states have enacted their own immigration enforcement programs.

Appropriations for the U.S. Border Patrol within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—only a subset of all enforcement spending, but one especially relevant to Mexican immigrants—more than tripled from 2000 to 2011, and more than doubled from 2005 to 2011 (Rosenblum, 2012). The federal government doubled staffing along the southwest border from 2002 to 2011, expanded its use of surveillance technology such as ground sensors and unmanned flying vehicles, and built hundreds of miles of border fencing.

Federal authorities also changed their tactics in recent years, and some changes have been aimed particularly at Mexican border crossers. Many Mexicans caught at the border who in earlier years would have been just sent home instead are repatriated under the “expedited removal” process, which carries a minimum penalty of not being allowed to seek a visa for at least five years.

That change is part of the “enforcement with consequences” strategy begun in 2005, under which the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice also have increased the share of unauthorized border crossers charged with criminal offenses related to immigration laws. The number of Mexicans removed for criminal offenses rose 65% from 2008 (77,531) to 2010 (127,728), at a time when non-criminal removals declined (169,732 in 2008 to 154,275 in 2010).

As part of the same strategy, the Border Patrol has taken new steps to try to disrupt immigrant smuggling operations. These include sending apprehended border crossers home at locations far from their entry points, to make it more difficult for them to contact smugglers who previously helped them (Rosenblum, 2012).

At the state level, omnibus immigration legislation modeled after an Arizona law that included provisions intended to reduce unauthorized immigration was passed in 2010 by Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina and Utah, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#). These laws include provisions requiring law enforcement officials to verify the

immigration status of those stopped for other reasons and prohibiting the harbor or transport of unauthorized immigrants. All have been challenged in court, and the U.S. Supreme Court is to hear arguments about the Arizona law (known as SB 1070) on April 25, 2012.

Enforcement Statistics

Government enforcement statistics indicate that the number of Mexicans who agree to be sent home without a formal removal order has declined markedly, a possible sign of lower flows.

According to data from the Department of Homeland Security, the number of apprehensions of unauthorized Mexican immigrants by the U.S. Border Patrol—more than 1 million in 2005—fell to just 286,000 in 2011. (Note that some people are apprehended more than once.) Border Patrol apprehensions of all unauthorized migrants most recently peaked in 2000, and now are at their lowest level since 1971.

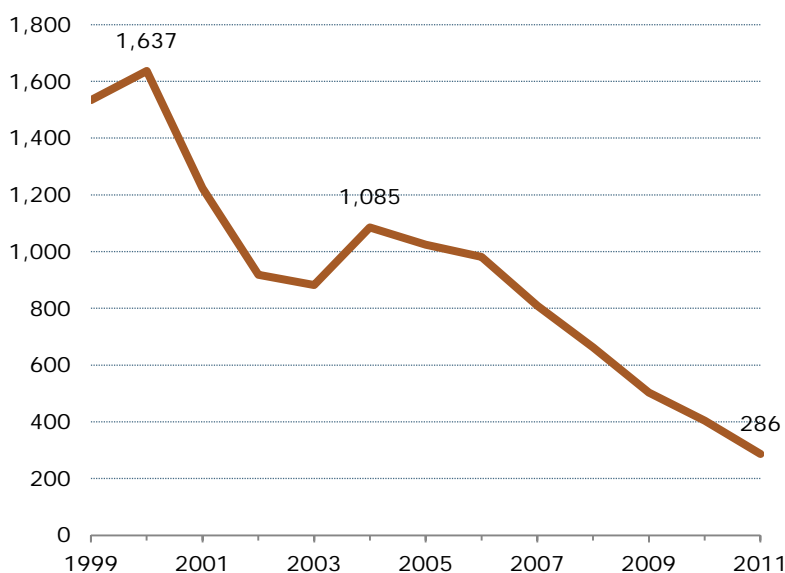
Another U.S. government measure that shows similar trends is the number of unauthorized immigrants

who agree to return to their home countries after apprehension without a removal order. The vast majority of these “returns,” in government parlance, are from Mexico. As with apprehensions, this number peaked in 2000, at nearly 1.7 million, declined from 2001 to 2003, rose to about 1 million a year from 2004 to 2006, and has declined since then. In 2010, of 476,405 immigrants repatriated this way, 354,982 (75%) were Mexican, according to Department of Homeland Security statistics.

