The Effects of Mexican Immigration on the United States

Emily Caldwell

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The Effects of Mexican Immigration on the United States

Emily Caldwell

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Abstract:

Mexico is currently the leading country of origin of immigrants to the United States. Mexican immigration has been a topic in the news recently especially due to the debate over the border wall, or Secure Fence Act. With many rumors circulating and misinformation abounding with regard to immigration from Mexico, I hope to find out what is factual and what is not. I hope to strip away bias, prejudice, and racism by seeking many differing sources of information. The economic, political, social, cultural, and future effects of Mexican immigration to the United States will be evaluated. Based on this evaluation, I will briefly discuss U.S. policy options and then select the best of these to make a recommendation for the United States to pursue.
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Introduction

Most Americans have an opinion about immigration, be it positive or negative. As Anna Maria Mayda said in her article entitled “Who is Against Immigration? A Cross-Country Investigation of Individual Attitudes toward Immigrants,” “[i]mmigration may feed cultural and national-identity worries, driven by the belief that the set of values and traditions that characterize the receiving country’s society are threatened by the arrival of foreigners.”1 Her article also summarized that natives to the United States who have more education and a “taste for multiculturalism” tend to be more positive in their opinion of immigration. Lower educated Americans, especially those who are put in direct competition with immigrants for jobs tend to have a more negative, sometimes even racist, view toward immigration. 2 In this paper I hope to look at immigration from a more neutral standpoint to determine how immigration – especially that from Mexico – affects the United States.

Why Mexican Are Migrating to the United States

Before we look at the effects of Mexican immigration, let us look at why and how many Mexican immigrants are coming to the United States. Immigrants come from all over the world to the United States in search of economic opportunity, political freedom, and the American dream. The large U.S. economy that can support and provide jobs to Mexican immigrants is an important factor. Mexicans would not come to the United States if Americans themselves were not thriving and providing a vision of hope and prosperity. The American Dream, the dream of wealth and prosperity that has instilled hope in generations, is inspiring many in Mexico to take the dangerous journey to the United States. 3

Family is another reason for immigration. The family is central to most Latin Americans, causing many who might not otherwise emigrate to go to be with their family members who are
already in the United States. Harvard professor Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco claimed that one half of Mexican immigrants come to be with family members in the country. Approximately 90 percent of visas issued to Mexican immigrants are issued to family members of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents (LPRs).

The physical proximity of the United States to Mexico also plays a role in immigration. Generally the Mexicans who are willing to move to the United States are the ones who do not have a way to support themselves in Mexico. Therefore, many of the immigrants have few, if any, resources to move to another country, which makes the neighboring United States the only real possibility.

Number of Mexican Immigrants in the United States

The 2000 U.S. census showed that there were over 28 million legal and illegal immigrants living in the United States. Of this number, about 8 million were from Mexico. LeeAnee Gellesly wrote in her book, Mexican Immigration, that if the category is increased to include Mexican and Mexican Americans, then there were about 20 million living in the United States. Mexican Americans are U.S. citizens that are of Mexican descent. That made up 7.3 percent of the entire U.S. population in 2000. From the Triennial Comprehensive Report on Immigration, Mexico led as the top country from which immigrants were admitted to the United States for legal residence in 1997. The number of legal immigrants admitted for legal permanent residence was three times higher than the next origin country of the Philippines. Similarly, in late 1996, Mexico was found to be the top country of origin of estimated illegal immigrant population with a total of 2,700,000. The next top origin country of illegal
immigrants was El Salvador with 335,000. However, it is estimated that about 38 percent of Mexican immigrants are not in the United States legally. That means that approximately 3 million Mexicans in the United States are illegal aliens. The following table gives the numbers of the foreign-born population by country in the United States and the projection for future immigration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number per year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>175,900</td>
<td>7,841,000</td>
<td>8,544,000</td>
<td>9,600,000</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>50,900</td>
<td>1,391,000</td>
<td>1,594,000</td>
<td>1,900,000</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>47,800</td>
<td>1,222,000</td>
<td>1,413,000</td>
<td>1,700,000</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>59,300</td>
<td>1,007,000</td>
<td>1,244,000</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>33,700</td>
<td>863,000</td>
<td>997,800</td>
<td>1,200,000</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>952,000</td>
<td>1,011,200</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>33,500</td>
<td>765,000</td>
<td>899,000</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>24,900</td>
<td>692,000</td>
<td>791,600</td>
<td>941,000</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>24,200</td>
<td>678,000</td>
<td>774,800</td>
<td>920,000</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>17,900</td>
<td>701,000</td>
<td>772,600</td>
<td>880,000</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Pop. Top 10</td>
<td>498,900</td>
<td>16,112,000</td>
<td>18,747,600</td>
<td>21,741,000</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Foreign Born</td>
<td>940,000</td>
<td>31,100,000</td>
<td>34,860,000</td>
<td>40,500,000</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Distribution of Mexican Immigrants in the United States

