**Mexican immigration to U.S. off 40 percent, study finds**

July 22, 2009|By Mariano Castillo CNN

Mexican immigration to the United States has dropped sharply since 2005, but the flow of migrants returning to Mexico remains steady, according to a study released Wednesday by the Pew Hispanic Center.

Immigration from Mexico to the United States slowed at least 40 percent between mid-decade and 2008, according to the analysis, based on national population surveys in the United States and Mexico, as well as Border Patrol apprehension figures.

The Mexican survey estimated that 1 million Mexicans left for the United States in a 12-month period beginning in 2006. Three years later, that number decreased to 636,000.

"The size of the drop has been quite remarkable in such a small span of time," Jeffrey Passel, senior demographer at the Pew Hispanic Center and author of the study, told CNN.

The recession and enhanced border enforcement are factors that may explain the decrease in apprehensions of unauthorized immigrants in the United States, according a Department of Homeland Security bulletin released last month.

But if diminished job prospects in the United States have kept would-be immigrants in Mexico, employment worries haven't increased the number of Mexican migrants leaving the United States, the study found.

An estimated 433,000 Mexican migrants returned home between 2008 and 2009, a number not significantly different than the 479,000 who returned three years earlier, Passel said.

While the number of Mexican migrants entering the United States remains greater than the number returning, the study shows that the gap is closing to the point of nearing a balance between migrant inflows and outflows.

"My guess is you have to go back at least 40 years or 50 years to see that," Passel said.

It is too early to tell, however, if either trend "points to a fundamental change in U.S.-Mexico immigration patterns or is a short-term response to heightened border enforcement, the weakened U.S. economy or other forces," the study states.

The economic downturn has certainly affected work opportunities for immigrants in the United States, said Alfredo Reyes, a day laborer who does construction and yard work in Atlanta area.

"There are weeks where I have three days of work and the other four without work," the Michoacan, Mexico, native told CNN.

Despite the reduced availability for work, Reyes plans on staying put because the economic downturn is global.

"I think things are more difficult there (in Mexico)," he said.

**Mexican migrants' growing influence**

**By Javier Lizarzaburu**

BBC Spanish American service

**"We are powerful enough to make a difference," says Guadalupe Gomez, talking about the influence migrants have in Mexican politics.**

Originally from the Mexican state of Zacatecas, he's lived north, in the US, for more than 40 years. He is currently president of the Federation of Zacatecan Associations.

The migrants' influence comes with the massive amounts of money they send back home.

Despite the relative stagnation of the US economy, this flow of money keeps growing, according to recent data. In 2003 it increased by 35% - the total amount sent that year to Mexico was more than $13bn.

Remittances from Mexicans in the US have become one of Mexico's most important sources of income - second only to oil and surpassing the traditional tourism industry.

According to Roberto Suro, director of the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington "remittances have probably benefited Mexico more than Nafta" (the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the US and Mexico).

**Electoral issue**

The flow of money from the US to Latin America largely exceeds the money from foreign aid that the region receives.

For many, remittances have become a form of foreign aid that helps the families back home to alleviate poverty, spur investment and achieve higher standards of living.

**It is thanks to them [migrants] that I became state governor**

Zacatecas Governor Ricardo Monreal

But critics argue that dependence on remittances can impair local initiative and create no incentives for people to move forward.

However, the issue is not just about families anymore.

Remittances are fast becoming a new phenomenon, influencing foreign and domestic policies in different countries, including the US - the main source of remittances worldwide.

Experts say the recent immigration proposals submitted by US President George W Bush, to allow migrants to work legally in the US for a limited number of years, are a direct response to the growing influence of Latinos in that country.

For Mexico's President, Vicente Fox, the issue was paramount during his electoral campaign.

He made migration a cornerstone of his political agenda. He even called migrants the new "heroes".

Quite a change from the days, not so long ago, when those who chose to live with "the enemy" - as they used to call the US in many parts of the Mexico - were called "traitors".

**Ghost town**

The Mexican state of Zacatecas, once a place rich in silver but now one of the poorest areas in the country, is illustrative.

More Zacatecans live now in Los Angeles than in the city of Zacatecas.

The State Governor, Ricardo Monreal, acknowledges that "their economic influence is huge and their political clout as a consequence of that is huge too".

"It is thanks to them that I became state governor," says Mr Monreal.

Remittances also have social and human implications.

In the village of Jomulquillo, a couple of hours from the city of Zacatecas, what hits you as soon as you arrive is the silence.

One of the few locals remaining there says that at the moment there are 80 people living in the village - 300 live in Los Angeles.

With the empty houses, the closed windows and locked doors, this feels like a ghost town.

But the pain of families being separated is somewhat compensated by these remittances that, in the case of Zacatecas, not only help the relatives but also their villages of origin.

**Crucial role**

As part of a new strategy, the Mexican authorities have decided to match the money sent by migrants with local, regional and federal money, in order to build roads, schools and medical centres.