Figure 4.1

Border Patrol Apprehensions of Unauthorized Immigrants from Mexico, 1999-2011

(in thousands)



Notes: Data are for fiscal years, Oct. 1-Sept. 30. Includes apprehensions between ports of entry.

Source: [U.S. Border Patrol](#), Department of Homeland Security

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However, there has been a notable rise in migrants sent home with an order of removal. The number of Mexicans sent home by U.S. authorities via deportation or the expedited removal process rose by two-thirds from 2005 (169,000) to 2010 (282,000). Total removals showed no clear trend earlier in the decade.

On another measure tracked by DHS, trends indicate that fewer migrants may be making multiple attempts to cross the border without authorization.

This measure is based on a database of fingerprints that, according to a recent Congressional Research Service report, has been in full use by the

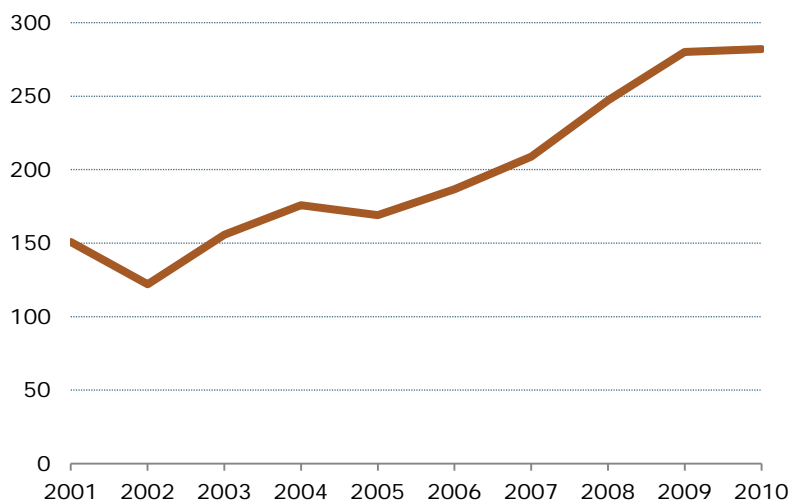
Border Patrol since 2005. According to Border Patrol data compiled in the report, there has been a decline in the percentage of apprehended unauthorized migrants who had been caught once before in the same fiscal year. The percentage peaked in 2007 and fell to its lowest level (20%) in the 2011 fiscal year, the report said (Rosenblum, 2012).

A somewhat similar trend is seen in a Mexican government survey of migrants who were apprehended and sent home by U.S. authorities (Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte). According to data analyzed by the Pew Hispanic Center, 90% of Mexican immigrants sent home by U.S. authorities in 2010 after being in the U.S. for less than a week say they had never been apprehended before. The share of those immigrants apprehended for the first time went up sharply from 1995 (70%) to 2000 (81%), then generally rose through the subsequent decade.

Figure 4.2

Removals of Mexicans by U.S. Authorities: 2001 to 2010

(in thousands)



Notes: Years are fiscal years. Removals include expedited removals.

Source: *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2010*, Table 38, [Department of Homeland Security](http://www.dhs.gov)

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5. Mexico, by the Numbers

During the decades-long emigration wave of Mexicans to the United States, Mexico has experienced a wide array of economic, demographic and social changes, some of which undoubtedly have had an impact on Mexican migration trends. This section offers a brief overview of the major changes.

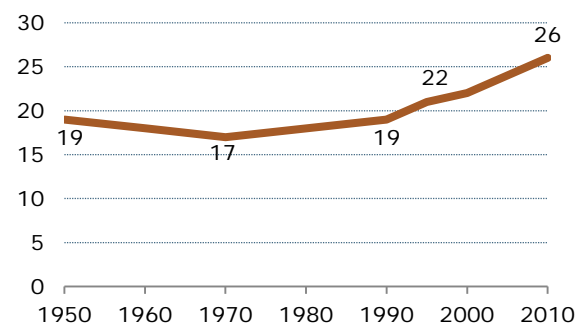
Mexico today is the world’s 11th-largest country by population with 115 million people¹³ and the world’s 11th-largest economy as measured by gross domestic product (World Bank, 2011).¹⁴ The World Bank characterizes Mexico as an “upper-middle income economy,” placing it in the same category as Brazil, Turkey, Russia, South Africa and China. Mexico is also the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world.

Demographics

The most significant demographic change in Mexico in recent decades has been the sharp and ongoing decline in birth rates. In 1960, the Mexican fertility rate was 7.3 children per woman.¹⁵ By 2009, that figure had dropped to 2.4—still a bit higher than the U.S. rate of 2.0 among all women ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2011](#)).

