

## Illegal Migration from Mexico to the United States

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### Introduction

- One morning in San Diego...
  - As neighborhood residents depart for work, illegal immigrants arrive to mow lawns, clean homes, care for children, build houses
  - Down the road, they prepare restaurant meals, clean hotels, harvest crops, assemble apparel, and process food
  - What is exceptional about this scene is not that it happens in Southern California (or other immigration gateways) but that it is now repeated in Las Vegas, Little Rock, Atlanta, and Detroit

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### Introduction

- Illegal immigrants are an integral part of the US economy
  - With the illegal population at approximately 11 million individuals, 6-8 million of whom work, unauthorized immigrants are no longer a marginal segment of the US labor force
  - Gone are the days when illegal laborers were confined to farms – they're now an important part of US construction, retail trade, service, and manufacturing industries

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## Introduction

- Mexico is the main source country for US immigration
  - In 2005, the 11 million Mexican immigrants in US were 31% of US foreign-born population and 10% of total population of Mexico
  - Of Mexican immigrants in the US, 6 million appear to be in the country illegally, implying that 56% of Mexican immigrants are unauthorized (compared to 17% of those from other countries)

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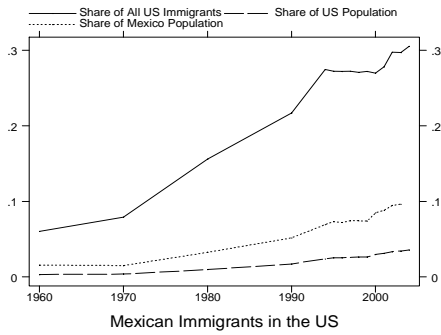
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## Rising immigration from Mexico



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## Outline

- How many illegal immigrants are in the US?
- What is the economic incentive for Mexico-US migration?
- Why has immigration from Mexico surged recently?
- What have US immigration authorities done to curb illegal immigration?

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### Measuring illegal immigration

- Most common measure is the *residual foreign born*
  - Estimated illegal immigrant population = Immigrants enumerated in the US Current Population Survey – Legal immigrants
  - How many legal immigrants are in the US?
    - Visas awarded to legal immigrants minus departures and deaths
  - How many illegal immigrants are uncounted by the CPS?
    - Current estimates suggest 10% to 15% of illegals are uncounted

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### Estimates of the US illegal-immigrant population, 1990-2005

Year	Illegal Immigrants from Mexico in the US (millions)
1990	2.0
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2000	4.8
2002	5.3
2004	5.9
2005	6.2

Sources: INS, Jeffrey Passel, Pew Hispanic Center.

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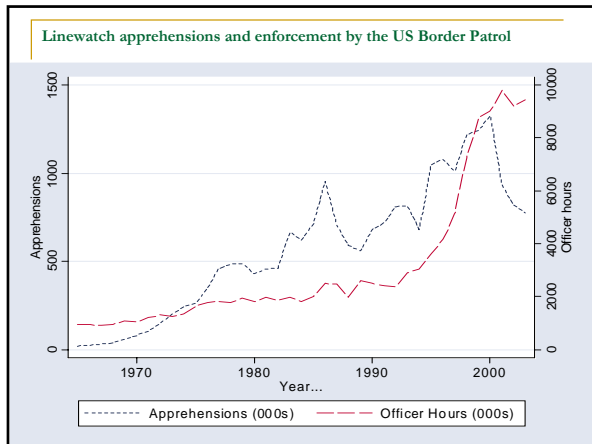
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- ### Churning in the illegal immigrant population
- Many illegal immigrants do not remain illegal forever
    - Ultimately, many obtain a US green card through sponsorship by a family member who is a US citizen or legal resident
    - Given long queues to obtain a green card, many migrate illegally and wait for a visa as an illegal immigrant in US
    - In the last decade, over 50% of Mexican nationals receiving green cards were residing in the US at the time they obtained their visas (with most having been in the US illegally)

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### The economic return to migration

