The "Push" and "Pull" of Mexican Immigrants Across the United States Border

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Abstract
With the exception of Native Americans, who occupied the vast area that would become the United States, the Americans of today are of foreign ancestry. Therefore, at a certain point in history, every current United States citizen had ancestors that immigrated to the "New World" in search of a new, more prosperous way of life. Unfortunately, in the twenty-first century becoming a citizen of the United States is becoming progressively more challenging, as undocumented immigrants are being reduced to hardened criminals.

In a poll conducted by the Pew Global Research Center people from several nations of varying backgrounds expressed their discontent with immigration because they feared the loss of culture and tradition that could occur as a result of an influx of immigrants ("World Publics Welcome Globalization-But Not Immigration", 2007). These fears by everyday citizens are reflected in many European immigration policies. North Americans, however, are generally more accepting of immigrants entering their nations because their histories are based upon immigrant populations. Heightened immigration policies in the United States are a result of current attempts at immigration reform.

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The “Push” and “Pull” of Mexican Immigrants Across the United States Border

By

Kayleigh Del Cotto

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

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with Honors in Political Science (include the department name)

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The "Push" and "Pull" of Mexican Immigrants Across the United States Border

by

Kayleigh Del Cotto

Eastern Michigan University

April 2012
Introduction

With the exception of Native Americans, who occupied the vast area that would become the United States, the Americans of today are of foreign ancestry. Therefore, at a certain point in history, every current United States citizen had ancestors that immigrated to the “New World” in search of a new, more prosperous way of life. Unfortunately, in the twenty-first century becoming a citizen of the United States is becoming progressively more challenging, as undocumented immigrants are being reduced to hardened criminals.

In a poll conducted by the Pew Global Research Center people from several nations of varying backgrounds expressed their discontent with immigration because they feared the loss of culture and tradition that could occur as a result of an influx of immigrants (“World Publics Welcome Globalization-But Not Immigration”, 2007). These fears by everyday citizens are reflected in many European immigration policies.

North Americans, however, are generally more accepting of immigrants entering their nations because their histories are based upon immigrant populations. Heightened immigration policies in the United States are a result of current attempts at immigration reform.

An example of the current shift in opinions about immigration can be demonstrated in The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act of 2010, currently one of the most vague and strident forms of anti-illegal immigration legislation in years (U.S.Congress.Senate. 2010). This act, passed in the state of Arizona, has increasingly brought to the public’s attention the problems of illegal immigration, especially in the case of Mexican immigrants.
The purpose of this legislation is to dissuade immigrants from unlawfully entering the United States or residing within its borders without proper documentation. While Arizona is not the first state using criminal trespass laws to target illegal immigrants, it is the first to codify a criminal trespass law that specifically targets illegal immigrants. According to Arizona’s governor Jan Brewer, the law was created in response to the federal government’s inability or unwillingness to pass comprehensive immigration reform (Morse, 2011).

Law enforcement officials merely have to suspect a person of breaking the law by being in the country illegally before asking to see their papers. Those opposed to this law fear that discrimination or racial profiling could occur because of the freedom officers have when addressing illegal immigrants. There is also concern over their lack of training in identifying illegal persons. Not only could immigrants be racially profiled, but there is also the possibility for harassment against aliens who legally reside within the United States (Morse, 2011).

Law enforcement personnel are required to reasonably try to determine the status of immigrants during lawful stops, detentions, and arrests if reasonable suspicion exists. The failure to carry alien registration documentation is criminalized, and is under the federal government’s jurisdiction not the state’s (Morse, 2011). Requiring immigrants to carry documentation of their citizenship status on their person is unwarranted due to the fact that citizens of the United States are not required to carry proof that they are permitted in the country. How can we expect both legal and illegal aliens to keep this information on their person if the law does not require it for citizens? This further puts to
question the legality of this law. It has been brought into question whether local police officers can actually determine a person’s immigration status simply based on appearance. Just because someone looks like a foreigner does not mean they were not lawfully born in the United States, nor does foreign birth signify the potential that someone is an alien (Morse, 2011). This law specifically works to indict, detect, and deport illegal persons from the United States (Archibold, 2010).

The people most closely affected by illegal immigration live along the United States and Mexico border. They have experienced an influx of foreign citizens entering their cities and taking advantage of seasonal and low paying manual labor (Public Favors Tougher Border Controls and Path to Citizenship, 2011). While the people most greatly affected by illegal immigration may be strong supporters of this act, some citizens and human rights advocates have tried to counter the new policies in place. More specifically, those in disagreement with these policies see them as forms of racial profiling, and in some instances, as human rights abuses (Archibold, 2010).

While a higher standard of living should increase a citizen’s pride of their nation, it also attracts immigrants hopeful of better lives and education for their families. The fear of losing jobs and economic benefits, loss of voting power, and allowing foreigners to share this wealth, fuels animosity towards naturalizing immigrants especially those who enter illegally. Aviva Chomsky’s book, “They Take Our Jobs!” And 20 Other Myths About Immigration will be referenced later in this paper to further explain these fears and myths about immigration (Chomsky, 2007). Despite America’s reputation as the
"melting pot of the world", known for the variety of people that reside in its borders, many United States citizens are in support of strict immigration policies.

In recent years there has been a variety and abundance of literature published about why Mexican immigrants are coming to the United States. Scholars have differing opinions as to the single main reason people immigrate to the United States. Unfortunately more emphasis has been put on potential solutions on how to solve the immigration problem than the actual analysis of the migration of an entire group of people. Does illegal immigration stem from a lengthy naturalization process and particular historic events or are there other motives encouraging immigrants to leave their country to both legally and illegally enter the United States? In order to fully understand the reasons why immigrants are choosing to enter the United States illegally, an understanding of the existing immigration theories and policies is necessary. By looking at the policies of several other nations, one will realize that the United States policies on immigration are much more relaxed than the majority of industrialized nations of the world, specifically Western Europe. The following theories that follow vary greatly and tell the story of a group of people not interested in being criminals or altering the culture of the United States. These theories play an important role in explaining how the immigrants have helped to make the United States the country it is today.

Theories

One theory, proposed by authors Adolino and Blake in the book, *Comparing Public Policies: Issues and Choices in Six Industrialized Countries*, proposes that national support of a more liberal immigration policy depends on that country’s history with
immigrants. For example, the United States has a history of accepting immigrants in large numbers. Immigrants were essential in the founding of the strong nation that currently exists. Because of this relationship, the U.S. tends to have a less restrictive policy concerning immigration in comparison to other nations (Adolino and Blake, 2001).

Out of the six nations examined by Adolino and Blake, the United States is the only country that was founded on immigrants. Japan is primarily a homogeneous country. Because of its homogeneity, the Japanese allow very few foreigners to enter the country. Those who are allowed to enter with work visas must meet strict skill and education requirements (Adolino and Blake, 2001).