Where are these Mexican immigrants living in the United States? Even more than immigrants from other countries, Mexican immigrants live in concentrated areas. About 63

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1 Here I would like to point out that when evaluating the number of Mexican immigrants, the illegal immigrant population is usually an estimate. These statistics are very hard to determine, for the obvious sensitivity of the
percent of Mexican immigrants live in the West, with nearly half living in the state of California. Texas and Arizona also have very high percentages of Mexican immigrants. The top 10 states with the largest Mexican immigrant population are listed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Mexican Immigrant Population</th>
<th>Total Immigrant Population</th>
<th>Share of Immigrant Population from Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>3,785</td>
<td>8,781</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>1,452</td>
<td>2,443</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>1,155</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>2,767</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3,634</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation (Total)</td>
<td>7,856</td>
<td>28,378</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Mexican immigration as a share of all immigration is also increasing, as the following graph shows. Since 1997, when the percentage was at 7.9 percent of total immigrant population, the percentage had increased to 27.7 percent in the year 2000.

subject and the difficulty to obtain truthful data.
Mexican Immigrants as a Share of All Immigrants


Economic Effect

Jobs Immigrants Hold in the United States

Prior to evaluating the types of jobs Mexican immigrants hold, it is useful to reference the educational levels reached by these immigrants. About 65 percent of Mexican immigrants have less than a high school education. Compared to the 31.2 percent of all immigrants and 9.6 percent of natives to the United States, it is clear that the Mexican immigrants are far behind in education. Steven A Camarota, Director of Research at the Center for Immigration Studies, found that Mexican immigrants hold jobs such as farm laborers, operators, fabricators, non-agricultural laborers, child care workers, janitors, and security guards. Very few Mexican immigrants hold higher-level positions, such as managerial.

The jobs held by illegal Mexican immigrants are even lower-paying and less-skilled than those held by legal Mexican immigrants. A higher percentage of illegal Mexican immigrants work as operators, fabricators, laborers, farming, and precision production, craft, and repair than legal Mexican immigrants, while a lower percentage of illegal Mexican immigrants work in managerial and professional, technical sales, administration, support, service occupations, and
private households. This information could be because illegal immigrants must be willing to work for whoever will hire them, regardless of the wage they will earn.

**Benefits of Mexican Immigrants**

Some Americans argue that Mexican immigrants should be allowed to live and work in the United States because it lowers the cost of the goods and products produced here, making the United States more competitive in the global marketplace. However, Camarota comes to the conclusion that the actual cost of the product would not change much, if any at all, since the prices paid to unskilled workers account for only a very small percentage of the price of goods and products. Furthermore, the employers may not pass along all the savings to the consumers.

In addition, however, it must be realized that Mexican immigrants fulfill jobs that many Americans are unwilling to fill. Mexican immigrants work in many of the most undesirable jobs at very low wages. If they were not doing the jobs, there might be a lack of willing Americans to do the jobs for the same wages. If that were the case, it would result in the increase in the price of products.

