
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES: Continuities and Changes

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Abstract: This research note examines continuities and changes in the profile of Mexican migration to the United States using data from Mexico's Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica, the U.S. Census, and the Mexican Migration Project. Our analysis generally yields a picture of stability over time. Mexico-U.S. migration continues to be dominated by the states of Western Mexico, particularly Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán, and it remains a movement principally of males of labor-force age. As Mexico has urbanized, however, out-migration has come to embrace urban as well as rural workers; and as migrant networks have expanded, the flow has become less selective with respect to education. Perhaps the most important change detected was an acceleration in the rate of return migration during the early 1990s, reflecting the massive legalization of the late 1980s.

By far the most important source for immigration to the United States is Mexico. During the 1960s, the legal inflow from that country totaled some 430,000 persons and grew in the 1970s to more than 680,000. During the 1980s, legal immigration from Mexico reached the remarkable figure of 3 million persons (U.S. INS 1992). Karen Woodrow and Jeffrey Pas-

sel (1990) estimated that another 800,000 Mexicans arrived without documents. Official U.S. government statistics reveal that some 12 million Mexicans entered the United States as temporary visitors during the 1980s (U.S. INS 1992).

Mexicans predominate among undocumented migrants. Of the 3.2 million persons who were legalized under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), three-quarters came from Mexico (U.S. INS 1990). Despite this massive legalization, Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passel (1994) estimated that around a million Mexicans remained undocumented in 1992, 31 percent of the total unauthorized population. After reviewing the quantitative evidence and evaluating the reliability of various estimation methodologies, Frank Bean et al. (1998) concluded that in 1996, the total Mexican population in the United States was 7.15 million, of whom 2.35 million (38 percent) were unauthorized.

Despite these large numbers, researchers know surprisingly little about the regional, demographic, and socioeconomic origins of Mexican immigrants, mainly because of a lack of representative data. One survey conducted by Wayne Cornelius (1992) found that in the late 1980s, the regional composition was shifting away from its historical origins in Western Mexico (mainly in Jalisco and Michoacán but also in Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas) toward new sending areas in the north (Baja California and Chihuahua), the south (Oaxaca and Guerrero), and the central regions of the country (the Federal District and the states of México and Puebla). Cornelius also found that Mexican immigrants had become more socially heterogeneous as better-educated urban workers joined the outflow in response to a deteriorating economy. Finally, Cornelius (1992) uncovered evidence that migrants were becoming more attached to the United States and were shifting from a sojourner to a settler mentality.

This changing profile of Mexican immigration is consistent with other survey data compiled by Jorge Bustamante (1992, 1998), and many investigators have come to accept it as a social fact (see Cornelius and Martin 1993; Poole 1996; Lindstrom 1966; Roberts 1997; Zabin 1997). A serious problem, however, is that the foregoing studies are not based on representative national samples. According to Cornelius, "the available data, while suggestive of trends, are far from conclusive, and problems of comparability limit our ability to generalize from them" (1992, 155). Cornelius himself surveyed only migrant workers in selected industries in three Southern California counties, whereas Bustamante (1992, 1998) questioned undocumented migrants as they arrived at key border-crossing points.

In this research note, we combine representative data from a variety of sources to construct a more accurate and reliable profile of Mexican immigration to the United States. After describing long-term trends in the regional composition of the outflows, we consider possible changes in the demographic and socioeconomic background of immigrants since 1970. We

then consider possible shifts in the selectivity of emigration and estimate trends in the probability of return migration to assess whether recent migrants are displaying an increased tendency toward long-term settlement rather than back-and-forth movement.

Long-Term Trends in Regional Origins

Large-scale migration to the United States began around 1900, when U.S.-financed railroads penetrated the Mexican interior and connected with existing rail systems north of the border (Cardoso 1980; Hart 1987). Because Mexico's northern border region was relatively unpopulated at this time, U.S. labor recruiters who followed rail lines southward in search of workers first encountered them in the densely populated west-central region in states such as Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato. Among Mexico-U.S. migrants identified in 1900 by Moisés González Navarro (1957), about a third were from one of these three western states (Cardoso 1980, 12).

After World War I broke out, industrialists in the United States were cut off from traditional sources of labor in Southern and Eastern Europe, and they intensified their recruitment of Mexican workers. After 1920, when changes in U.S. immigration law severely restricted the entry of Southern and Eastern Europeans, U.S. employers redoubled their efforts, and Mexican immigration rose to what Cardoso (1980) called "a flood tide." The annual number of Mexican entries grew from just 10,000 in 1913, on the eve of World War I, to 68,000 in 1920, and peaked at 106,000 in 1924. According to official U.S. statistics, some 621,000 Mexicans entered the United States between 1920 and 1929 (Cardoso 1980), a figure not reached again for decades.