Germany, another country outlined in the aforementioned book, receives the largest number of immigrants of any nation in Europe. Despite its large population of immigrants it does not consider itself an immigrant nation. It controls the entry of illegal immigrants with a very effective border patrol (Adolino and Blake, 2001). Out of the six nations studied in Adolino and Blake’s book, the United Kingdom has been the most effective at immigration policy. Due to its geographic location and strong border control, illegal immigration has not been a large problem (Adolino and Blake, 2001).

France has a very different outlook on immigration than Germany and the United Kingdom. The French are opposed to open immigration policies because of their current economic downturn and problems with illegal immigration. Their history of illegal immigration stems from an attempt to eliminate legal immigration in the past (Adolino and Blake, 2001). Like France, Italy has not historically been a country of immigrants.
Instead the Italian nation is a country of emigrants. Because Italy receives very few asylum seekers and has a fairly open policy on immigration, immigration is not as serious an issue as in the five other countries. Those immigrants that do enter Italy illegally work as a part of the countries underground economy (Adolino and Blake, 2001).

Another theory proposed by Adolino and Blake deals with the push and pull of people in and out the country. Pull traits make a country appealing to outsiders. For instance, if foreigners have family members that reside within a different country they may be motivated to join them in that nation. Other incentives such as higher wages and social welfare systems may also motivate a person to leave their home country. Push factors convince citizens to leave their home country. Poverty, unemployment, natural disaster, threats due to war, and lack of political freedom can all force immigrants to seek a better way of life. While a country’s appearance can be altered to appear less attractive to immigrants, it is challenging for the same country to control the push factors in a foreigner’s homeland (Adolino and Blake, 2001). For example, if the United States enacts harsh immigration laws, increases border patrol, and decreases the quota of immigrants allowed to immigrate in a year, its image as a desirable country could be tarnished. These are all things that the U.S. government can control. However, the only way to assist immigrants in their own countries or to handle the “push” factors is to address the human rights issues that may be occurring and provide proper support for those in need. It is much more difficult to prevent the problems in Mexico than to change American policy.
An additional theory proposes that limits on immigration have to do with the economy of the receiving nation. A country suffering from an economic downturn will be much less likely to accept immigrants. In most countries there are preference systems where immigration controls decide what level of labor or education people entering the nation must have. If the nation desires low skilled laborers it will grant a larger amount of visas to this economic class and vice versa (Adolino and Blake, 2001).

Another theory about immigration policy comes from Cheryl Shanks', "Immigration and the Politics of American Sovereignty, 1890-1990." Shanks claims that countries resist immigrants to an extent because they seek to maintain a degree of national sovereignty, which is potentially hindered by foreigners. Not only is it hard to become a naturalized citizen of the United States, but it is equally difficult in other industrialized nations. One of the discrepancies that occur because of sovereignty is that immigrants have a political right to leave and reenter their country as they please. This is the sovereignty they receive from their home nation. However, once an immigrant enters a foreign nation, it is not their right to become a citizen or to even enter the country. The concept of being allowed to leave a country but not to enter another causes conflicts as far as immigration is concerned (Shanks, 2001). There would be little purpose in leaving one’s country for a better life in another nation, if it was difficult to gain the political rights and liberties that the immigrant goes without in his or her own homeland.

In addition to the theories mentioned above, Gordon Hanson’s “The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration” also supports the theories on immigration suggested in
Adolino and Blake’s literature as well as explains a few of his own. Hanson explores the economic costs of both legal and illegal immigration. He asks his readers to consider the option that keeping illegal immigrants out of the U.S. could create a greater expense to the United States than allowing them to stay (Hanson, 2007). Many American citizens fear the loss of jobs to foreign workers. Hanson proposes that only when an immigrant’s tax contributions are lower than the amount of governmental services they consume, are foreigners hurting the American economy. While low skilled American workers fear losing jobs to immigrants, whether legal or illegal, foreigners generally take jobs that are unwanted by the United States work force. By filling these undesirable jobs, more of the economy is being utilized and reaches a greater potential. Lastly, if the government controls the amount and variety of workers that enter the country, the economy should not suffer greatly (Hanson, 2007). While United States citizens fear economic repercussions from illegal immigration, legal immigration could potentially have a similar effect in the long run.

Other theories that exist encourage immigration on the basis that it strengthens the United States economy. In, “Task Force Report Number 63” the Council on Foreign Relations commends the United States open policy toward immigrants because of how they have improved the nations economy. The country’s ability to attract a wide variety of highly educated workers has kept its economy diversified and strong (Bush and McLarry III, 2009). This report suggests that the U.S. has remained a world leader for such an extended period of time because of its immigration policies. In contrast to this
positive view on immigration, Bush and McLarry III defend the theory that our immigration system is ineffective because it is not efficient. This theory is supported by the large number of illegal immigrants that enter the United States.

If the United States system of immigration were better organized and efficient it is possible that more immigrants would enter the country legally. Stricter or at least more precise laws, as well as the greater availability of visas for laborers would potentially decrease the number of illegal citizens crossing the United States and Mexico border. Due to these problems reform is necessary (Bush and McLarry III, 2009).

Lastly, Brunner and Colarelli proposed a system of immigration reform based on a point-system as a means of entry into the United States. While an open or closed border policy is an option for controlling the flow of immigrants, neither is very effective. An open border would rid the country of its illegal immigration problem but would result in a damaging amount of people entering the country. However, a closed border would hurt the United States economy due to immigration’s importance. A point-system would examine different characteristics about people wishing to cross the border. Their level of education and skill would be a determining factor. Another would be their level of fluency of English among other requirements (Brunner and Colarelli, 2010). While this policy proposal could be potentially beneficial to the United States it is but one proposal to fix the country’s problem of illegal immigration.

Further examination of why immigrants are illegally entering the country is a necessary step toward fixing the problem. More specifically, investigating the case of
illegal immigration across the geographic region of the U.S. and Mexican border is vital to this research. This situation could be examined if the push and pull factors regarding immigration to the United States were taken into consideration.

Statistical Analysis

If there are greater economic opportunities available in the United States, then the citizens of Mexico will be “pulled” or encouraged to emigrate from Mexico to the United States, both legally and illegally, in order to gain a higher quality of life. This hypothesis can be investigated by examining the relationship between the economic quality of life in the United States versus that in Mexico and Mexican immigration to the United States. The dependent variable in this hypothesis is the number of both legal and illegal immigrants entering the United States over the course of ten years, specifically from 2000 to 2009. While the independent variables are the unemployment rates in both the United States and Mexico, the GDP per capita numbers for each nation, and the murder rates in Mexico. The measures of the economic variables will be the gap between the United States and Mexico’s unemployment rates and GDP per capita in terms of U.S. dollars.