- Benefits of illegal migration
  - Gain in income due to higher US wages
  
- Costs of illegal migration
  - Psychic penalty of leaving home
  - Expense of settling in the US
  - Cost of crossing the border

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### Average hourly wages for Mexican males, 2000

	Age	Years of Schooling Completed			
		0 to 8	9 to 11	12 to 15	16+
Mexican Immigrants in US	23 to 27	8.30	8.20	9.30	13.00
	28 to 32	8.40	8.70	9.60	15.70
Residents of Mexico	23 to 27	1.60	2.10	3.30	5.20
	28 to 32	1.75	2.40	4.05	6.65

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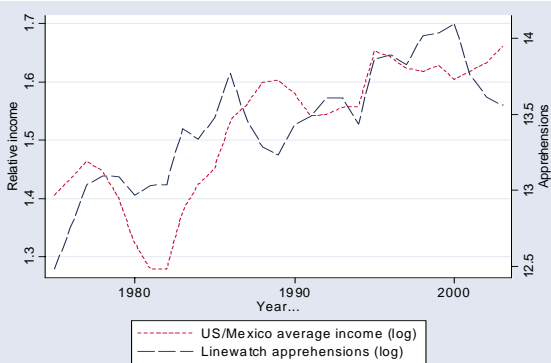
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### Border apprehensions and US-Mexico relative per capita GDP




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Apprehensions at the border rise when wages in Mexico fall



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Educational attainment for the Mexico born population, 2000

		26-35 year old males	
		Residents of Mexico	Mexican immigrants in the US
Years	0 to 8	41%	40%
of	9 to 12	43%	46%
schooling	13 plus	16%	14%

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Educational attainment for the Mexico born population, 2000

		26-35 year old females	
		Residents of Mexico	Mexican immigrants in the US
Years	0 to 8	44%	42%
of	9 to 12	42%	44%
schooling	13 plus	14%	14%

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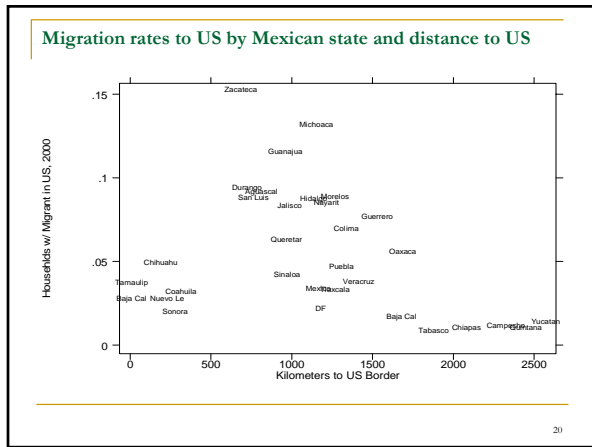
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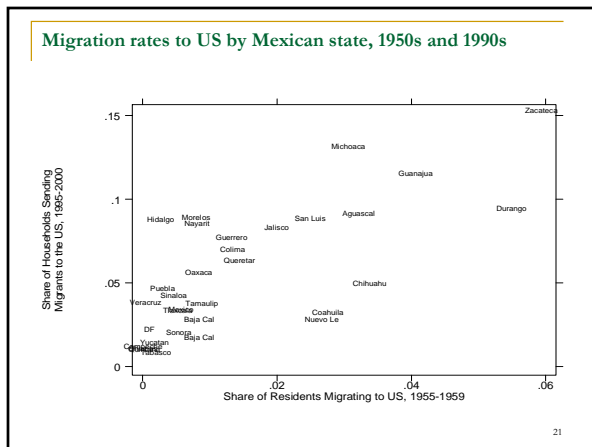
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### The supply and demand for migrants

- If incomes in US have long exceeded those in Mexico, why has Mexico-to-US migration surged only recently?
- Changes in the demand for labor
  - Slow growth in the Mexican economy
- Changes in the supply of labor
  - Rapid growth in Mexico's labor force