In table 1, we present the distribution of U.S. migrants by Mexican state of origin using all known data sets that satisfy three basic criteria: they are large in scale, national in scope, and measure directly migrants and their characteristics. The first column is drawn from Mexican government statistics for 1926–1932, originally published by Paul Taylor (1934). During this period, which corresponds to the end of Mexico's "flood tide" of emigration, some 44 percent of all Mexicans migrating to the United States came from one of nine western states that comprise the historic heartland for migration from Mexico to the United States. As in 1900, a large share of these individuals came from just three states: Guanajuato (10 percent), Jalisco (14 percent), and Michoacán (9 percent), which together accounted for roughly a third of all movement during the period.

The advent of the Great Depression in late 1929 ushered in an era of limited migration and massive deportations that persisted through the ensuing decade. From 1929 through 1937, some 453,000 Mexican citizens were deported from the United States (Hoffman 1974), and between 1930 and 1940, the number of Mexican nationals enumerated in the U.S. Census ac-

TABLE 1 Mexican Migrants to the United States by Region and State of Origin in Selected Years from 1926 to 1994

Region and State	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Pre-Depression Flood Tide			Pre-IRCA Period		Post-IRCA Period		
	1926–1932 (%)	1944 (%)	1964 (%)	1978–79 (%)	1984 (%)	1992 (%)	1991–92 (%)	1992 (%)
Historic region	44.0	54.0	56.1	61.1	50.5	49.4	50.3	54.1
Aguascalientes	1.5	2.3	3.0			1.4	1.6	1.2
Colima	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.1	0.8
Durango	2.2	3.1	4.1	5.0	3.6	3.0	5.5	4.9
Guanajuato	10.3	13.8	11.1	17.1	10.3	11.0	12.3	6.3
Jalisco	14.2	6.5	6.7	13.6	13.1	9.6	7.7	18.4
Michoacán	9.4	18.7	16.3	8.4	14.7	15.6	10.5	11.3
Nayarit	0.3	0.4	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.8	2.2
San Luis Potosí	1.6	2.9	3.9	4.4	3.0	1.9	4.0	2.8
Zacatecas	4.3	6.3	8.8	11.8	5.8	4.8	6.8	6.1
Other regions	66.0	46.0	43.9	38.9	49.5	50.6	49.7	45.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sources: For 1987, Mexican government statistics on state of origin for 258,937 U.S. migrants (Taylor 1934). For 1988, Mexican government statistics on state of residence for 118,059 braceros (Corona 1987). For 1989, Mexican government statistics on state of residence for 179,290 braceros (Corona 1987). For 1990, ENEFNEU survey: weighted sample of 405,467 Mexican residents who were working or looking for work in the U.S. at the time of the survey or during the prior year (Corona 1987). For 1991, ETIDEU survey: 9,631 undocumented migrants interviewed at 12 ports of entry as they were deported by U.S. authorities (Corona 1987; CONAPO 1986).

For 1992, ENADID survey: weighted sample of 350,203 Mexican residents who were working or looking for work in the United States at the time of the survey or during the prior year (Zenteno and Massey 1988). For 1993, EMIF survey: weighted sample of 797,931 labor migrants interviewed as they arrived at the border on their way to the United States (COLEF 1994).

For 1994, PS Survey: sample of 4,012 former undocumented migrants who qualified for amnesty as long-term U.S. residents under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

tually fell. But as the depression bottomed out and World War II loomed on the horizon, the United States reined in its deportations. When Pearl Harbor abruptly thrust the country into war, the government quickly reversed course: rather than seeking to deport Mexican immigrant workers, the United States sought actively after 1941 to recruit them.

The centerpiece of the new recruitment effort was the Bracero Accord of 1942, a binational treaty that arranged for the “temporary importation” of contract workers into the United States for periods of short-term farm labor. Under the treaty, Mexicans were granted renewable six-month visas to work for approved agricultural growers, located mostly in the southwestern United States. In one form or another, this “temporary”

wartime measure was extended annually until 1964 (Calavita 1992). Over the course of the program's twenty-two years, more than 4.6 million Mexican workers were imported into the United States (Cornelius 1978).

The second and third columns of table 1 show the remarkable stability of migrants' regional origins during this period. Using Mexican government statistics compiled by Rodolfo Corona (1987), 54 percent of all braceros in 1944 came from the historic heartland of western Mexico, and twenty years later, the proportion was nearly the same at 56 percent. As in the late 1920s, the three most important migrant-sending states in 1964 were Guanajuato (11 percent), Jalisco (7 percent), and Michoacán (16 percent). Once again, these three states contributed roughly a third of all migrants to the United States. The upward shift in the overall share from western Mexico (from 44 percent in the late 1920s to 56 percent in 1964) reflects the growing importance of three other western states: Durango, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.