In addition, public opinion polls of Mexican citizens help clarify other reasons for emigration to the United States. If problems like crime affect the lives of Mexican citizens, then they will leave their country because of these “push” factors and emigrate to the United States both legally and illegally in search of a life of greater stability.

This hypothesis will be explored by comparing the number of murders that took place in Mexico from 2000 to 2009 to the number of immigrants entering the United States, as well as the aforementioned economic factors of unemployment rates and GDP.
per capita that could contribute to immigration. Overall, the number of immigrants
coming into the United States on a yearly basis will be measured by looking at figures in
the 2009 Yearbook Statistics collected by Homeland Security and a paper entitled
Population Estimates, which is also from the Department of Homeland Security (2010).
The numbers obtained for the Mexican and American GDPs and unemployment rates are

The data from the years 2000-2009 will be used from each of these sources. Data
from the years 1990-2000 is available on the World Bank website, however, the
necessary immigration numbers from each of these years could not be found. Only the
sum of the ten years is available in terms of immigration numbers. Therefore, the data
from the previous years was not utilized when completing the statistical analysis of this
paper. The sum of these ten years would cause errors in the analysis because from 2000-
2009 was measured per year, not every ten years. The data from the last ten years seemed
most relevant to this research because it is the most recent and the last decade in the
United States has seen many changes in foreign policy.

Another source of information that will be used to conduct the following research
will consist of qualitative data in the form of opinion polls conducted by the Pew
Research Center and its Pew Global Attitudes Project. More specifically, the displeasure
of Mexican citizens with their own country about the economy and crime in their nation
will be examined. In addition to this data, opinion polls about the popularity of
emigrating to the United States will be utilized. The analysis of the data gathered will be
conducted by carefully looking over the tables provided by the Department of Homeland Security, as well as by reading and analyzing the opinions of the people surveyed by the Pew Research Center, to look for evidence providing truth to the hypothesis. If the data were to show an increase in immigration when the gap between the United States and Mexican GDP per capita were wider, this would help support the thesis. As economic conditions worsen in Mexico and improve in the United States, then Mexican citizens would come to the United States in search of economic success.

After comparing both the illegal and legal immigration rates from Mexico to the United States with quantitative economic data from The World Bank, and murder rates in Mexico it is evident that there are push and pull factors contributing to the amount of immigrants entering the United States. A statistical analysis was carried out by collecting data from the years 2000 to 2009. A regression was carried out by running the information of each of the three independent variables separately, against the total number of immigrants that entered the United States from Mexico over the course of nine years. The three independent variables used in the regression were Mexican murder rates, the difference between the United States and Mexican Gross Domestic Product, and the difference in unemployment rates between the two countries. This analysis was conducted because if more immigrants came to the United States when economic conditions were better in the U.S. and worse in Mexico, then there is a good possibility that the hypothesis that "push" and "pull" factors affect immigration is true. The final analysis of the data shows that while the two economic variables are close to the required 95% correlation they do not have a correlation with immigrant rates in the United States.
The Mexican murder rates do not even come close to having a correlation with the dependent variable of immigration.

When examining the information in the Model Summary of the regression the important figures consist of the R Square value as well as the Adjusted R Square. For this particular statistical analysis the R Square number is .833 or approximately 83%. The adjusted R Square total at .732 or 73%, while smaller, is adjusted for Degrees of Freedom and is altogether the more accurate value of the two. This data can be found in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Model Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP Difference</td>
<td>933.626</td>
<td>383.353</td>
<td>2.435</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Difference</td>
<td>-2638255.547</td>
<td>1113483.44</td>
<td>-2.369</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Murder Rate</td>
<td>1088894.055</td>
<td>769267.265</td>
<td>1.415</td>
<td>0.216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita</th>
<th>Illegal Immigration</th>
<th>Legal Immigration</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35,081</td>
<td>4,680,000</td>
<td>171,445</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>35,898</td>
<td>204,032</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>36,797</td>
<td>216,924</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>38,196</td>
<td>114,758</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>40,309</td>
<td>173,711</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>42,534</td>
<td>157,992</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>44,663</td>
<td>170,042</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>46,627</td>
<td>143,180</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>47,209</td>
<td>188,015</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>45,989</td>
<td>164,067</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Mexico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP Per Capita</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Murder Rate</th>
<th>GDP Difference</th>
<th>Unemployment Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,935</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29,146</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>6,284</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29,614</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>6,491</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30,306</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>6,932</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31,264</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>7,445</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32,864</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8,235</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34,299</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,140</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35,523</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>9,741</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36,886</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10,248</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36,961</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>8,143</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>37,846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After examining the R Square numbers analyze the B and significance columns.

For the Gross Domestic Product, the B value shows that for every dollar that the U.S. GDP Per Capita rises, there will be approximately 933 more immigrants that enter the United States.
Both the Gross Domestic Product difference between the United States and Mexico and the unemployment difference between the two are near the standard confidence interval of 5%. The GDP difference significant figure is .059. This means that 94.1% chance that the number of illegal and illegal immigrants entering the United States is affected by the gap between the GDP Per Capita of the two countries. The wider the gap the greater number of immigrants that will cross the border and vice versa. The significance column should consist of numbers at 5% or less in order to show that the regression results are statistically significant. While 5.9% is close to the required percent, unfortunately it is still too high for the data to be of significance. The data measure probably came up as insignificant due to the small number of cases that were utilized in this research.

The unemployment rate difference has a significance of .064. This also means that there is no statistical significance between the unemployment gap between the United States and Mexico and the number of immigrants entering the U.S. on a yearly basis. This number states that there is a 93.6% chance that there is a positive correlation between the number of immigrants entering the United States in a year and the gap between the unemployment rates of Mexico and the U.S. The closer the gap between the unemployment rates of the two countries, the smaller amount of immigrants that will leave their homes for a life in a foreign country. This relationship exists because if the Mexican unemployment rate is not much different from the United States then there are not as many economic gains to be claimed by leaving the security of Mexico. However,
if the economy of Mexico is suffering and the U.S. economy is thriving there are many economic benefits to be gained from moving to the United States.

In addition to the statistical data obtained from the Office of Homeland Security, opinion polls from the Pew Research Center can also be used to support the hypothesis for this research. For example, in the year 2007 when asked about how problematic certain factors were to Mexican citizens, like crime, economic factors, and corrupt leaders 75% claimed that economic factors greatly influence their lives. Another question proposed to the Mexican citizens interviewed was if they felt life in the United States would be better in comparison to life in their home country. The results show that 57% of the people polled felt that a life in the United States would be superior ("Most Mexicans See Better Life in the U.S.-One-In-Three Would Migrate, 2009).