From being called "traitors who chose to live with the enemy", Mexico's emigrants have now gained a level of influence and respectability unheard of in the country.

According to Guadalupe Gomez "a lot of politicians are taking notice of our influence". And, he adds, they have to do more to make migrants participate in the decision-making process.

It is not surprising therefore that last year, in a historic move, the Zacatecas' state legislature voted in favour of allowing migrants living in the US to stand for political office.

Similar things are occurring in other Latin American countries.

The recent elections in El Salvador show just how much this issue is affecting politics.

Experts say that the right-wing Tony Saca won the elections largely due to last minute television ads warning that a victory for the left-wing candidate would have a negative impact on US-Salvador relations.

One consequence of this, the ads warned, would be massive deportations that in turn would put remittances at risk.Analysts believe that because nearly 30% of the population depends on the money sent from the US, this twist in the electoral campaign became a decisive element in Mr Saca's victory.

If remittances continue to grow as they have in the last few years, migrants are likely to become crucial players in the politics of their countries of origin and not only in the economy.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR [**Opinion**](http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion)

A bold plan to solve America's illegal immigration problem

**We can end the political stalemate if we summon the courage to end illegal immigration, provide amnesty at a price, and be more selective about who we welcome into the country.**

By [*Richard D. Lamm*](http://www.csmonitor.com/About/Contact-Us-Feedback), [*Lawrence Harrison*](http://www.csmonitor.com/About/Contact-Us-Feedback) / October 15, 2010

Denver and Vineyard Haven, Mass.

As the debate on immigration policy intensifies, Americans are caught in a false choice between tougher border protection and amnesty for illegals. A compromise solution that both parties can rally behind is possible – but only if we have a revolution in the way we discuss our national identity and values.

At bottom, we must:

1. Substantially reduce levels of legal immigration and end illegal immigration, while providing amnesty – at a price – to most pre-existing illegal immigrants.

2. Be selective about future immigrants’ country of origin, and terminate multiculturalism as a national value.

Not a right-wing concern

Concerns about immigration are not confined to the right end of the political spectrum or to “xenophobes” and “nativists.” Both of us, we hasten to add, are avid supporters of President Obama.

The [consequences of unchecked immigration](http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2010/0826/Mexico-mass-grave-highlights-abuse-of-migrants-heading-to-US) affect all Americans. The US population in 1900 was about 76 million; today, it is about 310 million, of which about 47 million are Latinos. Richard Lamm observes:

In my twelve years as governor of Colorado, high levels of immigration, predominantly from Mexico, made virtually every major problem more difficult to solve. At least 50 percent of immigrants today come from Latin America, and they are acculturating much more slowly than prior immigration waves. Additionally:

• A substantial proportion of the patients at the Denver Public Hospital are illegal immigrants, virtually all poor and poorly educated.

• The percentage of Hispanic students in Denver public schools has risen quickly, to 54 percent.

• Public housing in Denver is filled with both legal and illegal immigrants.

• Nationwide, 20 percent of our prison space is occupied by foreign-born inmates, disproportionately Latinos.

Fifteen years ago, when these problems were less severe, Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, chair of the bipartisan US Commission on Immigration Reform, called for an end to illegal immigration and a calibration of legal immigration levels to the demonstrated needs of the economy. She understood then what is even more true today: High levels of legal and illegal immigration hurt all Americans, but they especially hurt US citizens, disproportionately black and Latino citizens.

With so many of our citizens unable to find jobs, we must be willing to lay aside our biases and work toward a solution that works for everyone.

Solving the amnesty issue

The first crucial step is to tackle the so-called amnesty issue.

We believe that amnesty for illegal immigrants is a bad idea, proven to encourage subsequent illegal immigration by the experience of the 1986 amnesty. But we also believe that the US government shares the blame because of its failure to enforce immigration laws. We consequently propose the following sketch of a compromise.

First, a bipartisan, commission must certify (1) that our borders are under control, and (2) that an effective system of employment verification is in place. Then, all illegal immigrants who can prove that they have been working or at school in the United States for at least five years are eligible for amnesty.

Each illegal immigrant who applies for amnesty must pay a fine of $10,000 per person, over a five-year period if necessary, before becoming eligible for amnesty. Family eligibility will be limited to the nuclear family: spouses and children who have lived in the United States for five years, or since their marriage/birth.

Some may argue that the $10,000 per person fine is excessive. But look at the numbers. In 2008, remittances from Latino immigrants in the United States, mostly to families in their homelands, totaled about $60 billion – $25 billion alone went to Mexico. That shows that Latinos in America are capable of generating serious income. With five years to pay, the $10,000 fine should be manageable.

This approach could generate as much as $100 billion in new federal revenues.

End multiculturalism

The second crucial step is to [end multiculturalism as a national value](http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2008/0226/p09s01-coop.html) and be much more selective about who we welcome into our country. Immigration isn’t just about quantity. It’s about quality. Since immigration should serve the national interest, it’s fair to ask:

• What does America’s work force need? What choices leave our children the best, most sustainable America?