Under pressure from religious and labor organizations, the U.S. Congress phased out the Bracero Program between 1960 and 1964. Rather than bringing Mexican immigration to a halt, however, the demise of the program simply channeled the flow in new directions. After 1960 documented and undocumented migration began a sustained increase over two decades. From 1960 to 1980, border apprehensions increased by 14 percent per year to reach an annual figure of more than a million (U.S. INS 1988). At the same time, annual gross legal immigration grew from just 32,000 in 1960 to more than 100,000 in 1981 and fluctuated between 55,000 and 70,000 through 1986 (U.S. INS 1988). In total, from the end of the Bracero Program through 1985, some 1.4 million Mexicans were admitted into the United States as legal immigrants (U.S. INS 1988), and at least 1.5 million more entered without documents (Warren and Passel 1987; Passel and Woodrow 1987).

Columns 4 and 5 of table 1 confirm the continued predominance of western Mexican states throughout this period. The figures in column 4 come from Corona (1987) and are based on the Encuesta Nacional de Emigración a la Frontera Norte y Estados Unidos (ENEFNEU), which was administered by the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social in 1978–1979 to identify Mexicans who had worked or looked for work in the United States during the year prior to survey (or were reported by family members to be doing so at the time of the survey). By the late 1970s, migrants from the big three states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán had increased their share of the flow to 39 percent. At the same time, the relative participation of Durango, San Luis Potosí, and especially Zacatecas had also increased, with 61 percent of all Mexico-U.S. migrants originating in western states.

The figures in column 5 are likewise taken from Corona (1987) and based on the Encuesta de Trabajadores Indocumentados a los Estados Unidos (ETIDEU), which interviewed a representative sample of undocu-

mented migrants deported from the United States in late 1984 (CONAPO 1986). Once again migrants from Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán accounted for 38 percent of all U.S. migrants. Compared with the 1978–1979 survey, the relative numbers attributable to Durango, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas are slightly smaller, reducing the west's overall percentage to just above 50 percent. But nothing indicates a clear movement away from this core sending region.

The era of relatively unhindered undocumented migration drew to a close in late 1986 with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The legislation greatly expanded the resources, personnel, and power of the U.S. Border Patrol, criminalized the hiring of undocumented migrants, and generally militarized the Mexico-U.S. border (Dunn 1996; Fragomen 1997; Andreas 1998; Massey 1998; Singer and Massey 1998; Durand and Massey n.d.). The last two columns of table 1 draw on three independent surveys to document the regional origins of Mexican immigrants in 1992, well into this new restrictive era.

Column 6 contains data from the Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (ENADID), a representative national sample of Mexican residents age twelve and over who worked or looked for work in the United States during the year prior to the survey (or were reported by family members to be doing so at the time of the survey). Roughly half of all U.S. migrants identified in this survey (49 percent) came from the western region, with 36 percent coming from the big three states of Guanajuato (11 percent), Jalisco (10 percent), and Michoacán (16 percent). Column 7 tabulates information from the Encuesta sobre Migración a la Frontera Norte (EMIF), which interviewed undocumented migrants as they arrived at selected border-crossing points on their way to the United States. Again, half of all migrants came from the western states, with 31 percent coming from the big three.

Both of the foregoing surveys were restricted to Mexicans interviewed south of the border, so that if the regional origins of settlers differed from those of sojourners, it would not be possible to detect recent shifts in the geographic origins of immigrants. The last column therefore presents the state of origin for respondents to the Legalized Population Survey of 1992, which sampled former undocumented migrants who qualified for IRCA's amnesty by virtue of their long-term residence in the United States. These data suggest that the regional origins of settled migrants are even more concentrated than those of sojourners: 54 percent of resident undocumented migrants come from the historic region, with a little over a third (36 percent) originating in the states of Guanajuato (6 percent), Jalisco (18 percent), or Michoacán (11 percent).

Considering the diverse methodologies and sampling designs employed by the data sources used in table 1, the uniformity of regional origins across time is striking. From the late 1920s through the early 1990s, between

30 percent and 40 percent of all migrants have consistently come from one of three sending states—Guanajuato, Jalisco, or Michoacán—and between 50 percent and 60 percent have come from western Mexico, the historical heartland for migration to the United States. Periodic fluctuations in the percentage originating in this region are mostly explained by variation in the share coming from Durango, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas, whose combined total rose from 8 percent in the late 1920s to 21 percent in the late 1970s and then fell again in the 1990s. The western states of Aguascalientes, Colima, and Nayarit are small in geographic and demographic terms and have generally contributed few migrants to the international flow.

In sum, a review of data over the past seventy years provides little evidence of a long-term shift away from the historic dominance of Mexico's western region in contributing migrants to the United States. Although new sending states may have emerged over the years, outflows from the west and particularly from the core states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán have also risen to preserve their proportionate dominance in the population of international migrants.

Recent Trends in Social Origins

The ENADID survey provides a rare opportunity to assess the changing characteristics of Mexico-U.S. migrants by using a large, representative national sample. The survey was implemented by Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI) to generate a representative sample not simply of the country as a whole but of each state in the republic. The survey conducted a stratified, multistage probability sample of 2,000 households within each of the nation's thirty-two states, yielding a target size of 64,000 households. The questionnaire was administered in face-to-face interviews from September through November 1992, with a final sample of 57,916 households and 277,552 individuals, a response rate exceeding 90 percent (INEGI 1994).