The aforementioned questions from these polls further support the idea that economic problems in Mexico push their citizens from their country in search of better economic opportunities. Because of a larger GDP and a lower unemployment rate, the U.S. can support a larger number of people economically and those people desiring a better life could benefit from taking advantage of both of these factors. These heightened economic variables are more than likely what cause people to believe their lives would be significantly better if they left their home country.

The Pew Research Center also asked the citizens polled if they would move to the United States if given the opportunity. 33% said they would and 18% of that 33% said they would do so without proper documentation ("Most Mexicans See Better Life in the U.S.-One-In-Three Would Migrate", 2009). Although these percentages are significantly
lower than those of the polls inquiring about problems in Mexico and a better life in the United States they are still valid to this research. In the introduction to this research project there was a question asked about why immigrants enter the country illegally. The data from these polls can give a tentative answer to that question or at least give an idea as to why people would illegally enter another country. If economic needs are high enough people will move both illegally and legally to the United States. When citizens are desperate to help their families and friends they will even go as far as breaking the law.

In addition to having a possible correlation between the dependent variable and the two independent economic variables, there is no statistical significance between the amount of immigrants entering the United States from Mexico and the Mexican murder rate. The significance of this independent variable was .216, which signifies that there is a 78.4% chance that there is a correlation between the two variables. A significance of 78.4% is too low, therefore, the crime rate is invalid. The polls collected from the Pew Research Center do show that 81% of the Mexican citizens polled stated that crime was a large problem affecting the people of Mexico (“Most Mexicans See Better Life in the U.S.-One-In-Three Would Migrate”, 2009). While crime in Mexico is evident and clearly affects the wellbeing of the citizens residing within the country, there is no significant correlation between immigrants crossing the United States and Mexico border and crime rate. Therefore this reasoning is not viable when explaining an immigrant’s decision to move to the United States.
While the statistical significance of the three independent variables explored in this paper may not be high enough to support the initial hypothesis, it does help guide us in the right direction for further research on the topic of immigration. Based upon the theories that have been proposed and the polls from the Pew Research Center the idea that economics has much to do with what is pushing immigrants from their own nations and pulling them into ours is quite viable. In order to support this hypothesis to the best of our ability we must look at the topic of immigration from a more narrow scope, and focus more specifically on the case of immigration between the United States and Mexico. The reasons why Mexican immigrants come to our nation will be better understood after examining the economic and immigration legislation histories of both nations.

History: Conquest

As previously mentioned, the United States has a long history dealing with immigration, especially concerning Mexico. As European immigrants left their nations in search of political, economic, and social freedoms at the formation of the new nation they settled and started making their own rules about what the United States should be like. They left their own persecution only to subject their ideals and views on anyone they deemed different from a “European American”. Subsequent groups of immigrants such as the Irish and those from southern Europe were not considered “white” and were subject to racism and made the scapegoats of the nation’s problems. Eventually United States citizens were ambivalent about who entered the country since they considered most Europeans to be “white”, with the exception of slaves (Coates and Siavelis, 2009).
This discrimination continued with people of Mexican origin who today are not considered “white”. Eventually the other groups mentioned previously were integrated into the melting pot that is the United States and this new group was chosen to fear and subjugate. This has been the nature of the United States; the latest to join our nation are subject to second-class citizenship.

The complex relationship between the United States and Mexico concerning migration begins ironically with the concepts of the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny of the early and mid-1800s. The United States showed its supremacy and power by notifying Europe that the Western Hemisphere was no longer open for colonization and that anyone who challenged them would be met with force (Mize and Swords, 2011). Several decades later the United States wholeheartedly followed the idea that God had given their country the ability to rule from “sea to shining sea” (Mize and Swords, 2011). It was during this time that the Mexican-American War took place from 1846-1848 and Mexico acquiesced half of its territory and one percent of its population to the United States (Délano, 2011). This was the beginning of significant amounts of Mexican immigrants living within the U.S. border and discrimination against people of Latino descent. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and Treaty of La Mesilla set the 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexican border as it is today. The 100,000 Mexican citizens that were left on the U.S. side of the border after the war were given the option to either move to the Mexican side of the border or remain on their current property and be assimilated into the new culture. 75,000 of these citizens would remain on their land and become U.S. citizens (Délano, 2011). In addition to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the Gadsden Purchase of
1853 ceded another 30,000 square miles to the United States for a direct rail line in the southwest (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). This purchase contributed to the increase of the Hispanic population in the country and helped to create a more porous border. From 1848 to 1910 Mexican immigrants would be allowed to cross the border with a fair amount of ease.

A Corrupt Leader and Revolution

One of the first reasons that pushed Mexican immigrants to cross the border was a loss of land, as well as starvation, at the hands of the country’s leader Porfirio Diaz. Diaz pushed his people from their land when he consolidated the hacienda system and expropriated the land of small farmers (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). The people that left Mexico for the United States were of little concern to Diaz. He was more interested in attracting foreigners to the country. It was his hope that by bringing European, Chinese, and Japanese emigrants to Mexico he could promote colonization, and take advantage of Mexico’s natural resources and build a railway system. The public became critical of their leader’s rule because of his preferential treatment of foreigners and the continued loss of land (Délano, 2011). An 1883 land law allowed land developing contractors a third of any land they surveyed. From the 1890s forward Mexican landowners emigrated to their neighboring country because of Diaz’s harsh land reforms. Land provides, food and without land, starvation and displacement were inevitable (Délano, 2011).

Inevitably the unrest over the corrupt conditions under Porfirio Diaz would lead to the Mexican Revolution of 1910. While crime as explored in the statistical analysis of
this paper was not a significant reason for immigration to the United States, a considerable amount of people fled Mexico during the revolution to escape the violence and economic hardships that would ensue until the war ended in 1917 (Délano, 2011).

The 1990’s to the present have been important for immigration reform and the change in feelings towards immigrants. However, this was not the best time period to use for a statistical analysis of why immigrants were coming to the United States. A better time frame to explore would have been during the late 1800s through NAFTA, when the United State’s bilateral arrangements between Mexico began and its exploitation of cheap labor originated. These years set the stage for the current situation the United States has found itself in.

The Beginning of Exclusion

The United States began inviting Mexican laborers to cross its border in the duration of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Asian workers supplied American growers with farmhands. When this group of people were excluded the growers needed a proper substitute for these able bodied workers (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). This would not be the last time the U.S. chose to invite Mexican workers abroad to help when the situation was advantageous to the American economy. Authorized recruitment of Mexican workers would continue through the first World War until 1921 which was the first of several periods of repatriation efforts inflicted on these workers (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). Between 1921 and 1922 workers would be sent back to their home country only to find that there was no work available. They would then reenter the United States where they would stay until the 1929 repatriation (Délano, 2011). The Great Depression marked
the second set of mass repatriations at the hands of the U.S. government. The Depression also changed the U.S. opinion of immigrants. Anti-immigrant sentiment began at this time and Mexican workers were blamed for everything from falling wages and unemployment, to being accused of living off U.S. taxes (Délano, 2011). Many of the complaints about immigrants that currently exist originated during this period in time. In addition to these sentiments it became very clear that Mexico could not handle the economic burden created by taking back so many of its citizens in its already burdened economy.