**Harm of Mexican Immigrants**

A common accusation against Mexican immigrants is that they steal American citizens' jobs. This is true in a sense, but can also be misleading. Based on the educational levels attained and jobs held by Mexican immigrants, it could be determined that most Americans do not face job competition from Mexican immigrants. The only natives that do face competition from Mexican immigrants are those with the same educational level, or high school dropouts. Mexican immigrants in some cases do take jobs from natives without a high school education. Camarota’s research shows that there are significantly less jobs available for unskilled natives.
due to the abundance of workers.\textsuperscript{18} If more people are willing to work for the same jobs, there will be less positions open.

Another adverse effect from the increase in unskilled laborers has been the decrease in the wages of this group. The wages for unskilled workers also decreased due to the higher number of available workers. Based on the March 1990 and March 2000 Current Population Survey, the wages adjusted for inflation among the unskilled laborers decreased 7.2 percent between 1989 and 1999.\textsuperscript{19}

The Mexican immigrants’ lower wages mean they make up a high percentage of those in poverty in the United States. The estimated annual income of natives in 2001 was about $37,000, while the average for legal Mexican immigrants was about $21,000, and illegal Mexican immigrants was about $15,000.\textsuperscript{20} About 60 percent of Mexican immigrants and their families live in poverty or near poverty.\textsuperscript{21} Although illegal immigrants are not eligible to use welfare programs, their American-born children are and they can collect benefits from their U.S. born children.\textsuperscript{22} About 30 percent of Mexican immigrants use some major welfare program. Only about 20 percent of all immigrants use them, and only about 14 percent of Americans use major welfare programs. Included as major welfare programs in these statistics include Supplemental Security Income, public housing/rent subsidy, public assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid. Additionally, about 34 percent of Mexican immigrants used subsidized school lunch programs.\textsuperscript{23} However, more disturbing to Camarota than the percentage of Mexican immigrants requiring social services is the “fact that [use of] welfare does not drop dramatically over time” because “it indicates that even after having lived in the country for many decades, many Mexican immigrants are still not self-sufficient.”\textsuperscript{24} If the Mexican immigrants were earning more the longer they stayed in the country and integrated into society, then they might be able to decrease
their use of welfare programs as a result of their higher income. The majority of the types of jobs they hold though, jobs not requiring skilled labor, do not increase the wages paid to workers over time. This keeps many Mexican immigrants in or near poverty.

Another problem is that about 46 percent of Mexican-born immigrants have no health insurance. The U.S. government must pay for the U.S. born children of Mexican immigrants because they are covered under Medicaid. The lack of health-insurance is not specific to Mexican immigrants, but Mexican immigrants do have a higher percentage of those without it. Total immigrants without health insurance in 1999 was slightly over 30 percent.

The U.S. public education system must also take on the challenge of educating the American-born children of immigrants. This includes not only providing teachers and classes, but also special programs since many of the children do not speak English. Camarota says that “[t]he added cost of providing services to students with limited English language skills is also likely to strain the resources of many school systems.” In 2001, there were an estimated 3,213,000 school-aged children of Mexican immigrant mothers.

The funding for these programs becomes a problem because, while many Mexican immigrants take advantage of public services, they do not pay as much income tax as natives do. In 1999, it was found that 74 percent of natives to America paid at least some federal income tax, but only 59 percent of Mexican immigrants did.

The Political Effect

Republicans and Democrats Fight for the Hispanic Vote

The immigration from Mexico has caused many political effects, including Republicans and Democrats fighting for the Hispanic vote. The increasing number of Mexican immigrants in the United States has caused many politicians running for office to include special
advertisements focusing on the issues most important to that group: “family, education, and employment.” In recent years, President George W. Bush has made several attempts to reach out to Latinos, who normally vote Democratically. For example, President Bush is the only U.S. President who has ever given his weekly radio address in Spanish. Both Democrats and Republicans are searching for ways to pull in the Hispanic vote.