In the survey, household members age twelve or older were asked whether they had ever worked or looked for work in the United States. If so, they were asked to provide the exact dates of their departure and return. Because the ENADID survey sought to enumerate all persons who "normally" reside in respondent households, absent migrants were included in the sample as long as at least one member remained behind to report on them and this person considered them to reside there "normally." The survey thus yielded a representative national sample of current and former U.S. labor migrants that can be classified by year of departure to define successive cohorts of migrants leaving Mexico for work in the United States between 1970 and 1992.

Table 2 presents selected social and demographic characteristics of the U.S. migrants identified by the ENADID, classified by year of depar-

TABLE 2 Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics of Mexicans Who Reported Working or Looking for Work in the United States at Any Point in Their Lives, by Year of Departure on Last Trip

Characteristic	Year of Departure				
	1970–1974 (%)	1975–1979 (%)	1980–1984 (%)	1985–1989 (%)	1990–1992 (%)
Region of Origin					
Historic	47.8	57.4	56.1	49.5	48.8
Border	33.7	26.3	27.4	24.8	29.7
Center	17.0	13.8	15.2	24.6	19.8
Periphery	1.5	2.4	1.3	1.1	1.7
Sex					
Male	77.3	81.7	81.7	82.3	87.4
Female	22.7	18.3	18.3	17.7	12.6
Size of Birthplace					
Town (less than 15,000)	64.4	72.3	70.1	58.2	64.4
City (15,000–99,999)	15.1	12.7	14.4	14.5	11.4
Metro area (100,000+)	20.4	15.0	15.4	27.4	24.3
Age at Survey					
12 to 18	0.2	0.8	1.7	1.5	6.9
19 to 34	5.8	19.9	44.6	60.4	56.4
35 to 54	64.2	62.7	43.4	33.1	32.0
55 or older	29.8	16.6	10.4	5.0	4.7
Age at Departure					
12 to 18	13.8	11.2	14.6	11.7	8.9
19 to 34	55.9	60.7	60.6	63.3	56.8
35 to 54	28.7	24.4	22.4	22.0	30.2
55 or older	1.6	3.7	2.4	2.9	4.1
Education					
None	13.1	16.5	10.5	8.6	7.5
1 to 4 years	33.0	36.0	34.5	23.5	24.7
5 to 9 years	44.5	39.6	46.6	55.7	57.0
10 years or more	9.5	7.9	8.4	12.2	10.8
Sample n	489	813	1,048	2,276	2,439

Source: Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (1992).

ture. Because the survey was designed to provide Mexican officials with basic demographic data rather than a detailed socioeconomic profile of the population, we can only consider a limited range of background characteristics such as place of birth, age, sex, and education. Data on place of birth allowed us to chart trends in the regional and rural-urban origins of Mexican migrants. This information is presented in the table's top two panels.

Region of origin is categorized using a scheme developed by Jorge Durand (1998). In addition to the historic states already discussed, he defined three other sending regions: the border (Northern and Southern Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Tamaulipas); the center (the Federal District, Guerrero, Hidalgo, México, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, and Tlaxcala); and the periphery (Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, Quintana Roo, Veracruz, and Yucatán).

Despite fluctuations over time, the ENADID data do not suggest a shift away from the historic concentration of U.S. migration in the western states. The percentage of migrants originating in the historic region varied from 48 to 57 percent across cohorts with no clear temporal trend. The share coming from border states ranged from 25 to 33 percent, and the share from center states ranged between 14 and 25 percent. Dominance of the historic region increased to roughly 56 percent in the periods 1975–1979 and 1980–1984, and the share emanating from the center region briefly surged in 1985–1989 (consistent with Cornelius's 1992 observation of an increase in emigration from the Mexico City area). But these shifts represent short-term fluctuations rather than long-term trends away from traditional patterns. Indeed, the figures across the successive cohorts vary rather tightly around overall percentages of 50 percent for the historic region, 30 percent for the border region, and 20 percent for the center region, with the periphery accounting for a trivial percentage at all times. This configuration appears to be something of a constant going back at least to the early 1970s and possibly to the 1940s. Although caution must be exercised in drawing conclusions about trends because the ENADID excluded settled migrants, we found before that settlers were even more concentrated in the regional origins than sojourners.

Despite the earlier suggestion by Bean et al. (1990) based on apprehension statistics that the gender selectivity of Mexican migration may be changing, the distribution of migrants by sex reveals remarkable continuity over time. As the second panel of table 2 shows, males dominate overwhelmingly in all periods, and the data suggest that their dominance has increased in recent years. Whereas 77 percent of all those who left for the United States between 1970 and 1974 were men, the share rose to 87 percent by 1990–1992.