The Bracero Program

One frequently proposed solution to the number of undocumented workers crossing the Mexico-United States border and residing in the U.S. is to create a new guest worker program. While this option is viable it comes with many complications. Before choosing this route for future generations of Americans, one must look to the past to the first and largest guest worker program sponsored by the United States government, The Bracero Program (Mize and Swords, 2011). Although this program was a good idea in theory, it was marred by abuse and contributed to the discrimination of Mexican workers, as well as, the failure to curb the number of undocumented citizens north of the border.

The Bracero Program is a factor that pulled male workers out of Mexico and attracted them to the United States in search of work or simply a means of survival. Once Mexican citizens realized that the revolutionary promises like land reform would not be fulfilled, the need to leave their impoverished country that suffered from high unemployment to find work in the north became a real necessity. The Bracero Program
formally began in 1942 in an effort to recruit foreign workers to fill labor shortages during World War II (Délano, 2011).

In Mize and Swords' book *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA* the author’s detail the Bracero Program. The temporary workforce is described as being comparable to livestock rather than human (Mize and Swords, 2011). Often times leaving the destitute conditions in their own country also meant suffering abuse and tribulation in their new foreign home. Before Mexican laborers left Mexico under this program they were required to gain letters of support from their local government officials and be put on a list of prospective workers (Mize and Swords, 2011). Fees to obtain the necessary paperwork for employment in the United States were expensive, especially if you wanted your name directly added to the recruitment list in order to increase the chances of gaining a position (Mize and Swords, 2011).

In addition to costs associated with paperwork, it was the responsibility of each Bracero to fund his trip to the nearest recruitment center. These centers were moved three times in the duration of the program. Initially, the Mexican government wanted the recruitment centers in central Mexico in hopes of alleviating unemployment in this region. This also meant that the trip for these workers was less of a monetary burden because of its location (Mize and Swords, 2011). In the event that workers were traveling from southern Mexico at least the centers were centrally located. However, the United States government had its own interests in mind when dealing with recruitment centers.
Under the supervision of the United States the centers were moved to locations that were more strategically advantageous to the U.S. on the border. Not only did moving the recruitment centers closer to the United States border cut the costs for growers transporting their new workforce from the centers to their land, but it also populated the border region with seasoned workers that would come back to the area from year to year. The more experienced the labor force, the less time American growers needed to spend familiarizing laborers in consecutive seasons (Mize and Swords, 2011).

Once laborers arrived at the recruitment centers they had to wait in an unfamiliar city for their number to be called to go to the United States for work. Many of these workers had depleted the majority of their economic resources on their trip to the centers and lived off very little with no place to call home (Mize and Swords, 2011). Before the Braceros were allowed to work in the United States they were required to go through an extensive series of medical examinations. In Mize and Swords’ book several of their interviewees described in detail the invasive procedures they undertook, from being stripped down for the purpose of delousing, to having their belongings sprayed with DDT, to being searched for sexually transmitted diseases (Mize and Swords, 2011). According to Mize and Swords, “The Braceros were touted as disease-free, unattached, hard-working, experiences and, above all, subservient young men” (Mize and Swords, 2011). If the workers passed their medical examinations, which many of them did due to the fact that they were young, strong working-age men, they were then sent off to their contracted locations to begin working.
Shortly after beginning their jobs and arriving in the United States the hardworking Braceros realized that the labor contracts they had signed meant little more than that they were legally permitted to work within the U.S. border. Their pay rates were written as a part of their contracts, but were rarely upheld. Employers could get away with labor abuse because very few laborers were willing to complain. Under the Bracero Program workers were not permitted to change employers under any condition and those who created problems were immediately deported. Employers often paid their workers a decreased wage, which consisted of what remained of their pay after deductions for living quarters, food, transportation, tools, and supplies (Mize and Swords, 2011). What is worse is that at the time agricultural jobs were exempt from minimum wage laws that were in effect for the rest of the country. Living quarters ranged from tents and barns to converted chicken coops, most of which did not meet the required living standards. Workers were required to pay for food, even in the event that they prepared their own. Many times the food was ill tasting in addition to being inedible. Complaints about spoiled food and food born illness were common. Transportation on a daily basis was supposed to be a cost covered by employers, but at times was also deducted from each laborer’s paycheck. Transportation was generally overcrowded and dangerous. Mize and Swords mention several accounts where immigrants were killed or severely injured due to improper transport and drivers. The most outlandish use of immigrant money during the Bracero Program was on tools and supplies that growers needed for their farms (Mize and Swords, 2011). If poor wages and living conditions
were not enough to endure, many workers suffered from loneliness and isolation, as they worked to support the people they loved back in Mexico. Although agencies existed to ensure that the Bracero’s contracts were being followed and that living conditions were acceptable, these were severely understaffed and therefore inefficient at guaranteeing that stipulations were met and followed (Mize and Swords, 2011).

Loss of wages and poor living conditions were not the only problems under the Bracero Program. The entire program was ridden with corruption. Temporary workers were only supposed to stay in the United States for a maximum of six months before returning home. However, many employers wanted workers to stay longer which placed them in the United States illegally (Mize and Swords, 2011). Coming to the U.S. under the Bracero Program became difficult and expensive, so rather than going through all the trouble and paperwork, Mexican workers began either staying in Mexico or coming to the United States illegally. The illegal passage of workers over the border was no concern of U.S. employers. Hiring illegal immigrants or “wetbacks” meant the ability to avoid transportation payments and the same administrative difficulties that Mexicans had tried to avoid in their own country (Délano, 2011).

For the duration of the Bracero Program from 1942-1964 the Mexican government took a fairly inactive role in its agenda and helping its citizens. However, its demands that Mexican workers be treated equally and free from discrimination can be demonstrated between 1942 and 1947 with the blacklisting of Texas (Mize and Swords, 2011). The state of Texas was particularly discriminatory towards its foreign workers during the early years of the Bracero Program. The phrase “No Dogs Negros Mexicans”
was not uncommon on Texan storefronts (Mize and Swords, 2011). As the blacklisting continued Texan growers decided to invite workers to come illegally to work in the state. One of the most defiant moves by the United States against the Mexican government was the El Paso Incident. In 1948 the border was opened by immigration officials and over a thousand workers were let into the United States by illegal means (Mize and Swords, 2011). This blatant betrayal of the United States contract with Mexico was a way to undercut the Mexican government’s bargaining power. The current illegal immigration “problems” that exist presently stem from the corruption suffered under The Bracero Program. By allowing immigrants illegally into the United States the U.S. defied the Mexican government and put itself in a preferential situation (Mize and Swords, 2011).

