Current Migration Trends from Mexico: What Are the Impacts of the Economic Crisis and U.S. Enforcement Strategy?

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The Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program

Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at UCSD

UCSD student interviews a potential migrant to the United States in Tunkas, Yucatan
Migrant-sending towns being studied by MMFRP

Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program
University of California, San Diego
4,012 survey interviews and 1,500+ hours of in-depth life history interviews conducted in Mexico, California, and Oklahoma, 2005-09
Tunkás, Yucatán
1,030 survey interviews

**Population:**
ca. 2,806

**Culture:**
Mayan indian;
74% speak Maya

**Economy:**
Corn farming, bee-keeping, U.S. remittances

**Migration history:**
In 1\textsuperscript{st} or 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation of migration to U.S.
25% of residents have migrated at least once to U.S.
U.S. economic crisis

How is it affecting Mexican migrants living in the U.S.?
“In comparison with last year, has the number of hours that you work each week changed?”

- More: 10.4%
- Less: 52.8%
- Equal: 36.8%
Change in hours worked per week in past year, by legal status

Legal
- More: 13%
- Less: 52%
- Equal: 35%

Undocumented
- More: 10%
- Less: 53%
- Equal: 37%
“How long did it take to find your most recent job in the U.S.?”
(by legal status)
Open unemployment is still rare among Tunkaseño migrants in the U.S.

- Among Tunkaseño migrants interviewed in U.S., only 2% were currently unemployed (but most work in services).

- Among returned migrants interviewed in Yucatán in 2009, only 3% had come back because they had lost their job in the U.S., or couldn’t find work there.
Return Migration to Mexico?

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that U.S. demand for Mexican labor has plummeted with the economic downturn.”
-- San Francisco Chronicle, 3/18/09

- Widespread media reports of return migration
- But is this really happening? People are aware that the situation in Mexico is no better:
  - Q. Why don’t you go back to Mexico? “Because the work in Mexico is deficient as well. When I think about it, I want to go back, but I don't because of the situation that Mexico is in right now.”
  - -Ramón, Tunkaseño migrant living in Anaheim, Calif.
## Predicting return migration to Mexico in 2009

(Probit regression model)

<table>
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<th>Independent variables</th>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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<td>0.1395*** (0.0541)</td>
<td>0.1022* (0.0544)</td>
<td>0.0631 (0.0730)</td>
<td>0.0775 (0.0728)</td>
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<td>Spouse in US</td>
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<td>-0.3060*** (0.0534)</td>
<td>-0.2699*** (0.0744)</td>
<td>-0.2125*** (0.0800)</td>
<td>-0.1536*** (0.0490)</td>
<td>-0.5157*** (0.0423)</td>
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<td>US experience</td>
<td>-0.0052** (0.0024)</td>
<td>0.1551** (0.0738)</td>
<td>0.0612 (0.0468)</td>
<td>0.0612 (0.0468)</td>
<td>0.3474*** (0.0957)</td>
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<td>Children</td>
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<td>-0.1950*** (0.0473)</td>
<td>-0.1950*** (0.0473)</td>
<td>-0.1950*** (0.0473)</td>
<td>-0.3728*** (0.0204)</td>
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<td>Children in US</td>
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Controlling for undocumented: No, Yes
Clustered SE by occupation: No, Yes
Num of observations: 186, 186, 166, 186, 150, 220

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Coefficients represent the marginal changes in probability for a change in the independent variables

Clustered SEs by occupation

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
The U.S. economic crisis

How is it affecting remittances and the economies of migrant-sending communities?
Family remittances sent to Mexico (in millions of dollars)

Source: Banco de Mexico.
Remittances sent to state of Yucatan

Year to year variation

Source: Banco de Mexico.
Remittances: “Compared with the previous year, how has the average amount that you send [from the U.S. to Tunkás] changed”?

- Sends more (11%)
- Same (41%)
- Sends less (48%)

= US $140 per month less
U.S. economic crisis

How is it affecting migration flows?

Arrests drop as border traffic slows

With the economy in tatters and security beefed up, immigrants have fewer incentives to risk dangerous trek.