• Aren’t there significant differences in the speed and completeness of assimilation among different immigrant groups?

• Doesn’t it make a difference whether we take 1,000 Chinese, Japanese, or Koreans as opposed to 1,000 people from south of our border? Just look at the astonishing Asian success rates, and the failure of so many Latinos to graduate even from high school – and the divisive evolution of Spanish to become, de facto, our second national language.

With an unemployment rate near 10 percent, why are we importing close to a million people a year? America has experienced zero job growth since 2000, yet we have added 10 million legal immigrants plus millions more illegally. By the Jordan Commission standards, we are importing too many immigrants, particularly too many unskilled immigrants.

If we can begin to speak honestly about who we are and where we’d like to go as a nation, we can meet this threat.

*Richard Lamm was the governor of Colorado from 1975 to 1987. He is currently the codirector of the Institute for Public Policy Studies at the University of Denver, where he is also a university professor. Lawrence Harrison directs the Cultural Change Institute at the Fletcher School, Tufts University*

Mexico mass grave highlights abuse of migrants heading to US

**The Mexico mass grave of 72 bodies is seen as the latest evidence that drug cartels are increasingly preying on migrants headed to the US.**

By [*Sara Miller Llana*](http://www.csmonitor.com/), Staff writer / August 26, 2010

With attention focused on the US tightening its borders and stepping up deportations, mostly of undocumented Mexicans, the plight of migrants crossing through Mexico is often overlooked.

Their reality became shockingly clear on Wednesday with the discovery of a Mexico mass grave. The 72 corpses are believed to be of Central and South Americans who were journeying through the deserts of Mexico in hopes of reaching US soil. Mexican officials are investigating whether the migrants were victims of drug cartels that are increasingly reliant on kidnappings, recruitment, and extortion of undocumented migrants to pad their pockets.

"It's absolutely terrible, and it demands the condemnation of all of our society," government spokesman for security issues Alejandro Poire said during a press conference Wednesday.

President Felipe Calderón's office issued a statement condemning the attack, adding that government action against drug cartels has led them to extort and kidnap migrants as a financing mechanism. "This is a result of the activity of the state against them, which has significantly weakened the operational capacity of criminal groups," the statement said.

An estimated 10,000 migrants were kidnapped in Mexico between September 2008 and February 2009, according to a report from the National Human Rights Commission. Amnesty International has urged the Mexican government to do more to protect migrants passing through.

Not only are they targeted for money, says Mr. Poire, but they are also seen as potential recruits for drug cartels locked in a deadly battle that has taken 28,000 lives since 2006, when Mr. Calderón sent the military to fight organized crime.

This could be the deadliest massacre since the Calderón effort was launched, but it certainly is not isolated. In July, 51 bodies were found at a trash dump outside the industrial city of Monterrey. In May, [55 bodies were found](http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2010/0608/Mexico-mass-grave-highlights-gruesome-drug-war) in an old mine near the town of Taxco, not far from Mexico City.

The northern state of Tamaulipas, where the 72 bodies were found, has been submerged in a violent struggle between drug gangs trying to secure illegal trafficking routes into the US.

The story of the latest mass grave broke after an Ecuadorian migrant sought help from a military checkpoint in Tamaulipas. He claimed to have escaped the kidnapping that befell his fellow travelers, and pointed authorities to the scene of the crime at a ranch, about 100 miles south of the US border. Gunfire erupted as the military arrived to investigate the ranch, killing one marine and three gunmen.

The Ecuadorian migrant, now hospitalized, told the Mexican press that the migrants were kidnapped by an armed group that identified themselves as the Zetas, who were trained as Mexican elite forces before breaking off and joining the drug trade. The Zetas may have sought to recruit the migrants to work in the drug trade, according to local reports.

The Ecuadorian migrant said he was traveling with people from Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, and Brazil. Overall, 58 men were found and 14 women. The Mexican government said it is trying to verify the identities of those dead with the various embassies involved.

It is unclear if they were killed all at once or over time. It is also unclear why these victims were targeted.

The journey through Mexico has become more and more treacherous as suspected drug traffickers branch out into other businesses, including human trafficking. They are increasingly targeting migrants in a variety of ways, say analysts, authorities, and migrants.

Migrants are often victims not only because they are presumed to have cash on hand, but because many have relatives with cash in the US. This was confirmed to the Monitor during interviews with migrants at Tultitlan in central Mexico, a crossing ground for many heading to America.

At a shelter in Tultitlan, migrants say they are victims both of Mexican authorities seeking bribes and Mexican gangs who beat them for their cash, and worse, kidnap them in hopes of getting ransom from relatives in the US.

“It is not easy to be here as a migrant,” says Leticia Junez, a nun who works with migrants in Tultitlan. “Not only do they leave their families, they face all the dangers of crossing illegally, especially kidnapping.”