Representation in Government Offices

Representation in government offices has also increased due to the increasing numbers of Mexican immigrants. Hispanics made up as much as 14.3 percent of the population but only about 4% of all voters are Hispanic. The Senate is 3% Hispanic with 6 Senators from Hispanic origin and the House is approximately 5% Hispanic with 21 members with Hispanic origin. This is under representative of the entire Hispanic population, but is about the right percentage for representing the Hispanics who can vote.

The Cultural Effect

The cultural influences of Mexican immigration can be seen clearly in the media, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and television. One Spanish-language broadcast network, Univision, became the fifth most-watched network in 1999. The Hispanic influence is even prevalent in children’s TV, as seen in programs such as “Dora the Explorer.”

Though the cultural aspects abound, specific local examples can be thought up easily as well. In the Huntsville phonebook, there were 45 listed Mexican restaurants. Local churches advertise offering services in Spanish.

The Social Effect

Social effects are also prevalent but somewhat hard to identify. Some Americans have concerns over increased drugs, crime, and poverty, but at the same time, there is increased
diversity. Many U.S. citizens have concerns about the flow of drugs into the country through the U.S.-Mexico border. Colombia supplies much of the cocaine and heroin to U.S. drug users, and major terrorist organizations are tied to drug traffickers and arms smugglers from South America all the way to the U.S. border. Mexico is also the largest or second largest supplier of heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine to the United States. Along with the transfer of drugs, many times there also exists violence.

The exact flow of drugs and cause of crime is hard to determine, but John Hagan and Alberto Palloni in their article “Immigration and Crime in the United States” come to the conclusion that there is no apparent connection between immigration from Mexico and crime rates and the flow of drugs into the United States. They write, “The crime rate increased from the 1960s until about 1990, then has declined noticeably for the past six years. . . . The problems of data of the criminal justice system make it very difficult to reach empirical conclusions on immigration and crime. It appears, however, that the major trends in crime are not being driven by immigration.” Poverty in general seems to increase crime rates, but aside from the increased poverty in the United States due to Mexican immigrants who live in poverty, immigration does not inherently increase crime rates. In his article “The Impact of Immigration on American Society: Looking Backward to the Future,” Charles Hirshman states that

Almost all popular fears about immigration and even the judgments of ‘experts’ about the negative impact of immigrants have been proven false by history. Not only have almost all immigrants (or their descendants) assimilated over time, but they have broadened American society in many positive ways. . . . Each new wave of immigration to the United States has met with some degree of hostility and popular fears that immigrants will harm American society or will not conform to the prevailing ‘American way of life.’
Hirshman suggests that waves of immigrants to the United States integrate into society instead of dominating or seriously transforming society. Even if immigrants do not integrate into society vary rapidly, they usually do over a few generations.

The wave of Mexican immigrants should be no exception. Richard Alba describes another fear of Americans in his article "Looking Beyond the Moment: American Immigration Seen from Historically and Internationally Comparative Perspectives." He states that "[s]ome Americans fear—against the evidence of cross-generational linguistic assimilation, one should add—that Latin American immigrants and their US-born children could form a separate Spanish-speaking subsociety." There are extremists who might wish to promote this subsociety, but most sources agree that the majority of Mexican immigrants appear to come here to work hard and be a part of the United States.

**The Future Effects**

Mexican immigrants will continue to affect the United States in many ways in the future. Unless Mexico's economy improves dramatically in a short amount of time and the United States imposes strict border rules, Mexico will retain the title of the first place country of origin for U.S. immigrants. Furthermore, unlike the total Mexican population, the birth rates of Mexican immigrants are not declining. As earlier stated, the 3.2 million school-aged children of Mexican immigrants will result in the continuation of the effects of Mexican immigrants as they grow up and further influence and integrate into American society.