The declining birth rate in Mexico has led to a rise in the median age of its population. In 2010, the median age in Mexico was 26—still well below the figure for the U.S. that year (37), but well above the median age in Mexico in 1970, when it was just 17.

Figure 5.1
Median Age of the Mexican Population, 1950-2010



Source: INEGI, Mexican government statistical and geographical agency.

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¹³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011
http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Documentation/pdf/WPP2010_Volume-I_Comprehensive-Tables.pdf

¹⁴ According to the World Bank, Mexico’s GDP in 2010 was \$1.41 trillion, in constant 2005 international dollars adjusted to purchasing power parity. PPP is the currency exchange rate adjusted for differences in price level between countries. It shows how much money would be needed to purchase the same goods and services in different countries.

¹⁵ Total Fertility Rate is the estimated average number of children that a woman would have in her lifetime, based upon present-day age-specific birth rates and assuming no mortality during the childbearing years.

The rising median age in Mexico has meant that its 15- to 39-year-old age group—people in peak years for emigration—has declined as a share of the overall population. In 2010, 15- to 39-year-olds made up 65% of Mexico’s working-age population (defined as all adults between ages 15 and 64). In 1990, this age group comprised 73% of the working-age population.¹⁶

Economics

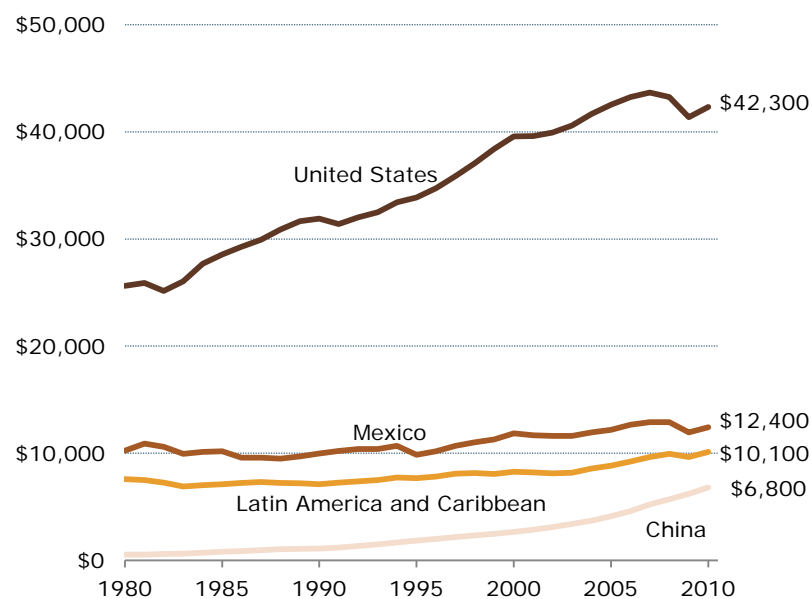
In the three decades from 1980 to 2010, Mexico’s per capita GDP rose by 22%—from \$10,238 in 1980 to about \$12,400 in 2010.¹⁷ This increase is somewhat less than the average for all Latin American/Caribbean countries during the same period (33%) and significantly less than the increase in per capita GDP in the United States during this period (66%). Meantime, during this same period, the per capita GDP in China shot up thirteenfold—from \$524 in 1980 to \$6,816 in 2010.

In more recent years, Mexico’s economy, like that of the United States and other countries, fell into a deep recession in 2007-2009. But since 2010 it has experienced a stronger recovery than has its neighbor to the north; according to INEGI, the Mexican GDP grew by 5.5% in 2010 and 3.9% in 2011, well above the rates in the U.S. for those two years.

Figure 5.2

Gross Domestic Product per capita, 1980-2010

(in 2005 international dollars)



Note: Gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure of a nation’s total output of goods and services. The GDP for each country is converted to international dollars using purchasing power parity. PPP is the currency exchange rate adjusted for differences in price level between countries. It shows how much money would be needed to purchase the same goods and services in different countries.

Source: World Bank, International Comparison Program database

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¹⁶ INEGI Interactive Data Analysis, Mexican Decennial Censuses.