The migrant shelter where she volunteers in Tultitlan was itself victim of an assault in July, when men claiming to be federal police stormed the center and tried to speed away with migrants in their vans. The volunteers stopped it from happening. But it underscores their vulnerability, Sister Junez says. The case is still under investigation.

[**Mexican Government Cites Ecological Dangers of Border Wall**](http://www.treehugger.com/files/2007/11/mexican_governm_2.php)

by [Eliza Barclay, Washington, D.C.](http://www.treehugger.com/author/eliza-barclay-washington-dc-1/) on 11.19.07

[**BUSINESS & POLITICS**](http://www.treehugger.com/business_politics/)



The wall the U.S. government is building on the border with Mexico could cause floods, the disappearance of 11 animal species with the interruption of their migration routes, and the fragmentation of flora and fauna populations, according to a new study by the Mexican Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat. The study, entitled "A Barrier to Our Shared Environment: The Border Wall between Mexico and the United States" was released Friday in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and was conducted by 56 Mexican and U.S. experts.

Mexico's top environmental official, Juan Rafael Elvira Quesada, noted that the wall, built to prevent Mexican immigrants from entering US territory, is an environmental threat to the region's deserts, mountains, rivers, swamps and marches, whose biodiversity is very rich.

"We must bear in mind that biodiversity does not belong to the Mexicans or the Americans, because it belongs to the entire world," Elvira Quesada noted.

The report's authors have suggested that the U.S. government look for alternatives to the wall, including less intrusive fencing materials that allow better drainage and the passage of animals. They also recommended that the government use smaller machines and vehicles in the construction process to reduce environmental impact.

**Along U.S.-Mexican border, an erratic patchwork fence**

By [*Daniel B. Wood*](http://www.csmonitor.com/About/Contact-Us-Feedback), Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor / April 3, 2008

Naco, Arizona

After driving 10 miles along the expanded US-Mexican border fence near her farm, Dawn Garner offers her dour assessment: "Anyone can plainly see this wouldn't stop a flea, let alone a migrant or terrorist."

A jagged patchwork of metal mesh, corrugated steel, vertical bollards, chest-high railroad rails, and waist-high barbed wire has been cobbled together along the southern border east of Naco by various National Guard units over the past summer. Hard-hatted workers from a general contractor, Sundt Inc., continue to dig ditches and grade terrain across plains of fluorescent-green prairie grass framed by saw-toothed mountains.

"This [fence] is just too easy to cut into, climb over, or go under or around," says Ms. Garner. Twenty to 40 illegal migrant workers cut across her five-acre farm daily, she says.

Unlike in San Luis, Ariz., and San Diego, where double-and- triple metal walls are backed by lighting and cameras, the fencing being built along this part of the US-Mexican border is piecemeal. Such a fence is pointless, say local ranchers.

The border patrol, however, contends that it is cost-effective, and more potent than it seems.

Here in Naco, the wall is being built on mostly federally-owned land. So there is little of the outrage over fair compensation and invasion of private property as there is in Texas, or complaints about cutting landowners off from land that falls on the Mexican side of the wall, as in the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation to the west.

Neither has there been as much ecological concern as farther north near San Pedro – though this may change, as the Department of Homeland Security announced Tuesday it would waive certain environmental and land rules for 470 miles of the border from California to Texas and another 22 miles in Hidalgo County, Tex.

Rather, most local residents seem concerned about building a wall that actually stops illegal immigrants.

"We don't want a Berlin Wall or anything, just something that keeps migrants from flooding our backyards," says Garner, accelerating her bright yellow Jeep down the gravel road that runs alongside the newly-built fencing stretching east from the tiny border crossing at Naco toward New Mexico.

As Garner drives, an eclectic array of fence styles and materials flutter by in the bright sun.

One stretch of the fence is made of a kind of steel, Vietnam-era material – once used as landing mats for helicopters touching down on the jungle floor – held together vertically by steel girders. Another stretch of the fence comprises corrugated steel bars placed one on top of the other to a height of 10 feet, and capped by another three feet of metal mesh.

A third style is built of staggered, cylindrical pillars known as bollards, with just enough of a crack between them to allow small rodents or birds through – but not humans.

As the landscape turns desolate and the terrain rough, the fencing alters even more. In some places are vertical metal slats that look like suburban picket fences, only higher. In others, the fence is made of steel girders pounded into the ground vertically, with some laid across at waist height – able to stop cars but easy for people to step over or crawl under.

This patchwork fence is interspersed with 100-yard gaps where there's no barrier at all or traditional barbed-wire fencing.

Out in the desert, "vehicle barriers" begin to appear, made of used railway rails that resemble Abe Lincoln-era split-rail fences. "Well, these are sturdier than they look and it seems they would stop a car," acknowledges Garner. "But as you can see, anyone in a car could simply drive around one of these."

Ranchers here say they don't understand the logic behind the eclectic potpourri of fence styles. It's just politics, says Richard Hodges, owner of a 372-acre cattle ranch whose family has lived here since homestead days. "[It's] because they need to say they got a wall up."

