William C. Velásquez Institute

A WCVI Intermestic Initiatives White Paper

Economic Stimulus through Legalization

Dr. Raúl Hinojosa-Ojeda
Executive Director,
UCLA North American Integration and Development Center

National Office • 206 Lombard, 1st Floor • San Antonio, TX 78228 • (210) 922-3118 • Fax (210) 922-7095

California Office • 2914 N. Main St., 1st Floor • Los Angeles, CA 90031 • (323) 222-2217 • Fax (323) 222-2011

Florida Office • 2646-A NW 21st Terrace • Miami, FL 33142 • (305) 635-6965 • Fax (305) 822-7025

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This paper makes three critical arguments on how to view the imperative of achieving justice for immigrants with the national priority of passing a national economic stimulus bill. It is our view that both priorities are complementary and merit immediate enactment by Congress and President Obama.

I.) Legalization of the nation's undocumented workers is now an economic necessity, as well as a moral and civil rights imperative. Legalization increases short-term incomes, job creating consumption and net tax revenues in the low wage segments of the labor market, as well as sets the long-term foundation for an expanding middle class and a more sustainable economic recovery. The experience of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) is very instructive in this regard, producing both wage and consumption gains, and enhanced tax-revenue collection in the midst of a recession of the late 1980's and early 1990's, as well as decades of very high rates of educational, home and small business investments by newly legalized families. If Congress and President Obama legalized the current 10-12 million undocumented persons in the U.S. an economic stimulus of $30-36 billion in personal income, 750,000-900,000 new jobs, and $4.5 to $5.4 billion in net tax revenue would result!

II.) Movement now towards legalization and naturalization of the roughly twenty million legal permanent residents and undocumented persons would create local and state regional mini-booms in civic engagement. Furthermore, enabling civic participation of these previously excluded groups will substantially intensify public support for an inclusive and humane tenor with regard to immigration reform as well as public policies aimed at providing support to low income and socially disadvantaged socioeconomic profiles.

III.) The national security outcome desired by Washington, D.C. of declining undocumented migration is attainable under existing law and there is no need for further legislation expanding security-related provisions related to undocumented migration. Indeed, we must begin to recognize that the current approach is very costly (in money, rights and lives), and increasingly yielding diminishing returns. Massive security-related expenditure growth now yields lower numbers of apprehensions as migration from Mexico to the US (both undocumented and legal) has been dropping due to security measures, the climate of repression in immigrant communities, and the declining regional economy. The unintended consequences of further pursuing the current enforcement only approach include generating a vulnerable underground economy and maintaining an artificially low wage floor, actually encouraging the demand for vulnerable undocumented workers.

This paper was commissioned by the William C. Velasquez Institute (WCVI) in compliance with the Omnibus Immigration Reform resolution #4.02 approved by the September 2006 National Latino Congreso.

I. Economic Impact of Legalization

Legalization of the nation's undocumented workers will provide a strong economic stimulus, and must be integrated as a necessary component of President Obama's economic recovery strategy. Failure to do so would actually prove detrimental to faster and long lasting economic recovery. Legalization also has the virtue of combining moral and civil rights imperatives with society-wide economic benefits, strengthening the most vulnerable and exploitable low-wage segment of the labor market, and establishing the basis for both a more sustainable economic recovery.

Moving workers out of a vulnerable underground status produces both short term and long term economic gains by strengthening the ability of working families to become more productive with higher levels of income, job generating consumption and increase their net contributions to tax revenues. Legalization also creates higher household investments in family-wide education, boosting college-going rates among children, as well as creating very high rates of home ownership and small business investments that have historically been economic engines of job creation and community revitalization.

The economic recovery benefits from legalization would not flow from government deficit stimulus spending but rather from strong net income increases that would in turn generate increased consumption and tax revenue growth.