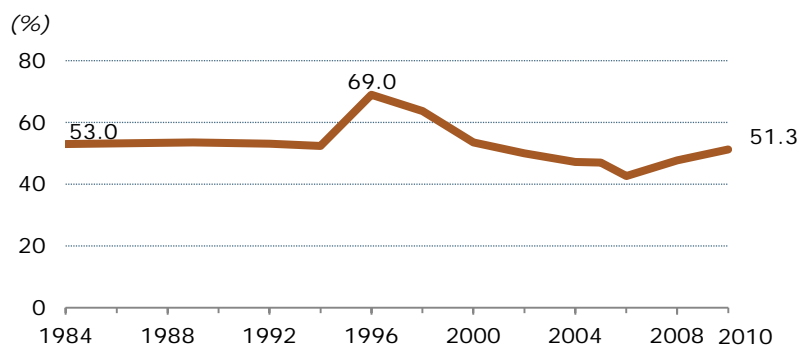
¹⁷ All figures are expressed in constant 2005 international dollars and adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP).

Despite a moderate long-term rise in per capita GDP, the share of Mexicans who live below the poverty line has not changed significantly in recent decades. It was 51% in 2010, down slightly from 53% in 1984. However, that overall stability was interrupted by a major economic crisis and recession in Mexico during the mid-1990s that sent the poverty rate soaring to a peak of 69% in 1996.

Another measure of economic well-being that still has not fully recovered from the economic crisis that hit Mexico at the end of 1994 is mean household income. In 2006, the average household income was close to \$7,000 MXN per quarter,¹⁸ still a slightly lower amount than in 1994. During the recent economic crisis, average household income in Mexico dropped 14% from 2006 to 2010.

Social Development

Figure 5.3
Percent Living Below Official Poverty Line in Mexico, 1984-2010

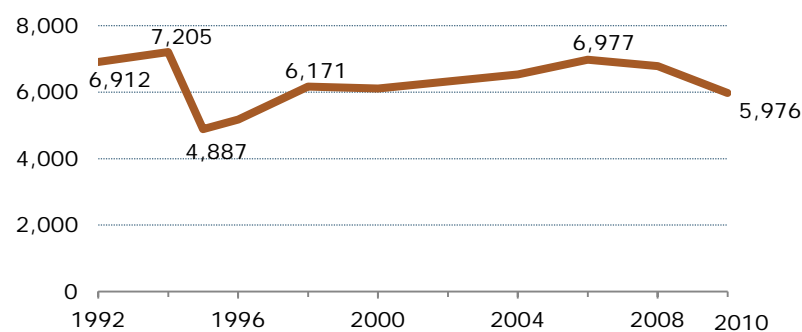


Note: The official poverty line refers to the “asset poverty line.” The Mexican government recognizes three different poverty lines based on income: food poverty, capabilities poverty and asset poverty. Asset poverty is used by the World Bank to assess economic development.

Source: World Bank, International Comparison Program database for 1984-1988; Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL) *Medición de la pobreza 2010*, for 1992-2010.

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Figure 5.4
Average Mexican Quarterly Household Income
(in constant 1992 Mexican pesos)



Source: INEGI, Encuesta Nacional de Ingreso y Gasto en los Hogares (ENIGH), 1992-2010.

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¹⁸ Amounts are in constant 1992 Mexican pesos. The 2006 figure converts to \$2,262 in U.S. dollars, using the 1992 exchange rate of one U.S. dollar to 3.095 Mexican pesos.

Even though economic performance in Mexico has been sluggish in recent decades and insufficient to generate enough jobs for young adults coming of age, other indicators of development have improved. For example, 92.4% of all Mexicans ages 15 and older were literate in 2010, up from 83% in 1980.¹⁹ In 2010, the average number of years of education of Mexicans ages 15 and older was 8.6, compared with 7.3 years in 2000.²⁰

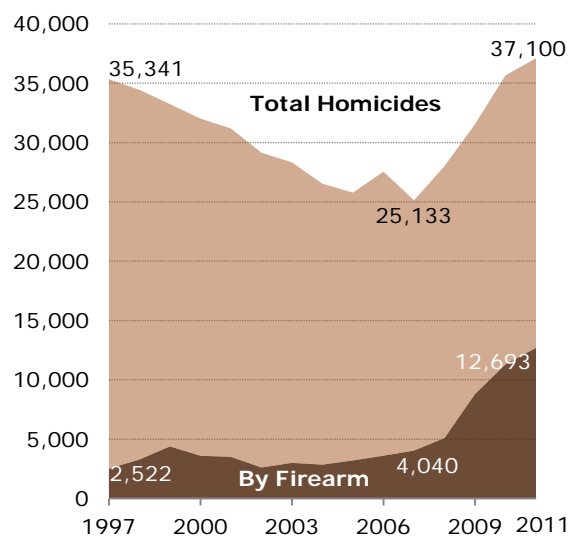
In terms of health care, almost three-in-five (59%) Mexicans in 2000 lacked health care coverage ([CONEVAL, 2010](#)). In 2003, the Mexican federal government created a health care program, Seguro Popular, that provides basic coverage to the uninsured and is free for those living under the poverty line (Comisión Nacional de Protección Social en Salud, 2012). The share of the Mexican population with access to health care had increased from less than half (41%) in 2000 to slightly more than two-thirds (67%) in 2010, an increase of 26 percentage points ([CONEVAL, 2010](#)).