By studying the second and third-generation Mexican-Americans, a better picture of the future will be formed. In 2000, it was found that second and third-generation Mexican-Americans had higher percentages who finished high school than more recent Mexican immigrants, but lower than second and third-generations of other immigrants from other
countries. These numbers are encouraging and show that Mexican Americans will be better able to integrate in the future. The question of Mexican immigration and other issues between the U.S. and Mexico will not disappear due to the large border of about 2000 miles shared by the two countries.

**U.S. Policy Options**

**Tighter Border Controls**

One of the most visible effects of Mexican immigration to the United States currently has been the U.S. government’s response of passing the *Secure Fence Act*. Current U.S. Immigration Policy has an overwhelming focus on border security. Ironically, the current fences at the border are insufficient, to say the least. In many areas there are holes in the fence; other areas can be easily dug under or climbed over.

On October 25, 2006, President George W. Bush signed the *Secure Fence Act* which approved the building of about 700 more miles of fence along the Mexico-U.S. border. The Department of Homeland Security was authorized to use advanced technology, such as cameras, satellites, and unmanned aerial vehicles to further secure the border. The bill also included authorization for more lighting, barriers, and checkpoints. Increased security on the border would allow the United States more control over who and what entered into the country.

An estimated 500 people die each year trying to cross the border into the United States. Some believe that having a more secure wall will discourage illegal aliens from making the dangerous journey across the border. However, there are many critics of the border wall.

Environmentalists do not like it because it does not allow the free roaming of animals, such as mountain lions, coyotes, and deer. Those against immigration say that it will not keep illegal aliens out because the wall is only effective in areas where the wall is in place. In areas
that already have a similar fence in place, immigration at the area where the wall was built decreased, but immigration through surrounding areas actually increased. American Indians travel across the border and do not want the fence to interfere with their freedom of movement. Some concerned with the long-term budget of the project are worried that constant upkeep, which includes not only the fence, but also the technology, such as cameras, will outweigh the advantages. The funds have already been increased since the initial projection of $2 billion. Some unofficial projections of how much the fence is actually going to end up costing are as high as $30 billion. Still others say that some of the areas along the 700 mile fence are not suitable for a fence. Some areas are desert with the sand changing, and some areas are through cities. Others say that it has a negative symbolism similar to the Berlin Wall. Patt Morrison criticizes the wall in an opinion article in the Los Angeles Times by pointing out how many laws it breaks. These include the “National Environmental Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act, California coastal regulations, the Federal Water Pollution Act, the Clean Air Act, the Administrative Procedure Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.” She claims it is “like they never existed.”

The reaction in Mexico has also been negative. Former President Vicente Fox called it “disgraceful and shameful.” President Calderon called it a “Grave Mistake,” saying that “The wall is not going to solve any problem. Humanity committed a tremendous mistake by constructing the Berlin Wall, and I believe that today the United States is committing a grave mistake by constructing this barrier on our common border.”

Sassen provides another interesting view about border security. He says “[w]ithout a broader approach to immigration, more fences, if built, could consume the lion’s share of the
federal budget for border security, leaving inadequate resources for other critical tasks, such as employer enforcement, detention, and removal.” Perhaps focusing more broadly would discourage individuals from coming to the United States because they would know that they had a greater chance of being detected and sent back.

Sassen seems to suggest that no matter how much is spent on border security, it will not eliminate immigration because immigrants will find other ways into the country. Further, he says that increased efforts at border security have resulted in more rather than less immigration. He pointed out that “after 15 years of increased militarizing of the border, we have an all-time high in the estimated unauthorized immigrant population (ca. 12 million).”

He suggests a possible reason for this to be that individuals who would normally leave their families at home are now taking their families with them. He said that

The escalation of border control has raised the risks and costs of illegal crossing, which in turn has changed a seasonal circulatory migration—with workers leaving their families behind—into a family migration and long-term stays. The Border study established that in the early 1980s, about half of all undocumented Mexicans returned home within 12 months of entry. By 2000 the rate of return migration stood at just 25 percent.