The distribution of migrants by size of birthplace suggests little in the way of a shift toward urban origins among Mexico-U.S. migrants. Although period-specific fluctuations are again evident, there was no sustained movement away from the historic concentration of international migration in smaller communities. The percentage of migrants born in places smaller than 15,000 inhabitants was 64.4 in 1970–1974 and exactly the same figure in 1990–1992. Emigration from large metropolitan areas, however, surged in the late 1980s from 15 percent in 1980–1984 to 27 percent in 1985–1989.

It is difficult to interpret trends in the size of birthplace, however, because the age distribution of migrants changes markedly across cohorts, and younger persons are naturally more likely to be born in cities due to the progressive urbanization of Mexican society. As the fourth panel shows, migrants in the earliest cohorts are considerably older than those in the most recent cohorts. Whereas 64 percent of those leaving for the United States in 1970–1974 were between thirty-five and fifty-four years old and 29 percent were fifty-five or older, in 1990–1992 the respective figures are only 32 percent and 5 percent. In moving from earlier to later cohorts, the age distribution becomes progressively younger.

The shift in the age composition across cohorts stems not from any secular trend in the age of departure but from the fact that migrants who left Mexico in earlier periods simply got older over time. The next panel shows no consistent trends in the age of departure. Throughout the period, Mexican migrants were heavily concentrated in the age range nineteen to thirty-four, not surprising in that the ENADID explicitly sought to enumerate labor migrants. Thus the share of migrants departing for the United States in the prime working years (eighteen to thirty-four) varies narrowly from 56 percent to 63 percent across cohorts, and the relatively minor shifts in age composition observed do not move in any consistent direction.

The “greening” of cohorts over time creates problems in interpreting trends in selectivity with respect to education and other age-dependent variables such as size of birthplace. The data shown in the bottom panel of table 2 indicate a progressive increase in the education of Mexican migrants to the United States, with the percentage reporting five to nine years of schooling rising from 45 percent to 57 percent between 1970–1974 and 1990–1992, and the percentage with no education falling from 13 percent to 8 percent. But educational levels in Mexico have been rising generally over time. Thus even without any change in the selectivity of migration, we would expect recent cohorts of migrants to be better educated than those who departed earlier. Likewise, other things being equal, we would expect migrants in later cohorts to come disproportionately from larger places than migrants who left earlier.

Table 3 attempts to correct for this bias by age-standardizing the distribution of migrants by city size and education, using the age composition of the most recent migrant cohort as a standard. We estimate the distributions that we would observe if all cohorts had the same age composition as the most recent cohort. Once the effect of age composition is held constant, the distribution of migrants by size of birthplace appears to be bifurcating rather than urbanizing. Over time, migrants increasingly appear to be coming from both small and large places rather than from mid-sized cities. Although some period-specific fluctuations occurred, the percentage of emigrants born in mid-sized cities declined from 34 percent in 1970–1974 to 13

TABLE 3 Trends in Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics of Mexican Labor Migrants after Controlling for Age Composition and Selective Emigration

Characteristic	Year of Departure			
	1970–1974 (%)	1975–1979 (%)	1980–1984 (%)	1985–1990 (%)
Size of birthplace^a				
Town (less than 15,000)	46.3	63.2	61.2	57.0
City (15,000–99,999)	33.9	11.0	17.8	12.9
Metro area (100,000+)	19.7	25.8	21.0	30.2
Place of Residence^b				
United States	19.6	22.4	25.7	37.7
Mexico	80.4	77.6	74.3	62.3
Sex^b				
Male	58.0	61.4	64.5	68.1
Female	42.0	38.6	35.5	31.9
Education^c				
None	7.1	9.8	11.2	10.7
1 to 4 years	11.0	15.2	17.3	17.9
5 to 9 years	29.9	39.8	43.5	44.8
10 years or more	52.0	35.1	28.0	26.5
ENADID Sample n	489	813	1,048	2,276
PUMS Sample n	5,268	7,342	7,759	10,022

Sources: Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (1992); and U.S. Census of Population, 1% Public Use Microdata Sample.

^a Controlling for changing age composition.

^b Controlling for selective U.S. settlement alone.

^c Controlling for age composition and selective U.S. settlement.

percent in 1985–1990, while the percentage originating in towns rose from 46 percent to 57 percent and the share emanating from metropolitan areas from 20 percent to 30 percent.

Changing age composition is not the only factor potentially biasing the estimates presented in table 2. Another is the selective process of settlement in the United States. If those migrants who settle north of the border are self-selected on certain characteristics and if the frequency of settlement varies across cohorts, then characteristics may become confounded with trends across cohorts and yield misleading conclusions about the changing selectivity of migration. To control for this bias, we pooled returned labor migrants age twelve and over from the ENADID with Mexican workers age twelve and over enumerated in the 1990 U.S. Census, cross-classifying this binational migrant population by year of departure from Mexico. The resulting tabulations are presented in the remaining panels of table 3. Be-

cause the U.S. census did not ascertain place of origin in Mexico, we cannot control for the effects of selective settlement on the distribution by size of birthplace, but the remaining tabulations adjust for this potential threat to internal validity.