Drugs, Guns and Crime

Mexico has also had its share of problems in recent years—none greater than the spike in violence tied to criminal drug cartels. There were 37,100 homicides in Mexico in 2011, an increase of 44% since 2005. In addition, a rising share of homicides involves firearms—12,693 in 2011, up from 3,209 in 2005—which have been one of the signatures of killings linked to drug cartels.²¹

But crime in general, and homicide in particular, is by no means a new problem in Mexico. The number of homicides in 2011 is only slightly higher than the number back in 1997—35,341. Homicide rates fell steadily from the late 1990s through 2005, just as they

Figure 5.5
Number of Homicides in Mexico



Source: Executive Secretariat of the Mexican National System of Public Security ([Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, SESNSP](#))

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¹⁹ INEGI Interactive Data Analysis, Mexican Decennial Censuses, <http://www.inegi.org.mx/Sistemas/temasV2/contenido/sociedad/epobla06.asp?s=est&c=26360>

²⁰ INEGI Interactive Data Analysis, Mexican Decennial Censuses <http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/sisept/Default.aspx?t=medu14&s=est&c=26366>

²¹ Executive Secretariat of the Mexican National System of Public Security (SESNSP) <http://www.estadisticadelictiva.secretariadoejecutivo.gob.mx/mondrian/testpage.jsp>, accessed on April 17, 2012.

had around the world, but then, sparked mainly by the drug wars, reversed and began climbing up again.

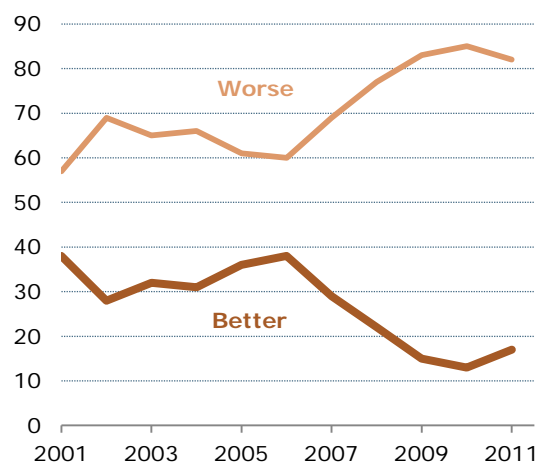
Mexico's public is very concerned about crime; in surveys taken during the past decade by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, the issue of crime is consistently identified by Mexicans as a top national problem. In a 2011 survey, 80% of respondents said crime was a very big problem, and 77% said the same about drug-related violence ([Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2011](#)). The next most serious problems, in the view of the Mexican public, were rising prices (74% said this was a very big problem); illegal drugs (71%); lack of jobs (70%); and the economic situation (69%). In the United States, by contrast, concerns about jobs and the economy far outstrip all other issues in similar surveys about national conditions ([Pew People & the Press, 2012](#)).

Attitudes About the Economy, Immigration

Looking at measures such as employment and GDP growth, Mexico has not been as hard hit by the recent economic downturn as the U.S. Even so, Mexicans have a very pessimistic view of their national economy. According to Consulta Mitofsky, a Mexican survey research group, in 2011, 82% of Mexicans said the economic situation in their country was getting worse, up from 60% who said the same in 2006 and 57% who said so in 2001 ([Consulta Mitofsky, 2011](#)).

In [2009](#) and again in [2011](#), the Pew Global Attitudes survey asked Mexican adults if they would emigrate to the United States if they had the means and opportunity to do so. The results were similar in both surveys. In 2011, 38% of survey respondents said yes, they would migrate to the U.S., while 61% said no, they would not. In 2009, 33% said yes, they would migrate if they could, while 62% said no. Among those who said yes in 2011, a majority (53%) said that they would go to work or live in the U.S. even without legal authorization.