If immigrants feel that they will not be able to return to Mexico and then reenter the United States, they might take the greater risk of bringing their entire families one time across the border. This increases the cost to the U.S. government because instead of one man in the United States working, there is a family with children. Charles Hirschman points out that in the past, Mexican immigrants came to the United States to work and send money back to their families in Mexico, with the intention that they would return to Mexico periodically to visit.

2 This is my translation of the quote in Spanish, which reads: “El muro no va a resolver ningún problema. La humanidad cometió un tremendo error al construir el muro de Berlín, y yo creo que hoy en día Estados Unidos está cometiendo un grave error al construir esta barrera en nuestra frontera común.”
This brings us to immigration reform. Before the September 11th attacks, President Bush and President Fox were working toward more open borders. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, more Americans favor stricter border security and the plans for an open border ended.54

Tighter Enforcement Within Country

In addition to increased border security, there are other aspects about immigration reform that must be addressed in order to improve the situation for all involved in Mexican immigration. Sassen points out some of the most commonly cited problems with current immigration policy:

There are three peculiar absences in the enforcement effort in the US which are also part of the larger ecology within which militarization has failed to achieve its aims. One is the absence of a parallel “escalation” in the visa application process—because of understaffing it can still take ten years for a lawful applicant to get processed. Secondly, the budget for inspections of workplaces suspected of violating the law remains minimal and employers sanctions are rare. Thirdly, the budget for tracking visa over-stayers remains minimal and apprehensions are few.55

If the United States is going to continue referring to illegal immigration as illegal, then a country that follows the rule of law needs to enforce those laws.

Camarota agrees with Sassen in that to decrease Mexican immigration, the United States needs to ensure that illegal immigrants cannot find employment.56 He argues that there are three actions that need to be taken in order to decrease the employment opportunities for illegal immigrants. The first would be a nationalized computer system that allows employers to see if the workers they are hiring are legal. The second would be to increase the efforts of the Immigration and Nationalization Service (INS) to enforce the law at worksites. A lack of funding is the hang-up for this step. The last step would be to do more at the border to stop illegal Mexican immigrants from entering into the United States. Camarota describes the current efforts at the U.S. southern border as “grossly inadequate.”
Another view on immigration from Mexico is that the United States is a technology-based economy that cannot support large amounts of unskilled laborers. This argument also points out that it is the poor who suffer the most from immigration from Mexico. The immigration reform that would be necessary in this view would be to reduce all unskilled immigration (legal and illegal) and re-educate the Mexican immigrants who are already here. Job retraining and increased knowledge of the job market would allow Mexican-Americans to better participate in the American job market. I do not see this as a very practical suggestion because if the United States only allows skilled immigration, then the entire U.S. workforce is going to be in competition with Mexican immigrants for jobs. Also, while “skilled labor and capital comprise the overwhelming share of the economic output,” unskilled jobs support the entire economic system as well.\textsuperscript{57}

Reducing Family Member Immigration

Considering that such a high percentage of visas are granted to Mexican immigrants who come to be with family members, Camarota suggests further immigration reform by reducing the family members of U.S. citizens who are able to immigrate legally. He says that the United States should look into a suggestion by the Commission of Immigration Reform to allow spouses, minor children, and parents of the U.S. citizen as well as the spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents (LPRs). This would eliminate the immigration of siblings and adult children of U.S. citizens. Eliminating the parents of U.S. citizens as well would cut the number of legal Mexican immigrants nearly in half.\textsuperscript{58}

Guest Worker Program

Some have encouraged guest-worker programs to be put into place. Some, such as Camarota, do not believe guest-worker programs would solve the problems with immigration
because they do not do anything to increase the skill level of the Mexican immigrants, which leaves them as the same burden upon society and taxpayers. Camarota also adds that in other countries that have attempted guest-worker programs, the workers stay permanently in the country. \(^5^9\) President Bush, however, stands firm to his belief that guest-worker programs will improve the situation both for Americans and immigrants because they would allow immigrants to work jobs legally that Americans are not willing to take, as opposed to many of them working here illegally. \(^6^0\) Some believe the United States is a country based on the rule of law, allowing illegal immigrants to live in the country is not acceptable. \(^6^1\)