But the US border patrol says a patchwork wall isn't as bad as it seems. Using leftover materials means huge savings, agents say. Funding for the original 700-mile fence envisioned by the 2006 Secure Fence Act was about $1.2 billion. Only $200 million has been spent so far and the goal has been scaled back some, but there is still more than 370 miles of fence to be built by the end of 2008.

Costs have been mounting – a mile of metal fencing costs $3 million to $4 million, according to border patrol – and include putting up National Guard troops in local hotels.

Border patrol officials say that in places like Naco, it is not necessary to build an impenetrable fence. "In urban areas like San Diego, once a migrant jumps the fence, he has only a few yards to disappear into the city," says Mike Scioli of the Tucson Sector Border Patrol. "But down here, we only need to slow them down."

Using mesh and bollard allows the border patrol to see through to the Mexican side of the fence – a critical tactical ploy that allows agents to see someone trying to cut or torch through from the other side, Mr. Scioli says. Also, in the cat-and-mouse games that occur daily in these areas, an eclectic fence forces illegal migrants to choose a section of fence to climb over, dig under, or cut through. Then, when border patrol agents chase them back, they have to find the exact hole they came through – making them easier to catch.

Still, not everyone is convinced. The patchwork barrier reflects the impracticality of border fencing, say some observers. "The nation is caught between the forces saying something must be done and the practicalities that it can't properly be executed," says Patricia Hamm, assistant professor of political science at Iowa State University. "And so we end up with what we've got – so many miles of wall that officials can point to from Washington to say 'We've done it.' And local residents and others who see what's in front of them say, 'It doesn't matter, it won't work'."

**US immigrants spark growth debate** By Robert Plummer BBC News business reporter

**While US politicians feud over proposed reforms to immigration laws, a parallel debate is raging on the impact of foreign-born workers on the country's economy.**

The immigrants themselves, whether legal or illegal, were clearly keen to show what a difference they make to the US when more than a million of them boycotted work and turned out at May Day protest rallies.

But ask economists the simple question "Is immigration good or bad for the US?" and you will soon find that their view is far from unanimous.

In terms of sheer numbers, legal immigration is currently high by historical standards, although lower than its all-time peak in the early 1990s.

Figures from the Department of Homeland Security show that 1.1 million people became legal permanent residents of the US in 2005. Mexico was the biggest contributor, with 14% of the total.

But each year, up to a million illegal immigrants also enter the country, mostly from Mexico and other Latin American nations. The Pew Hispanic Center, a research group, reckons more than 11.5 million of them now live in the US.

**Illegal influx**

According to the research group's figures, the states with the highest number of illegal immigrants are California, with more than 2.5 million, and Texas, with more than 1.4 million.

More than 40% of all illegal immigrants in the US, amounting to about 4.4 million people, have arrived in the past five years, the group says.

**IMMIGRANTS IN US**

California: 2.5m-2.75m

Texas: 1.4m-1.6m

Florida: 800,000-950,000

New York: 550,000-650,000

Arizona: 400,000-450,000

Illinois: 375,000-425,000

Georgia: 350,000-450,000

New Jersey: 350,000-425,000

N. Carolina: 300,000-400,000

Virginia: 250,000-300,000

*Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on US government's Current Population Survey, March 2005*

Most experts seem to agree that the US economy is bigger and faster-growing because of the influx of illegal workers.

But the debate really gets heated when they try to work out who wins and who loses as a result - and by how much.

Certain sectors of the economy clearly attract more immigrant workers than others.

Chief among these is the construction industry, which employs an estimated 2.4 million foreign-born labourers.

That means 22% of all construction jobs are held by immigrant workers, nearly two-thirds of whom are thought to be in the US illegally.

Farming, cleaning, building maintenance and food preparation are other jobs likely to go to immigrants.

**Wage levels**

Foreign-born workers, then, are most likely to end up in low-wage, low-skilled jobs. But they are by no means evenly spread across the US and account for less than 5% of the country's workforce. So why the fuss?

Well, conventional wisdom would say that unskilled immigrants, legal and illegal, must surely harm the job prospects and wages of the 10 million similarly unskilled and uneducated American-born workers.

Some pundits go even further, arguing that the knock-on effect of immigration also allows big firms to drive down wage levels for middle-class employees, adding to their growing sense of economic insecurity.

One economist, George Borjas of Harvard University, says men who had dropped out of high school saw their earning power decrease by 7.4% between 1980 and 2000 as a result of immigration.

But this view is challenged by David Card, an economist at the University of California, who says the wage gap between dropouts and high school graduates has remained constant since 1980.

He concludes there is "scant" evidence that immigrants harm the opportunities of US-born workers.

**'Net gain'**

Those who take a more benign view of immigration maintain that foreign-born workers tend to contribute more to the economy than they take out, even after accounting for the remittances that many of them send back to their countries of origin.