The Bracero Program would end in 1964 under the Kennedy Administration due to complaints from the United States public of human and civil rights abuse. Despite the United State’s extensive abuse to the Bracero Program, the Mexican government did not cancel the program or increase pressure on the U.S. to enforce the terms and agreements (Délano, 2011). This is proof of Mexico’s dependence on the program and inability to control its labor flow. Remittances from the United States were a safety valve for the economy that the Mexican government was not willing to forfeit. The Mexican government spent the next ten years trying to renegotiate a guest worker program with the U.S. unsuccessfully (Délano, 2011). Although Mexico would benefit from the techniques its workers would gain from participating in the program and from the remittances sent home, the country would be completely unprepared for the economic
burden that would occur when approximately 200,000 immigrants returned home six months after the program’s cancellation (Délano, 2011). The Mexican government’s inability to help its citizens demonstrates the failures of the revolution.

Bilateral Shortcomings

Throughout the United State’s history of bilateral agreements between itself and Mexico, programs that were meant to benefit both parties always conveniently resulted in increased benefits for the U.S. and little or no improvement on the south side of the border. While this may seem harsh coming from an American citizen, previous writings on immigration tend to show the U.S. as coming out on top. Why would any country enter into an agreement that did not seem at least somewhat productive to their nation? The United States’ desire to benefit themselves is evident in its exploitation of the Mexican Braceros. Several times throughout the program’s duration mass repatriations were carried out by the United States. One notable instance was known as “Operation Wetback”. Due to significant complaints by the U.S. public about the increase of illegal workers in the country, in 1954 1.3 million workers were sent back to Mexico (Mize and Swords, 2011). During economic slumps like the Great Depression workers were accused of causing the United States economic woes. During “Operation Wetback” the workers sent back to their home country were often times contracted illegally by American employers. In the case of the previously mentioned “El Paso Incident” immigration officials had a role in bringing over workers without proper documentation. This is a perfect example of the United States government taking advantage of Mexico’s cheap
labor. When the economy was booming, and cheap labor needed to be filled workers were welcomed, papers or no papers. As soon as the public noticed the amount of foreign labor in the country however, the immigrants were criminals, and the national government enabled them. The contradictory nature of these bilateral arrangements is nothing new. The U.S. loves cheap labor and criminalizes those who take advantage of it. The United States’ according to Mize and Swords, never actively took a stand against illegal immigration until 1986 (Mize and Swords, 2011).

IRCA or the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 consisted of five major elements geared toward curbing illegal immigration. IRCA was the first measure that held employers responsible for the hiring of immigrants without proper paperwork. In the past only immigrants suffered criminal charges for accepting the offer of illegal work. One of the main elements of IRCA was employer sanctions. Another portion of IRCA was an amnesty provision for immigrants who were illegally resided within the country but met specific conditions. U.S. citizenship was offered to those immigrants who could prove that they had lived in the country continuously for at least the last ten years. In addition to employer sanctions and amnesty, IRCA also created anti-discrimination measures to qualm human rights activists, an expansion of the H-2 visa program, an increase in fines and punishments, and border patrol funding (Mize and Swords, 2011). The close to three million immigrants that gained legal status from IRCA’s amnesty provision meant that these workers were free to move about the nation and find the best work opportunities available. They were now allowed to participate in the politics of both
the United States and Mexico (Delano, 2011). Not only did IRCA legalize immigrants, but also broke the cycle of circular migration that had occurred between Mexico and the United States for years. IRCA brought stricter border policy, so those that had freely crossed the border either stayed in Mexico or found ways to bring their families to the United States to stay (Delano, 2011).

It would be very easy and convenient to blame the United States for the abuse immigrant workers have suffered in their experiences abroad. While the U.S. is to blame for its discriminatory treatment of the foreign workers that helped build the American economy, one must also look at a government that is willing to exploit its citizens in order to benefit the entire country. The U.S. government has played a huge role through the Bracero Program and NAFTA at pulling both illegal and legal immigrants into the country. However, the Mexican government has played an equally influential role in pushing its citizens away. It became evident after the Mexican Revolution that revolutionary promises of land reform and an improved economy would not be answered. Contracting out workers under the Bracero Program not only meant that money would be sent to Mexico in the form of remittances, but also helped the government deal with unemployment and underemployment. The more people that left the country, the lower these numbers appeared nationwide. In the beginning, the Mexican government was much more vocal about the treatment of its workers. The blacklisting of Texas was the government’s way of showing the U.S. that its workforce was to be taken seriously and that there were consequences for improper treatment of its citizens. However, throughout
the duration of the Bracero Program from 1942-1964 it became evident to the United States that Mexico’s threats came with no serious consequence (Délano, 2011). Mexico had little control over the flow of workers that entered and exited the country. Under the Mexican Constitution it is the right of each citizen to come and go as they please.

Another significant detail of Mexican foreign policy was nonintervention in domestic affairs abroad. Mexico felt no need to interfere with American issues at home and in return hoped and assumed they would do the same. Mexico’s involvement in the lives of its citizens that live abroad has often been decreased to assistance and support of its consulates. What would make a nation so willing to exploit its citizens and allow them to be exploited? Alexandra Délano in her book *Mexico and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies of Emigration since 1848* blames this exploitation on the asymmetry of power that the United States held in its bilateral agreements with Mexico. The Mexican government was so dependent on the flow of labor leaving the country for the United States, that it allowed its workers to be trampled. Emigration to the United States was a safety valve for the political and economic pressures that existed in the nation (Délano, 2011). By allowing itself to be in a disadvantageous position its workers could find work under a more stable economy. Mexico was so fearful of upsetting the United States in negotiations that it often said nothing. It would deal with issues that were separate from immigration independently and feared contaminating any policies regarding migration (Délano, 2011). Because of this delinking strategy Mexico rarely ever held an advantage
over the United States. One of the few times when Mexico could have truly negotiated with the U.S. was during World War II when Mexican labor was in high demand.

Another instance in which Mexico became a priority to the U.S. was during the 1973 oil crisis. In 1974 Mexico discovered oil and suddenly had the attention of its oil deprived neighbors to the north (Délan, 2011). Mexico increased its foreign debt and its economy boomed due to its oil reserves. However in 1981 the price of oil would fall leaving the Mexican economy in shambles. The foreign debt that had once stimulated the economy could no longer be paid off as interest rates climbed and the peso became overvalued. In 1982 Mexico had no choice but to devaluate the peso and suspend its foreign debt payments. This would be the worst economic crisis in the country’s history. From this point on the Mexican government would become heavily dependent on the U.S. to support the country financially in exchange for their precious, low priced oil (Délan, 2011). Once again the United States would benefit from the exploitation of the Mexican economy. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund would require Mexico to take a bailout from their financial institutions. The Mexican economy would then undertake a massive restructuring where it would become open to foreign investment and imports. It would also be deregulated and privatized (Délan, 2011). All of these things were supposed to help the Mexican economy recover.