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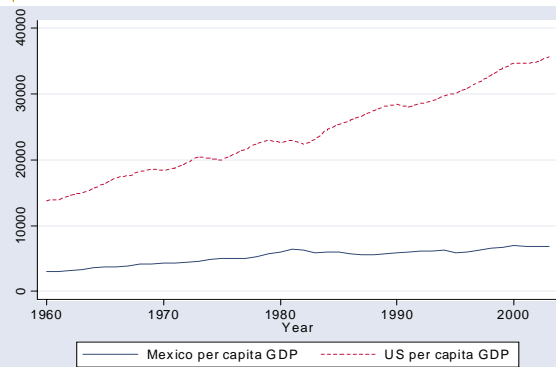
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### Mexico-US relative income



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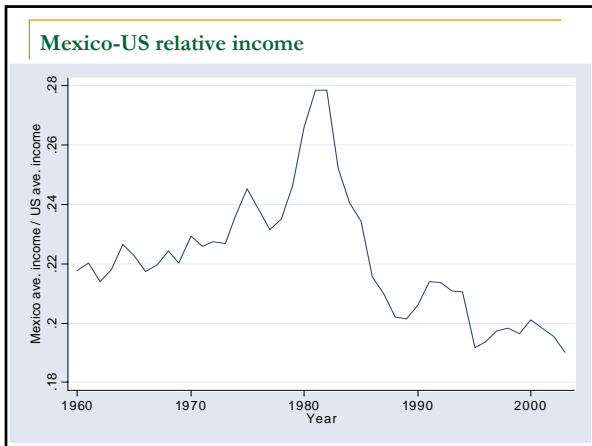
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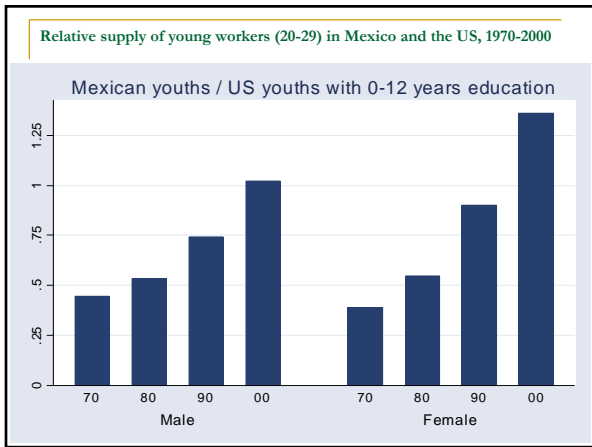
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### US enforcement policies and illegal immigration

- The US Border Patrol polices US borders, apprehends and deports those attempting to enter country illegally
  - Centerpiece of US policy: 12,000 officers police border, concentrating on specific points along US-Mexico border
- Government agents monitor US employers suspected of hiring illegal aliens, issue fines to violators
  - Employer monitoring is lax, with less than 300 agents to inspect all US worksites; few fines levied, most are small

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### Illegal immigrants located by US authorities, 1992-2004

	1992	1996	2000	2004
Total deportable aliens located (millions)	1.26	1.65	1.83	1.24
Share located by ICE/INS Agents	5%	6%	8%	6%
Share located by Border Patrol	95%	94%	92%	94%

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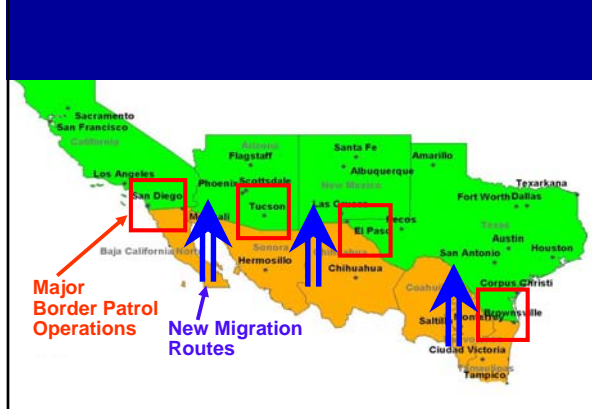
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Migrants Take More Dangerous Routes Around Border Patrol Operations