As the second panel of table 3 shows, considerable potential exists for bias stemming from selective settlement north of the border (see also Lindstrom and Massey 1994). Among those who left for the United States between 1970 and 1974, 80 percent had returned to Mexico and 20 percent were still living abroad at the time of the survey. But among those who left between 1985 and 1990, 62 percent were in Mexico and 38 percent were in the United States. When such selective processes of settlement and return are controlled by pooling samples of Mexican migrants enumerated on both sides of the border, the sex composition of migration is radically altered: female migrants are much more likely to settle than their male counterparts. Whereas only 17 percent of those enumerated in the ENADID were female, 43 percent of those enumerated by the U.S. Census were women.

The inclusion of migrant women who selectively remained north of the border does not alter the overall trend in sex composition, however. Even after adjustment, the dominance of men appears to be increasing. As one moves from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, the percentage of males among those leaving for the United States rises from 58 percent to 68 percent, and the percentage of women correspondingly falls from 42 percent to 32 percent.

The last panel of table 3 corrects for biases stemming from both selective settlement and changing age composition by applying age standardization to the pooled distribution of migrants by education. Once these adjustments are made, it can be seen that international migration is becoming progressively less selective with respect to education. Whereas the standardized percentage with ten or more years of schooling stood at 52 percent in 1970–1974, it fell steadily across ensuing cohorts, reaching 35 percent in 1975–1979, 28 percent in 1980–1984, and 27 percent in 1985–1990. At the same time, the percentage with no education increased from 7 percent to 11 percent, and the share having two to four years of schooling increased from 11 percent to 18 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage having five to nine years shifted from 30 percent to 45 percent. These trends are consistent with social capital theory, which argues that migrant networks expand over time to reduce the costs and risks of movement, thus making international migration less selective (Massey et al. 1998). As others have observed, migration generally begins in the upper-middle ranges of the socioeconomic distribution and then works its way down the class structure (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994). Emigration appears to be becoming more selective only because average educational levels have been rising in Mexico.

In general, therefore, we do not find a “changing profile” of Mexican migrants during the 1980s. Rather, despite a few changes, we perceive a remarkable continuity in trends and patterns. Maintaining a pattern that dates back at least to the 1940s and perhaps even to 1900, recent outflows continue to be dominated by migrants from a handful of western states: principally Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán, and to a lesser extent Durango, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas. Together these six states have consistently accounted for about half of all Mexico-U.S. migrants, with the border states comprising another 30 percent and the central states making up the remaining 20 percent. Emigration to the United States also does not seem to be becoming more urban. Rather, it has tended to bifurcate, with greater percentages coming from both small towns and large metropolitan areas. Over time emigration has also become less selective with respect to education, suggesting that the outflow has increasingly been one of the rural and urban poor, predominantly from the western states.

Since 1970, emigration to the United States has consistently been selective of working-age males. At the time of their last U.S. trip, approximately 60 percent of all migrants were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, with the percentage varying only slightly across cohorts (ranging from 56 percent to 63 percent and showing no consistent trend over time). Even after adjusting for the possibility of selective settlement by women, the population of U.S. migrants is decidedly male. Indeed, the relative percentage of men has increased across cohorts. Thus we find little evidence of an emerging pattern of family migration, at least through the late 1980s.

Another Profile of Mexican Migrants

Although the foregoing analysis seems to provide a clear picture of Mexican immigration over the past two decades, it nonetheless suffers from several drawbacks. First, Mexico’s ENADID survey identified only labor migrants to the United States, and the exclusion of those outside the workforce may obscure the emergence of new patterns of family migration. Second, even though the ENADID focused on labor migration, it gathered no information on occupational background, limiting our ability to study changing patterns of class selectivity. Third, neither the ENADID nor the U.S. Census provided coverage of trends through the mid-1990s, when important changes may have occurred. Finally, the foregoing data do not allow us to determine the existence of a trend toward more permanent settlement in the United States, a key feature of Cornelius’s argument.

To address these issues, we employ data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), a binational project directed by Jorge Durand at the University of Guadalajara and Douglas Massey at the University of Penn-

sylvania. Rather than surveying migrants by using the standard social scientific methods, they employ a blend of ethnographic and survey methods to study particular Mexican communities and their U.S. destinations (Massey et al. 1987). Simple random samples of households in Mexican communities are paired with nonrandom snowball samples of U.S. settlers to generate a binational dataset that controls in some measure for the selection biases inherent in most data sources on immigration. Each year since 1987, the project has surveyed four to six communities and their U.S. destination areas and has accumulated data so far on thirty-five binational communities. The properties of these data have been described in a variety of publications (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994; Massey and Parrado 1994; Massey and Espinosa 1997), and a systematic comparison between the MMP and the ENADID suggests that the MMP data, while not strictly representative, nonetheless yield a remarkably accurate profile of Mexico-U.S. migrants (Zenteno and Massey 1998).