**NAFTA**

Like the Bracero Program, the North American Free Trade Agreement would end up being a push factor bringing immigrants to the United States. The end results of NAFTA
are rather ironic considering the fact that one of the selling points in signing the agreement was that it would help curb illegal immigration to the United States. Both Presidents Clinton and Salinas de Gortari had high hopes that as a result of signing the free trade agreement salary differentials between the three countries involved would be eliminated, jobs would be created for all members, and as an end result the pressures that stem from immigration would be reduced (Délano, 2011). It comes as no surprise that another selling point of NAFTA, gaining U.S. support, is that additional jobs would be created in the U.S. (Mize and Swords, 2011). Although NAFTA did benefit some citizens on both sides of the border, Salinas de Gortari’s goal of creating a first world economy in Mexico would not be a result of NAFTA. In the end both sides would suffer disadvantages because of the agreement (Mize and Swords, 2011).

NAFTA would open up the labor market and reduce tariffs that had previously protected all industries. Mexico wanted a way to enter the American markets to improve their economy. However, entering these markets without protective tariffs would open them up to the “full force of global competition” (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). The customs barriers that had once kept U.S. corn producers from dumping their corn in Mexico were now removed (Mize and Swords, 2011). This spelled disaster for Mexican agriculture. The United States’ process of producing corn is highly mechanized. The country has technology that small Mexican farmers neither have nor can afford. This means that the U.S. can produce corn at a faster rate and American pesticides make U.S. corn more resilient to nature (Mize and Swords, 2011). The U.S. began dumping their
cheap corn into the Mexican market and eventually Mexico became a net importer of corn (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). When the cost of producing corn exceeded the amount of money farmers could earn from selling it, farmers lost their well-being and eventually were forced to seek other employment opportunities. Communal lands called ejidos would become privatized under NAFTA (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). NAFTA would become a death sentence for Mexican farmers (Mize and Swords, 2011).

As a result of the privatization of farms, and rural farmers inability to make a living, workers had to find other options for survival. During this period in time there was a mass migration of workers from rural to urban centers. Unemployment in Mexico was already high before the signing of NAFTA, but after flooding cities with unemployed workers the Mexican economy began to feel the pressure (Mize and Swords, 2011). NAFTA was supposed to help reduce the pressures of immigration from Mexico to the United States but it did the exact opposite (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). As NAFTA decimated rural populations around the country, Mexican citizens became more and more desperate to find means of survival. During the thirteen years after NAFTA went into effect, 6 million additional workers would come to the U.S. both by legal and illegal means (Bacon, 2008). In addition to unemployment pulling laborers across the border, the demand for labor in the U.S. continued due to a high level of economic growth and the aging baby boomer workforce (Délano, 2011). Illegal immigration at the time would increase due to the fact that the demand for immigrant labor would continue and the number of immigrants allowed legally to enter the nation would shrink. At this time it
was not uncommon for it to take up to ten years to be granted authorized permission in the United States (Coates and Siavelis, 2009).

Mexican agriculture was not the only sector of the economy that was affected by NAFTA. The maquiladoras that were started as a part of the 1964 Border Industrial Program would continue and spread under the North American Free Trade Agreement (Bacon, 2008). Maquiladoras are factories that are generally built within 100 miles of the U.S. border and are meant to take in raw materials from foreign investors and create finished products. Maquiladoras were the Mexican government’s way of attracting foreign investment in order to pay off the debt from the economic crisis. They were also supposed to create jobs for Mexican citizens (Bacon, 2008). Although maquiladoras meant an increase in jobs along the border, they also undermined worker’s rights by preventing the right to organize and providing no workplace protections. Environmental protections were not put in place and wages were kept incredibly low to ensure that foreigners would choose Mexico as their investment location (Bacon, 2008). When countries compete for the lowest wages possible in order to attract foreign investment it is a phenomena known as the “race to the bottom” (Mize and Swords, 2011). At this time many of the United States manufacturing jobs were moved to Mexico, which meant a significant number of American factory workers would lose their jobs as well (Coates and Siavelis, 2009).

To say that NAFTA did not economically benefit anyone would be a blatant lie. However, the U.S. would receive a disproportionate amount of the benefits from the
agreement, while Mexico suffered its negative consequences (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). The wealthiest individuals would get wealthier at the expense of the poor, and this would increase the disparity between the two groups of people within the country (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). Migration was explicitly ignored during the agreement that was formed between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. As always, Mexico was too afraid of bringing up sensitive issues and causing problems during negotiations. Additionally, they knew that in exchange for migration agreements the United States would demand Mexican oil as a trade off (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). In the end NAFTA would not lead to greater freedom of movement or greater equality for those Mexican immigrants in the United States, nor would human suffering be relieved (Bacon, 2008). In order to achieve successful economic integration the drafters of NAFTA should have looked to the European Union as a model. By improving the economies of its weakest members, Spain and Portugal, out migration to wealthier nations like France and Germany was prevented (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). Although some migration is inevitable, when economies are closely linked labor mobility can ease the pressures that come with migration.

The Million Dollar Question

The question concerning immigration issues and reform is: Why are immigrants migrating illegally to the United States? Unfortunately there is not a simple answer to this question as it is multifaceted and has much to do with the socioeconomic history of the United States and Mexico. One of the reasons Mexican emigrants leave their country that they love and come to the United States is to improve education opportunities for their children. In the poorer portions of Mexico, in this specific example Oaxaca, Mexico,
teachers earn about 220 dollars in United States currency every two weeks. With this money they are supposed to feed and support themselves, as well as, their families and additional expenses. If they want pencils and school supplies for their classrooms, which might consist of simple huts, they must take part of the meager earnings they have made to help their students (Bacon, 2008). In May of 2006 the teachers of Oaxaca went on strike for increased wages to improve their wellbeing. The government responded by shooting tear gas and abusing the striking teachers (Bacon, 2008). The government then sent in strikebreakers, with no teacher certification, to break the strike. Many teachers were not allowed to return to their jobs and the uncertified strikebreakers were allowed to stay and work which is against the law. Without work prospects many Oaxacans would first migrate north in Mexico and then cross the border to the United States (Bacon, 2008). 30 million Mexicans live on less than 30 pesos per day, which equals about three U.S. dollars. 40 million of Mexico’s 106 million live in poverty, while 25 million live in extreme poverty. In Oaxaca 75% of Oaxaca citizens live in this extreme poverty (Bacon, 2008). So why do Mexican citizens leave their country to live in a nation where they are unfamiliar with the language and culture? Most leave out of economic desperation, to feed their families, provide them with a better education, and to try and escape human rights abuse.