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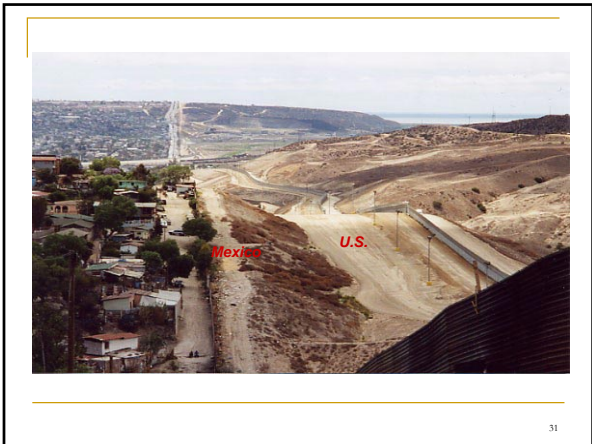
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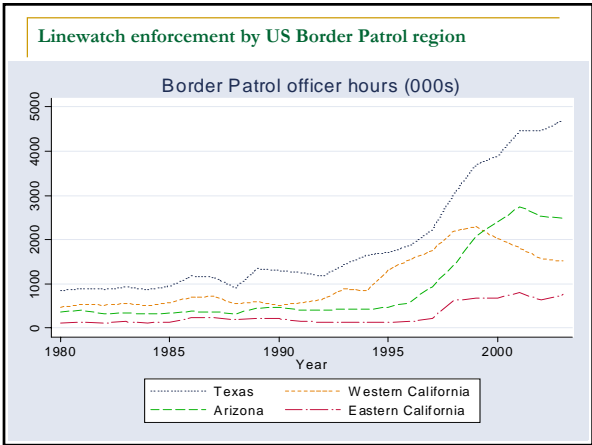
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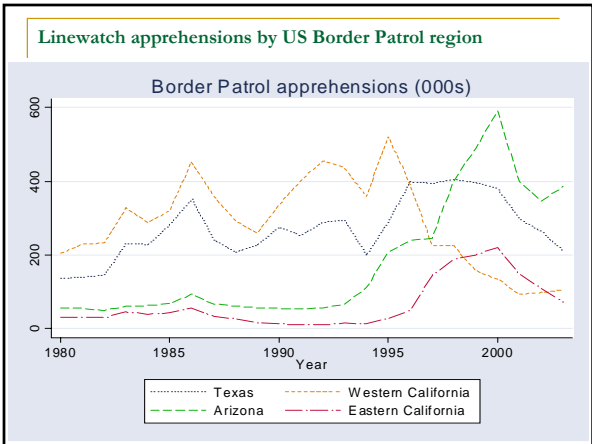
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The politics of enforcement

- There is a long history of US immigration authorities giving in to pressure from business interests not to enforce against illegal immigration too effectively
  - Rio Grande Valley of TX, Central Valley of CA, onion farmers in GA, meat packing in Great Plains, lettuce growers in AZ
  - Border enforcement tends to fall 6-10 months after an increase in relative price in labor-intensive industries – *consistent with US immigration authorities responding to demand for labor*

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The politics of enforcement

- Until last year, enforcement against illegal immigration at US worksites had virtually disappeared
  - Between 1993 and 2004, the number of employers fined for hiring illegal immigrants fell from 799 to 14 and the number of fines levied in excess of \$50,000 fell from 30 to 0
- Recently, DHS has expanded enforcement against unauthorized immigrants at US worksites
  - Workers are targeted *but not their employers*
  - Will the increase in enforcement last?

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**Concluding discussion**

- In the US, illegal immigration now accounts for one-third of immigrant inflows, with Mexico the primary source
  - There is no systematic public effort to count the illegal population
- Wage differences are an important motivation for Mexico-US migration, with migration networks also mattering
  - Distinct from other countries, Mexico sends migrants at all skill levels
- US enforcement policies appear designed to admit illegal immigrants in the least offensive manner possible
  - Will the recent intensification of enforcement last?

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**Further reading**

- Hanson, Gordon. "Illegal Migration from Mexico to the United States." *Journal of Economic Literature*, December 2006.

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