They say the money such workers pay in taxes far outweighs the amount they receive in benefits, especially since many of them return home before retirement and make no claims on the social security system.

They also point out that some US jobs only exist because of the availability of cheap illegal immigrant workers, who are prepared to work for wages that are below what Americans would accept.

Others retort that the low salaries indicate the work involved is of little value to the US economy, which could easily get by without the jobs concerned or the workers who do them.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the fact remains that Mexicans who enter the US illegally in search of a better life are simply obeying market forces - and little can be done unilaterally by Washington to stem the tide without the Mexican government's co-operation.

**Illegal Immigration Explained - Profits & Poverty, Social Security & Starvation**

**Why the Federal Government Can't End Illegal Immigration**

By [Deborah White](http://usliberals.about.com/bio/Deborah-White-14542.htm), About.com Guide

Illegal immigration into the United States is a highly profitable proposition for both employers and the U.S. government, and it also benefits Mexico, which is the largest source country of undocumented immigrants into the US.

The US and Mexican governments actively entice illegal immigrants to enter this country and to work illegally for profit-hungry U.S. employers. Poverty-stricken immigrants , who are often desperate to house and feed their families, respond to the financial enticements...and then are blamed by U.S. citizenry for illegally being in the US.

**Part 1 - United States Borders Are Barely Enforced**  Ten million illegal immigrants live in the US, according to estimates by academic and government agencies, although Bear-Stearns investment firm analysts claim that the US illegal immigrant population "may be as high as 20 million people."

About 75% of undocumented immigrants arrive across the US southern border with Mexico, and hail from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia and other Central and South American countries. The bulk...about 50% of all illegals....are Mexican-born people.

Time magazine stated in 2004 that illegal immigration accelerated under the Bush Administration, with the US gaining 3 million additional illegal immigrant residents in 2004. A third of all illegal immigrants in the US live in California. Other states with large illegal populations are, in descending order, Texas, New York, Illinois, Florida and Arizona.

After more than 100 years in existence, President Bush dissolved the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)in March 2003 and absorbed it into the new Homeland Security Department, along with FEMA and dozens of other federal agencies created to help citizens and residents.

Until its dissolution, the INS had been part of the Justice Department since 1940, and before that, part of the US Labor Department. After the September 11, 2001 tragedy, the Bush Administration complained that the INS was insufficiently focused on deporting and expelling illegal immigrants, and thus asked that it be transferred to Homeland Security.

The US Border Patrol is charged with the responsibility of enforcing illegal immigration across US borders. Until 2003, the Border Patrol was part of the INS, but was also folded into Homeland Security (as a separate agency from INS).

The massive US intelligence agencies overhaul passed by Congress and signed by President Bush in January 2005 required Homeland Security to hire 10,000 more Border Patrol agents, 2,000 per year starting immediately. The Border Patrol currently employs 9,500 agents who patrol 8,000 miles of border.

But Bush Administration ignored the law mandating the hiring of new agents. Said Congressman John Culberson (R-TX) to CNN's Lou Dobbs, "Unfortunately, the White House ignored the law, and only asked us for 200 more agents. That's unacceptable." Culberson was referring to the federal budget for 2006 in which President Bush provided funds for only 210 new agents, not 2,000 additional agents.

Both houses of Congress worked together twice in 2005 to bypass the White House, and hire 1,500 new Border Patrol agents......500 shy of that required by law, but far surpassing the mere 210 planned by President Bush.

**The US-Mexico border remains significantly under-patrolled.** On October 7, 2005, 80 members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to the President, calling on him to enforce immigration laws, and deferring consideration of the White House's proposed guest-worker immigration program. "History has shown that enforcement provisions are ignored and underfunded..." said the Congressional letter.

Meanwhile, Congressman Culberson told CNN's Lou Dobbs on October 7, 2005, "We've got a full-scale war going on our southern border. You don't need to go to Iraq to see a war. We've got widespread lawlessness...We need boots on the ground...ASAP."

**Part 2 - Widespread Poverty and Hunger in Mexico**  According to the World Bank, 53% of Mexico' population of 104 million residents live in poverty, which is defined as living on less than $2 a day. Close to 24% of Mexico's population live in extreme poverty, which means they live on less than $1 a day.

The bottom 40% of Mexican households share less than 11% of the country's wealth. Millions live in extreme poverty,and children are compelled to work on the streets in order to help provide food for their families.

Unemployment in Mexico is realistically estimated near 40%, and there are no government unemployment benefits. There are also virtually no welfare benefits to provide the basics for poverty-stricken, often-starving women, children and families.

**Poverty wasn't always as pervasive as it is today in Mexico.** A bit of economic history is in order.....

In 1983, the devaluation of the Mexican peso triggered an explosion of US-owned factories, called maquiladoras, along the Mexican side of the US-Mexico border. Corporations closed thousands of factories within US borders, and relocated them to Mexico to take advantage of cheaper labor costs, few required benefits and legally-acceptable poorer working conditions.