Others, such as Senator Barack Obama, suggest that “replacing the flood of illegals with a regulated stream of legal immigrants who enter the United States after background checks and who are provided labor rights would enhance our security, raise wages, and improve working conditions for all Americans.” \(^6^2\)

The United States could also make efforts to work with Mexico to improve its economy, reform business restrictions, break up monopolies. \(^6^3\) If Mexico’s economy were stronger, then perhaps it could provide jobs for all the individuals who risk their lives to come to the United States.

**Increasing Education Options Within Country for Immigrants**

Many argue that the best way to improve the situation of Mexican immigrants already here is to provide education for them, including English classes. This would help them integrate into American society.

**Other Options**

There are even other alternate views on immigration that require no immigration reform, or the opening of the border altogether. One of these views on immigration from Mexico is the
social valve idea. “It is often suggested that because Mexico finds it difficult to meet the employment and other needs of its own people, the United States should allow in immigrants to prevent social discontent from possibly destabilizing Mexico.” He continues to say “[o]f course, there is a very strong counter position which points out that providing an escape valve, the United States may in fact reduce pressures for change in Mexico, thereby hindering its development.”

There is an altruistic or egalitarian view that if the United States can offer a small percentage of the Mexican population a chance at a better life, then the United States should do that. After all, an egalitarian would argue that everyone should have an equal opportunity to be successful or enjoy the benefits of other countries, regardless of their nationality or race.

Others say that the “United States simply cannot control illegal immigration at a reasonable cost” and should therefore not waste any more money on a futile effort.

A view that surprised me when I came across it was Alba’s idea that immigration is a problem not only due to the economic effects, but because of the lack of fair representation for them in the democratic system of America.

There are approximately 12 million people who reside and work here without any legal basis for doing so; if one includes the US-born children in their families, then the figure rises to 15 million, approximately 4 to 5 percent of the total population. This is a disastrous situation for any democratic society, as it leaves a substantial-sized body of the population vulnerable to exploitation and without any significant political voice.

**Conclusion**

Despite Steven Camarota’s extensive research about the topic of Mexican immigration to the United States, and his conclusion that immigration is costing the U.S. government substantial amounts of money every year, there are still other experts who say that “the overall impact of immigration, including unauthorized workers, is a net positive for the U.S. economy.” This
difference in opinions of experts implies that despite all the evaluation and research done about
the effects of Mexican immigration to the United States, Americans will still view immigration
based on their personal opinions and biases or that there are both advantages and disadvantages.

If I had to make immigration reform suggestions, I would support a guest worker
program simply so that the Mexicans who cannot find jobs in Mexico can come and work the
jobs in the United States that Americans do not want to work. I think that broader border
security efforts could be useful in reducing the number of illegal immigrants entering the
country, but this alone will not solve the problem. Without spending implausible amounts of
money on the border, immigrants will be able to find ways into the United States. I think that the
fence proposed by the Secure Fence Act has many problems that could have been remedied by a
different proposal. However, I do not think that the current Secure Fence Act is going to be fully
completed due to a lack of funding. I would support further relations with Mexico to improve its
economy so that it can be a stronger trading partner and can provide more jobs for the many
individuals in poverty there. If Mexico’s economy were strong enough to provide jobs to all its
citizens, then there would be much less emigration from Mexico to the United States.

To conclude, clearly this is a complicated issue and there are no simple answers to
resolve all the problems. I have chosen only a small selection of issues to talk about, and I do
realize that there are many other issues I could have touched on. After researching the topic and
writing this paper, I have a much better understanding of the broad issue of Mexican immigration
to the United States and how that affects Americans.
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