Prospects for Future Reform

Regardless of whether you are a staunch nativist that wants to keep any and all illegal immigrants out of the country or someone who sees undocumented immigrants as people
who have left their country out of desperation and need help, it is fairly safe to assume that something should be done about the current immigration situation in the United States. The debate on how the U.S. immigration system should be reformed is as highly contested as any debate. There are many great solutions that have been proposed but thus far relatively little has been done to implement these solutions. After the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center immigration took the back burner. In the last few years local governments have tended to take very conservative approaches to ending undocumented immigration by increasing border patrol and building both literal and figurative fences.

Several common immigration reform proposals were discussed in the final chapters of the book *Getting Immigration Right: What Every American Needs to Know* edited by David Coates and Peter Siavelis. On the more conservative side there are proposals for mass repatriations like those that occurred during the Great Depression and “Operation Wetback. The problem with mass forced repatriation is that it has severe economic impacts on the communities that these immigrants leave and those that they enter. Entire sectors of the United States’ economy would suffer from a lack of workers. Unless U.S. citizens were willing to work the low paying jobs, the U.S. economy would suffer. Similarly, the Mexican communities that received the influx of workers coming back into the country would suffer economic hardships as well. The attractiveness of sending Mexican workers to the United States in the first place was to lessen these hardships and to stimulate the economy when remittances were sent home. An influx of
workers would do nothing to ease this already terrible situation (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). In the case of mass repatriations sometimes legal U.S. citizens of Mexican descent are accidentally sent back to Mexico. Families are also split up when this occurs. Children that have American citizenship are either sent to Mexico with their immigrant parents, where they do not speak the language and do not know the culture, or they are left in the United States while their families are deported (Coates and Siavelis, 2009).

Two other suggestions for immigration reform are raids by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) or building actual walls along the border. Both involve increased enforcement by immigration officials, which is very expensive. Important tax dollars could be used for more practical means than to heavily police our borders. ICE raids are often at places of work where a large number of undocumented workers are employed. These people are detained and then usually deported if found working without papers or with fraudulent paperwork. These raids also contribute to the separation of families and in some instances have been brought up as human rights violations (Coates and Siavelis, 2009).

Attrition or denial of welfare and civil rights to illegal immigrants has been a highly contested solution to the immigration “problem”. Proposition 187 is one piece of legislation that was in support of eliminating public education, welfare, and non-emergency medical care for undocumented citizens (Délano, 2011). HR4437 or the Sensenbrenner Bill is also in favor of attrition. Under this bill undocumented citizens would be charged as felons for being in the U.S. without proper documentation. Anyone
who helped these immigrants would also be considered felons. Ironically, Sensenbrenner’s family owns Kimberly-Clark, which employs immigrants to produce their paper products. The Sensenbrenner family helps create the immigration environment that the bill is trying to criminalize (Bacon, 2008).

Several other options for immigration reform are the careful verification of citizenship documents, a new or expanded guest worker program, amnesty, visa reform, or a comprehensive immigration package (Coates and Siavelis, 2009). All of these are options with possible beneficial outcomes but none are free from problems. Verification systems could be very useful, but would require the diligent work of employers to enforce them. If employers are not willing to spend the money on the technology for E-Verify and use it properly, immigrants will still come without paperwork. Guest worker programs are always an option, and a very popular solution for the Mexican government, however it is hard to keep guest worker programs truly temporary. Some workers will try to stay in the country longer than their contracts allow. A solution to this problem would need to be found for a guest worker program to be successful.

Alexandra Délano proposes a plan for comprehensive immigration reform in her book *Mexico and Its Diaspora in the United States: Policies of Immigration Since 1848*. The plan is based on five points: giving those undocumented workers already in the United States some form of legal documentation, increasing the amount of visas that are allowed per year to Mexican immigrants so that they can come to the U.S. legally, broadening the temporary worker program, increasing border safety, and creating development initiatives to strengthen the Mexican economy (Délano, 2011). At this point
a comprehensive plan that would cover the multifaceted nature of immigration reform would be the most beneficial to those immigrants who desire to migrate to the U.S. and to those U.S. citizens who are skeptical of their crossing the border.

Conclusion

There are several theories in the literature review portion of this report that relate closely with the question that was originally proposed. The theory projected by Adolino and Blake in their book suggests that there are “push” and “pull” factors causing immigrants to seek out the United States. This speculation is important to the research that this paper is based upon because it gives a more specific reasoning behind the causes of immigration.

This research is important because as previously mentioned many Americans are angered by the influx of people entering their nation and have the perception that they are stealing jobs as well as benefits. If a citizen of the United States were informed of the terrible economic conditions in Mexico, and how many Mexican immigrants migrate to ensure the wellbeing of their children and families, it is possible that they would develop a greater empathy and understanding for these impoverished persons. It often times takes a personal perspective for people to truly understand a situation. Could you honestly say that if your children were starving, or were destined to grow up in the same impoverished conditions, that you would not do something, even breaking the law to help them? These people are not criminals but people wishing to better their lives just like those people that emigrated to the United States at its foundation. If people are willing to cross dangerous borders, that result in over a hundred deaths a year, and to work for months without
seeing their loved ones, then it should come to mind that their end goal is one of great importance. How can you blame someone for wanting the things that so many Americans take for granted?

In terms of the implications of this research for the larger issues of American foreign policy, it appears that the United States will need to be more willing to work with Mexico to solve this problem. If Mexican citizens are being accused of stealing American jobs and burdening the country economically, then we must find American citizens to fill these positions or let it go. The U.S. as the strongest nation in the world will either have to offer the suffering nation support or change its policies on immigration. This investigation reveals certain implications about the American foreign policy process. Even if the United States citizens and government recognize the plight of the poor in Mexico they may still be unwilling to support their neighboring nation due to their own economic interests. “Only through understanding the multifaceted nature of the immigration issue can we as Americans hope to design an immigration policy that both defends the national interest and is economically sound, while simultaneously being humane and practically effective” (Coates and Siavelis, 2009).

Lastly, these findings demonstrate the complexity of the foreign policy process. No matter how well planned a solution or to what extent an issue is discussed, in the end the decision making process is complex because someone will lose. This demonstrates that no matter how effectively the government deals with foreign matters, there will never be a safe or correct answer.
Works Cited


Chomsky, Aviva. 2007. "*They Take Our Jobs!*" and 20 Other Myths About Immigration, Boston: Beacon Street Press.