Hundreds of thousands of poor Mexican workers and their families moved to northernmost Mexico to labor in the maquiladoras.

Within ten years, though, those same US corporations closed the maquiladoras, and again relocated factories, this time to Asia, which proffered even cheaper labor costs, no benefits and often abject working conditions acceptable to local governments.

Those hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers in the maquiladoras, and their families, were left with nothing. No benefits, no severance. Nothing.

To complicate economic matters more, Mexico's 1994-95 privatization of its banking and telecommunications industries thrust millions more into poverty with increased consumer prices, rising unemployment and wage and benefit cuts.

Mexico's massive privatizations in 1994-95 also created a new privileged class of home-grown millionaires and billionaires. As of 2002, Mexico ranked fourth in the world in billionaires, behind the US, Japan and Germany.

To summarize thusfar, millions of Mexican families live in soul-stripping poverty...unemployed, hungry, without healthcare...and the US border with Mexico is significantly under-enforced.

**Part 3 - US Employers Routinely Hire Illegal Immigrants, With Little Penalty**  In March 2005, Wal-Mart, a company with $285 billion in annual sales. was fined $11 million for having untold hundreds of illegal immigrants nationwide clean its stores.

"The federal government boasts it's the largest of its kind. But for Wal-Mart, it amounts to a rounding error---and no admittance of wrongdoing since it claims it didn't know its contractors hired the illegals" wrote the Christian Science Monitor on March 28, 2005.

"If it weren't so easy for illegals and employers to skirt worker ID verification, the settlement's requirement that Wal-Mart also improve hiring controls might have a ripple effect in corporate America. but the piddling fine will hardly deter businesses from hiring cheap labor from a pool of illegals that's surged by 23 percent since 2000....But enforcement is pathetically inadequate, especially since 9/11."

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 provides for sanctions against businesses that hire undocumented workers, which means workers without proper identification. The legislation was enacted once Mexico-US border maquiladoras run by US corporations began closing, and those workers streamed across the border, searching for jobs of any kind.

**But here's the rub.** In 1999, under President Bill Clinton, the US government collected $3.69 million in fines from 890 companies for employing undocumented workers. In 2004, under President George Bush, the federal government collected $188,500 from 64 companies for such illegal employment practices. And in 2004, the Bush Administration levied NO fines for US companies employing undocumented workers.

In 21st-century America, it's an unspoken agreement between employer, the undocumented employee and the federal government: **the employee provides acceptable ID that appears authentic, the employer asks no questions, and the US government looks the other way.** Fake ID...Social Security cards, US permanent residency cards (i.e. "green cards"), US temporary employment authorization cards....are readily available for about $100 to $200 in every major American city,and plenty of smaller ones, too.

Wrote reporter Eduardo Porter in an April 5, 2005 New York Times article, "Currently available for about $150 on street corners in just about any immigrant neighborhood in California, a typical fake ID package includes a green card and a Social Security card. It provides cover for employers, who, if asked, can plausibly assert that they believe all their workers are legal."

**Why would employers hire undocumented workers?**

According to Catholic priest Dr. Daniel Groody, Associate Professor at University of Notre Dame and a director of the university's Center for Latino Studies, "If they make it across the border, most immigrants will work at low-paying jobs that no one except the most desperate wants. They will de-bone chicken in poultry plants, pick crops in fields and build houses in construction.

As one person in Arizona noted, 'It looks like entering the US through the desert as undocumented immigrants is some kind of employment screening test administered by the US government for the hospitality, construction and recreation industries.'

Willing to work at the most dangerous jobs, an immigrant a day will also die in the work place, even while for others the work place has become safer over the last decade."

And undocumented workers, grateful for any job, will work for lower wages and minimal or no benefits, therefore enabling employers to make higher business profits. Cheaper labor costs and lesser working conditions equal greater profits for business owners.

In a January 2005 World Net Daily article, a report by investment firm Bear Stearns was cited that clearly illustrates that millions of US jobs have shifted from the legal workforce "as employers have systematically replaced American workers with lower wage illegal aliens."

For illegal immigrants, it's about finding any work to feed, clothe and shelter their families. For employers, it's about profits.

**But why would the US government look the other way,** allowing employers to replace American workers with undocumented workers from other countries?

"...experts blame the twin pressures of ethnic advocacy and business interests" reports the Christian Science Monitor.

Translation....**"ethnic advocacy" means buying favor...and votes....within the illegal immigrant community.** If an immigrant doesn't vote, he/she has relatives who do. In the 21st century, Hispanics surpassed African-Americans as the largest ethnic group in the United States. Many believe that the Bush Administration's lack of immigration enforcement in 2004 was directly connected to the Republican Party's goal to court the Hispanic vote, and to entice Hispanics to join Republican ranks.

Translation...**"business interests" means profits.** When labor costs are lower, business profits are higher. When thousands of businesses have higher profits, then the US business community is stronger (and happier). More votes and more voter perception of success.