Richard Marosi
Reporting from San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico

Arrests of illegal immigrants on the U.S.-Mexico border have fallen to levels unseen since the 1970s as the ailing U.S. economy and enhanced enforcement appear to be deterring people from trekking north.

From October 2008 through February of this year, the Border Patrol arrested 195,399 illegal immigrants, a 24% decrease from the same period last year. The apprehension level is on track to dip to about 550,000 for this federal fiscal year, the lowest level since 1975, when 596,796 immigrants were caught, according to Border Patrol statistics.

The downward trend in arrests — considered one of the best indicators of illegal immigrant migration — began a few

[See Border, Page A24]
Mexican emigration drops 13 percent in 1st quarter

Mexico City (AP) -- A government survey finds Mexican emigration dropped 13 percent in the first quarter of 2009 — an ongoing trend as the U.S. economic recession discourages Mexicans from crossing the border in search of work.

The National Statistics and Geography Institute found that 137,497 people left Mexico in the first three months of 2009, compared to 159,024 during the same period of 2008.
Propensity to migrate in 2006 and 2009, among residents of Tunkás, Yucatán

- **Think of migrating to U.S., 2006**: 24%
- **Think of migrating to U.S., 2009**: 8%
- **Think of internally migrating, 2009**: 16%
- **Interested in U.S. temporary hiring program, 2009**: 55%

*All Tunkásenos* (green) vs. *Economically active, aged 18-39* (blue)
Southwest border apprehensions

Why are border apprehensions declining?

“This is an indication that there are fewer attempts to cross the border illegally.... The efforts we’ve undertaken at the border have begun to turn the tide of illegal immigration.”

-- Michael Chertoff, DHS Secretary, October 23, 2008
Evading Border Patrol is perceived as difficult

“At present, how easy or difficult is it to evade the Border Patrol when crossing the border?”

Very difficult: 64%
Somewhat difficult: 21%
Somewhat easy: 5%
Very easy: 10%

Source: MMFRP survey of Yucatecos, January-March 2009
Clandestine border crossings are seen as very dangerous

- 87% of Yucateco migrants believe it is “very dangerous” to cross the border without papers
- 44% know someone who died trying to cross

Gravesite of 46-year-old Tunkas woman who died of hypothermia in East San Diego County
Migrant fatalities have increased in tandem with tougher U.S. border enforcement

Total detected deaths, 1/1/95 – 3/31/09: 5,046
Alternative explanations for declining border apprehensions:

• Reduced circularity in migration (less return migration):

Border enforcement doesn’t keep migrants out, but keeps them in the U.S. once they gain entry, due to high $ cost (coyote fees) + physical risks of reentry.

*Fewer return trips = fewer apprehensions:*

If migrants aren’t going home, they aren’t getting caught when they return to their jobs in U.S.
Key indicators of reduced circularity:

- Migrants are staying longer in U.S. on each trip.
- In the last 5 years, the average Tunkás migrant living in the U.S. has returned to his/her hometown only once.
- 37% of people interviewed in Tunkás report that they have relatives who have stayed in the U.S. for fear of not being able to get back in if they return to Mexico.
- More abandoned houses in hometown = whole-family migration
- Lower attendance at annual fiesta
Average length of stay, most recent trip to the U.S.

Source: Data from three most recent MMFRP surveys, in Jalisco, Oaxaca, and Yucatan.
Attendance at annual town fiesta (February 2009) was down sharply.
Alternative explanations for declining border apprehensions

• Reduced circularity in migration

• More use of people-smugglers:

  -- Tighter border enforcement has increased use of “coyotes.”

  -- 91% of Yucateco migrants interviewed in 2009 had hired a coyote to assist their post recent crossing into the U.S.

  -- Using a coyote = high probability of successful entry
Average amount paid to people-smuggler by Yucateco migrants on their most recent trip to the U.S.

Median Coyote Fee (2009 $)

- Before 2001: $861
- 2001-2006: $2,037
- 2007-2009: $2,858