The experience of the then-unprecedented legalization of the late 1980's and early 1990's (IRCA) is very instructive in this regard, producing rapid growth in wages, consumption and tax revenues in the midst of a recession of the late 1980's and early 1990's. IRCA also proved to generate long term lasting benefits, producing a solid legacy of middle class expansion over the last two decades. IRCA showed that moving workers out of a vulnerable underground status raised wages by 15% after years of stagnation, strengthened the ability of working families to become more productive and supported higher levels of job generating consumption, even during an economic downturn of 1988-1992 when unemployment grew from 5.3 to 7.5% (Table 1).

Almost immediately, IRCA-based legalization had the effect of giving rights to more workers, raising the low wage floor of the economy, reducing the demand for easily exploitable immigrants, reducing illegal crossings and apprehensions (-- without huge expenditures on a border wall). Over time, IRCA-based legalization also led to a boom in family investments in education and a rush to join the mainstream banking system, generating very high rates of home ownership and small business investments, providing long-term economic benefits of job creation, community development and strong net tax revenue growth.

This paper summarizes the results of the NAID Center research project on alternative scenarios of North America. Through a combination of historical analysis of the impact of IRCA and the use of currently calibrated CGE modeling we can compute the likely effects of legalization on the US economy. Applying the historical record parameters to current economic modeling parameters, it is estimated that the legalization of each million workers would result in a $3 billion increase in disposable income, supporting an additional 75,000 domestic consumption related jobs and $450 million in net tax revenues.

In other words, legalizing the current estimate of 10-12 million undocumented workers would result in a net income rise of $30-36 billion, support 750,000-900,000 new jobs, and generate $4.5 to $5.4 billion in net tax revenue!

Estimating the Economic Impacts of Legalization: Learning from IRCA

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) made possible the legalization of over 2.7 million undocumented immigrants within five years. IRCA also mandated the intensification of Border Patrol enforcement activities as well as the domestic auditing of employer I-9 forms and the threat of the imposition of sanctions on employers for hiring undocumented workers. Historical data generated in 1992 survey by the U.S. Department of Labor on the "Characteristics and Labor Market Behavior of the Legalized Population Five Years Following Legalization" indicates that legalization of immigrant workers had a number of significant effects in a number of key areas:

- The DOL sample data shows that 96% of the undocumented applicants who had resided in the U.S. prior to 1982 (section 205A applicants) had held employment. A survey 1 week prior to application in 1987 shows 85% (all applicants) were employed or actively seeking employment, whereas only 77% of U.S. adults were doing the same.
- The DOL reported over the four year period following legalization (1988-1992) saw a 15% mean hourly wage increase, although they still earned less than other American workers (Table 1). [1]
- U.S. Worker mean hourly wages grew even more than legalized immigrant wages during this same period (16.1%).
- Even after legalization, however, average U.S. workers incomes were much higher than immigrant incomes measured both as individual earnings (26%) and as family earnings (43%).
- This surge in wage growth represented a dramatic reversal after years of DECLINING real wages for immigrants typical since arriving in the U.S. until applying for legalization
- Women wages rose at 20% after legalization, an even greater reversal after declining by -7.8% since arriving in the U.S. (Table 2).
- It is important to remember that this legalization took place during a period when the U.S. unemployment rate rose from 5.3% to 7.5% (Table 3).