A major economic drawback, though, to allowing thousands...probably millions...of US businesses to pay under-market wages and benefits to undocumented workers is that it depresses wages for all workers in the US. All Americans workers, then have decreased incomes, lower benefits and higher rates of poverty and hunger.

An obvious moral drawback to allowing US businesses to pay under-market, lower than even minimum wage rates, is that it's wrong. Minimum wage and standard minimal working conditions are established to humanely provide for the safety and welfare of all workers...not just American-born workers. It's a matter of decency and human rights, rooted in the United States' Christian-Judeo heritage. It's wrong and exploitative, and it's immoral. It's an updated form of economic slavery.

Writes Dr. Groody, "Immigrants die cutting North Carolina tobacco and Nebraska beef, chopping down trees in Colorado, welding a balcony in Florida , trimming grass at a Las Vegas golf course, and falling from scaffolding in Georgia....

With an economic gun at their backs, they leave their homes because hunger and poverty pushes them across the border....Every day, immigrants dehydrate in deserts, drown in canals, freeze in mountains and suffocate in tractor trailers. As a result, the death toll has increased 1,000 percent in some places."

And there's one more reason why would the US government would look the other way, thus allowing US employers to replace American workers with undocumented workers from other countries. A huge, seemingly insurmountable reason. A $7 billion a year problem: Social Security.

**Part 4 - Undocumented Workers Give $7 Billion Annually to Social Security**  According to a New York Times article on April 5, 2005, "...the estimated seven million or so illegal immigrant workers in the United States are now providing the system with a subsidy of as much as $7 billion a year....Moreover, the money paid by illegal immigrants and their employers is factored into all the Social Security Administration's projections."

However,since illegal immigrant workers are here illegally, and ostensibly presented fake ID to the US employer, **they will never collect Social Security benefits.** "For illegal immigrants, Social Security numbers are simply a tool needed to work on this side of the border. Retirement does not enter the picture," reports the New York Times.

The Social Security Administration remains solvent in large part due to deductions taken from the paychecks of illegal immigrant workers, yet Social Security will never pay benefits to those workers. The workers pay in, but they never receive back.

**Wouldn't the federal government detect fake Social Security numbers?** According to that April 6, 2005 New York Times article, "Starting in the late 1980s, the social Security Administration received a flood of W-2 earnings reports with incorrect---sometimes simply fictitious---Social Security numbers. It stashed them in what it calls the 'earnings suspense file' in the hope that someday it would figure out whom they belonged to. The file has been mushrooming ever since: $189 billion worth of wages ended up recorded in the suspense file over the 1990s, two and a half times the amount of the 1980s.

In the current decade, the file is growing, on average, by more than $50 billion a year, generating $6 billion to $7 billion in Social Security tax revenue and about $1.5 billion in Medicare taxes.

...the mismatched W-2's fit like a glove on illegal immigrants' known geographic distribution and the patchwork of jobs they typically hold. An audit found that more than half of the 100 employers filing the most earnings reports with false social Security numbers from 1997 through 2001 came from just three states: California, Texas and Illinois."

As shown by this information, **the federal bureaucracy clearly knows which companies employ probable illegal immigrant workers,** and it even knows which workers are likely illegals.

**And the government does nothing about it.** Not one penalty was levied by the federal government against an employer in 2004 for hiring undocumented workers.

**SUMMARY**

The equation to explain the whys of illegal immigration into the US is simple:

**Add:** Widespread abject poverty and starvation in Mexico after US corporations relocated their cheap-labor plants from the US-Mexico border to Asia, and after Mexican banks and telecommunications were privatized, creating dozens of instant billionaires and plunging millions into poverty.

**Add:** An extremely porous, under-enforced US-Mexico border.

**Add:** US employers anxious for more profits, and willing to exploit the poverty and fears of illegal immigrants to do so.

**Add:** The federal government anxious to curry favor with , and garner votes from, business owners and the Hispanic community...thus, willing to under-enforce borders and immigrations laws, and ignore illegal hiring by employers.

**Add:** The Social Security Administration dependent on taking in $7 billion annually of contributions from illegal immigrant workers who will never receive benefits from the system.

**THE RESULT:** Millions of illegal immigrants working for low wages and in poor working conditions, grateful for "scraps to fall from the US table of prosperity," per Dr. Groody.

Wealthier US businesses, and a much-richer Social Security Administration, neither which reimburse local and state authorities and taxpayers for the costs (education, health care, law enforcement and more) associated with illegal immigrants.

And a very angry US citizenry, who vilify immigrants for being here, rather than blaming the business owners who hire and exploit them, the US government which lets them enter the US and profits greatly from them, and the Mexican government which is happy to see them immigrate out of their country.

"Our nation virtually posts two sign on its southern border: 'Help Wanted: Inquire Within' and 'Do Not Trespass," says Pastor Robin Hoover of Humane Borders.

"Without the help of immigrant labor, the US economy would virtually collapse. We want and need cheap immigrant labor, but we do not want the immigrants."