The MMP data are advantageous for our purposes because they enable us to overcome several problems inherent in tabulations based on the ENADID: they include all migrants, not just labor-force participants; they include detailed occupational data; they cover years through 1994; and they enable us to develop estimates of the probability of return migration. Table 4 presents data from the MMP on successive cohorts of U.S. migrants leaving thirty-five Mexican communities between 1970 and 1995. The top panel shows trends in age composition across cohorts. It is computed for all persons leaving Mexico on their most recent trips to the United States

Not surprisingly, fewer migrants are concentrated in the labor-force age range compared with the earlier tables, which included only labor-market participants. In this tabulation, which incorporates all migrants regardless of labor-force status, the percentage of migrants in the prime labor-force ages (eighteen to thirty-four) varies from 45 percent to 54 percent (in contrast to the range of 56 percent to 63 percent in table 2). The share of migrants in the prime labor-force years rises from 1970–1974 through 1985–1989 and then drops sharply in 1990–1994 but not because of any emergent pattern of family migration. The percentage of children (up to age eleven) and of teenagers (twelve to eighteen) also falls, while the percentage of older workers increases. Rather than becoming more youthful, the migrant workforce appears to have been aging in the early 1990s, although the outflow continues to be highly selective of those of working age (eighteen to fifty-four).

As the second panel indicates, Mexico-U.S. migration continues to be highly selective of males. This panel once again includes all migrants regardless of labor-force status, but unlike earlier tabulations based on the ENADID, we do not detect a consistent trend in the relative share of men over time. On the contrary, the balance of the sexes appears to be stable at around 75 percent male and 25 percent female from 1970 through 1994.

TABLE 4 Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics of Mexicans Who Reported Working or Looking for Work in the United States at Any Point in Their Lives, by Year of Departure on Last Trip

Characteristic	Year of Departure				
	1970– 1974 (%)	1975– 1979 (%)	1980– 1984 (%)	1985– 1989 (%)	1990– 1994 (%)
Age at departure					
0 to 11	12.4	14.8	9.5	4.1	3.2
12 to 18	8.3	14.4	9.5	15.7	10.2
19 to 34	45.5	44.5	47.5	54.3	43.8
35 to 54	29.7	22.6	29.1	20.0	32.8
55 or older	4.2	3.5	4.5	5.9	10.1
Sex					
Male	76.8	75.5	79.9	74.8	74.7
Female	23.2	24.5	20.1	25.2	25.3
Mexican Occupation					
Professional, managerial, technical	3.8	3.3	2.9	4.1	4.7
Clerical, sales	13.2	10.4	8.1	7.9	7.7
Skilled labor	9.3	12.7	13.9	12.6	10.4
Unskilled labor	11.2	14.4	15.7	16.9	16.1
Agriculture	40.5	41.8	42.4	42.6	46.7
Service	8.9	8.8	9.8	10.0	8.0
Unemployed, not in labor force	13.1	8.5	7.2	5.9	6.4
Rate of return migration	15.0	19.4	20.4	20.2	24.6
Sample n (all migrants)	2,602	5,531	8,506	10,404	9,541
Sample n (household heads)	1,593	2,196	2,280	2,724	1,144
Sample n (person years)	18,352	26,052	32,403	30,942	12,002

Source: Mexican Migration Project.

With the exception of the 1980–1984 cohort, none of the percentages differs significantly from a 75–25 split.

The third panel of table 4 shows the occupational distribution for household heads just prior to their last trip to the United States, information not available from the ENADID survey. The occupational structure does not change markedly across cohorts. From 1970 to 1995, between 41 percent and 47 percent of all migrants worked in agriculture during the year before their U.S. trip, and 9 to 14 percent worked as skilled laborers. The percentage of professionals, managers, and technical workers stayed fairly constant at 3 to 5 percent, as did the percentage of service workers, which varied between 8 and 10 percent.

The only real trends to emerge are a decline in the percentage of clerical and sales workers (from 13 percent in 1970–1974 to 8 percent in 1990–1994) and a drop in the percentage of migrants who were unemployed or out of the labor force (from 13 to 6 percent). These declines were offset by a modest rise in the percentage of unskilled workers (from 11 to 17 percent), consistent with the bifurcation of the outflow into streams originating in small towns and large urban areas. In general, the profile of Mexican immigration as a distinctly working-class movement dominated by agricultural workers from small towns and by skilled and unskilled laborers from large cities strengthens over time: whereas 61 percent of all migrants were in one of these three occupational categories in 1970–1974, by 1990–1994, the share had risen to 73 percent, in keeping with the decline in educational selectivity observed earlier.