Figure 5.6
Mexicans' Views of Current Economic Conditions
(% of adults in Mexico saying current economic conditions are "better" or "worse" than previous year)



Notes: Average from monthly surveys. 2011 data through September.

Source: Consulta Mitofsky, Mitofsky Monitor published on Oct. 19, 2011

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6. Characteristics of Mexican-Born Immigrants Living in the U.S.

Mexico is the largest country of origin for immigrants in the United States, accounting for 29% of the foreign-born population in 2010.²² Most immigrants who leave Mexico come to the United States, and one-in-ten Mexican-born people currently lives in the U.S.

There is great variation in the patterns of immigration among the nation's 12 million Mexican-born immigrants. Many immigrants settle permanently and have children born in the United States. But a substantial number also travel back and forth across the border through the year, a pattern known as circular migration. There has long been a seasonal pattern to Mexican-U.S. migration, with larger numbers of people heading north in the spring and summer and larger numbers of people headed south in the fall and winter. This has abated somewhat, according to data from Mexico that indicate movement spread more evenly through the year (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

Table 6.1
States with the Largest Mexican-Born Populations, 2010
(in thousands)

California	4,325
Texas	2,488
Illinois	711
Arizona	524
Georgia	293

Source: 2010 American Community Survey

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Compared with other foreign-born residents of the U.S., Mexican-born immigrants are younger, less educated and less likely to speak English very well, according to tabulations from the 2010 American Community Survey. Only about a quarter (23%) are U.S. citizens, in large part because most Mexican immigrants are unauthorized and not eligible for citizenship; by comparison, a slight majority of immigrants from all other countries (52%) are citizens. Notwithstanding the presence of unauthorized immigrants, legal Mexican immigrants have lower rates of naturalization than other immigrants (Passel 2007).

²² The data in this section on Mexican immigrants in the United States are drawn from the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS). As such, they may differ slightly from similar estimates based on the Current Population Survey (CPS) in other Pew Hispanic Center reports. The CPS-based estimates have been augmented with estimates of immigrants' legal status and are adjusted for undercount. The ACS estimates are not adjusted and do not differentiate respondents by legal status.

About a third of Mexican immigrants (34%) arrived in the U.S. since 2000, similar to the share of all immigrants (35%). The share of Mexican immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for two decades or more (35%) is somewhat lower than the share of other immigrants of similar duration (40%).

Demographic Differences

There are notable demographic differences between Mexican immigrants and those from other countries. Most immigrants from Mexico (54%) are men; most other immigrants (53%) are women. Mexican immigrants are younger than others: the median age of Mexican-born residents of the U.S. is 37, compared with 43 for other immigrants.

Mexican-born immigrants on average are less educated than other immigrants. Among Mexican-born immigrants ages 25 and older, 60% have less than a high school education, compared with a fifth (21%) of other immigrants. Only 5% of the Mexican born hold a college degree, compared with more than a third (36%) of other immigrants.

Economically, Mexican-born immigrants are not as well off as others. The median annual household income for Mexican-born immigrants is \$35,000, compared with \$51,500 for other immigrants. These lower incomes are a reflection of the group's employment profile. Mexican-born immigrants are more likely than other immigrants to work in the construction, agriculture or mining industries (23% vs. 6%). Looking at occupation, only 10% of Mexican-born immigrants work in management, professional and related jobs, compared with 41% of immigrants from other countries.

Mexican-born immigrants are somewhat less likely than other immigrants to be homeowners (46% of households, vs. 55%). They are also less likely than other immigrants to speak only English at home and more likely to say they do not speak English very well. Among Mexican immigrants ages 5 and older, 72% say they do not speak English very well. Among other immigrants, 43% say so.

Most Mexican immigrants ages 15 and older (58%) are married, a share similar to that of other immigrants (59%).

Mexican Populations by Geography

As might be expected, Mexican-born immigrants are concentrated in Western and Southern states. Half (51%) live in the West, and an additional third (33%) live in the South. A notably

low share (4%) lives in the Northeast. By contrast, about equal numbers of other immigrants live in the West, South and Northeast.

By state, well over half (58%) live in California (4.3 million) and Texas (2.5 million). That share has declined since 2000, when it was 63%, an indication of how Mexican-born immigrants have dispersed to other states. No other state has more than a million Mexican-born residents, however.

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