Finally, to determine whether Mexican immigrants have shifted increasingly from sojourning to settling, we used life histories gathered from household heads in the MMP and selected person-years in which the respondent was present in the United States. Given that a migrant was in the United States at some point during a particular person-year, we determined whether or not that person returned to Mexico in the same year. Dividing the number of returns by the number of person-years yields a rate of return migration that we computed for successive periods.

Rather than falling over time, return migration actually seems to have increased across cohorts, with the rate going from 15 per 100 in 1970–1974 to 25 per 100 in 1990–1994. Virtually all the change is observed in two periods: the mid-1970s (when the rate jumped from 15 to 19) and the early 1990s (when the rate jumped from 20 to 25). Both these periods followed massive waves of legalization. From 1970 to 1978, the number of Mexicans receiving legal documents soared by 108 percent as employers sought to legalize former braceros and the latter sought to preserve their access to U.S. jobs. Likewise, between 1986 and 1991, the number of Mexicans admitted to permanent residence rose by a factor of 14 as more than 2 million Mexicans received green cards after being legalized under IRCA.

The shift of large segments of the Mexican migratory workforce from undocumented to documented status ironically facilitates circulation back and forth across the border. Paradoxically, granting a visa for “permanent residence” makes it easier and less costly for a migrant to return home, as he or she no longer faces the prospect of a difficult and costly border-crossing on returning to the United States. It is also possible for both settlement and circulation to increase simultaneously. Newly legalized migrants may establish households in U.S. urban areas and become rooted more permanently north of the border, even as they travel home more frequently for extended visits (in the MMP dataset, short visits of less than a month are generally not counted as a return trip). Moreover, owing to the buildup of

enforcement resources along the border (Andreas 1998) and the increasing hazards of border-crossing, those migrants who remain in undocumented status may display an increased tendency to remain in the United States, even as legalized immigrants cross back and forth more frequently (Durand and Massey 1999).

Mexican Immigrants: Continuities and Changes

In this research note, we have attempted to develop an accurate and reliable profile of Mexican immigrants based on large and nationally representative data sources. A review of samples going back to the 1920s found no long-term shift away from the historical concentration of emigration from western Mexico nor any diminution of the role played by the core sending states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán, which continue to contribute at least a third of all migrants to the transnational flow. When we examined recent cohort data from Mexico's Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (ENADID), we reconfirmed the historic dominance of western Mexico and verified the key role played by these three states.

The ENADID data, however, suggested a migratory outflow increasingly bifurcated between small towns and large urban areas and less selective with respect to education. Little evidence emerged of a trend away from the dominance of working-age males, as the percentage of male migrants increased between 1970 and 1990 while the percentage of those age eighteen to thirty-four stayed relatively constant. We thus found little movement toward greater family migration, at least nothing beyond the levels observed in the past. Mexico-U.S. migration has never been exclusively male, and families have always been involved. Our analysis simply indicates that women and children continue to be involved more or less as they were before.

We confirmed and amplified these conclusions using data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), which is not strictly representative of all migrants but provides more depth and richness than is offered by data from the U.S. Census or the ENADID survey. Our analysis of MMP data confirmed the continued predominance of migrants of labor-force age, except for a possible aging of migrant workers in the 1990s. We also reconfirmed the continued dominance of males in the migratory flow. Unlike the ENADID, however, the MMP did not indicate any increase in the predominance of males. Our analysis firmly established that Mexico-U.S. migration is a working-class movement made up of agricultural, unskilled, and skilled manual laborers. The percentage of migrants in these occupational categories rose to comprise roughly three-quarters of all migrants during the early 1990s, a pattern generally consistent with our finding of declining educational selectivity.

Finally, we computed rates of return migration among Mexicans present in the United States and found no shift toward permanent settlement. On the contrary, the massive legalization of former undocumented migrants in the late 1980s seems to have elevated overall rates of return migration in the 1990s, as a larger fraction of the migrant population no longer faces barriers to cross-border movement. This finding alone does not necessarily contradict a shift toward settlement among Mexican immigrants. Even settled households can return home frequently for extended stays once they obtain a legal residence visa, and undocumented migrants may be staying longer in the United States to avoid the growing concentration of enforcement resources at the border.

In summary, rather than finding an abrupt shift in the profile of Mexican migrants to the United States, our analysis indicates the remarkable continuity of a social process close to a century old. Now as in the past, the typical migrant is a working-age male from western Mexico, most likely from Guanajuato, Jalisco, or Michoacán. As networks have steadily expanded to make social capital more accessible, international movement has become less selective with respect to education. As Mexico has urbanized, families have brought their migratory experiences and network contacts from the countryside to the city, so that the flow now embraces urban as well as rural workers. The most notable change we detected was an elevated propensity toward return migration in the early 1990s, probably stemming from the massive legalization of undocumented Mexicans in the late 1980s. Such a shift is not new, however, and represents more of a variation on a traditional theme rather than a sharp divergence from past patterns.

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