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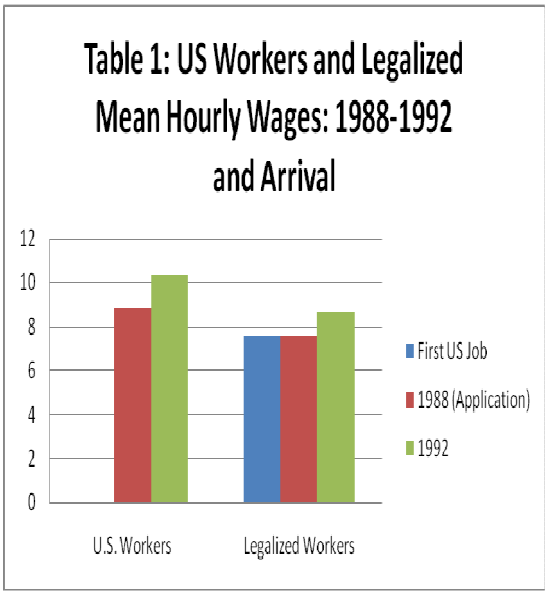
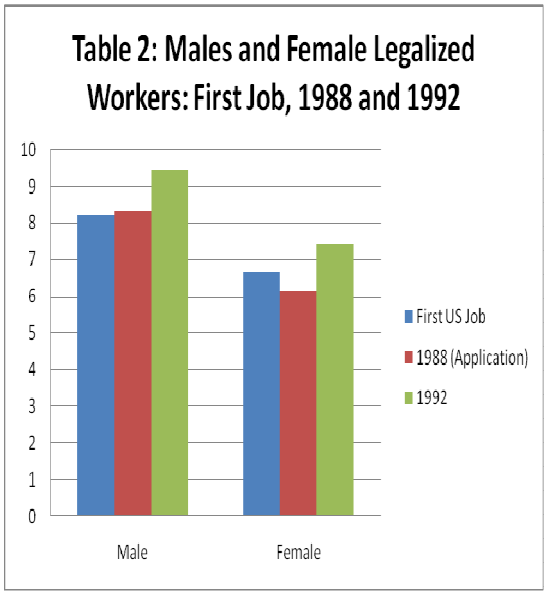
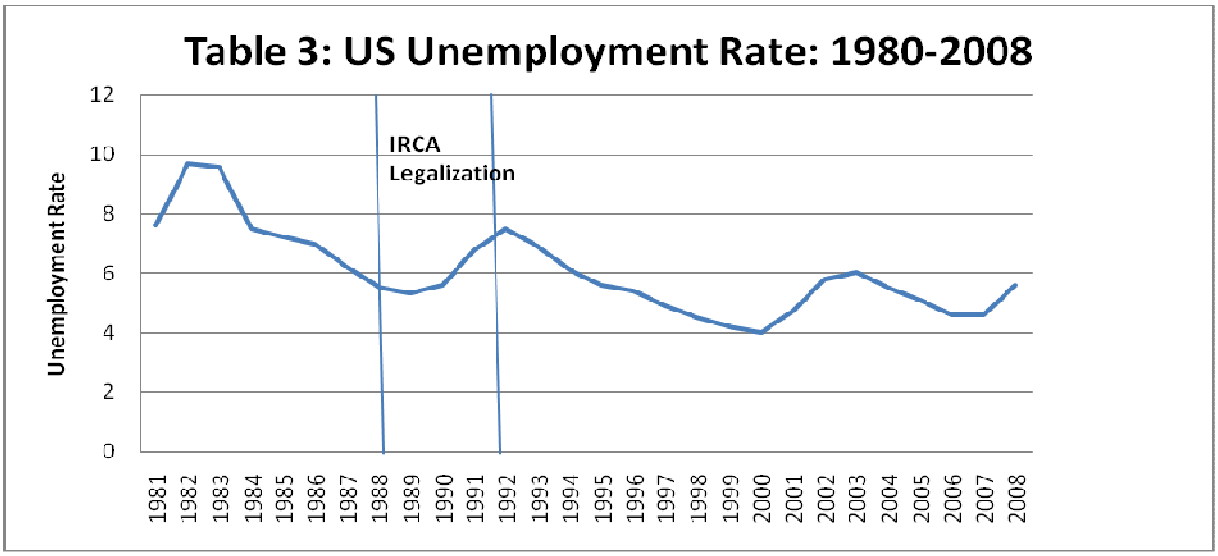
[1]Similar findings with respect to post IRCA wage growth are reported in a number of studies. Kossoudji and Cobb-Clark found a 26% real individual wages increase from a data set of the legalized population survey (LPS) over the years covered in the survey, which corresponds to annual wages growth of 2.3 (Coming out of the Shadows, pp. 605). These findings were also supported by Amuedo-Dorante, Bansak, and Rapael also supported findings of a wage increase of 6.9% for men and 13.8% for women. Wages were seen to increase with increased English ability, education, and experience in the U.S. (Massey, Phillips pp. 239), these factors appear to be related to and enhanced by legal status.



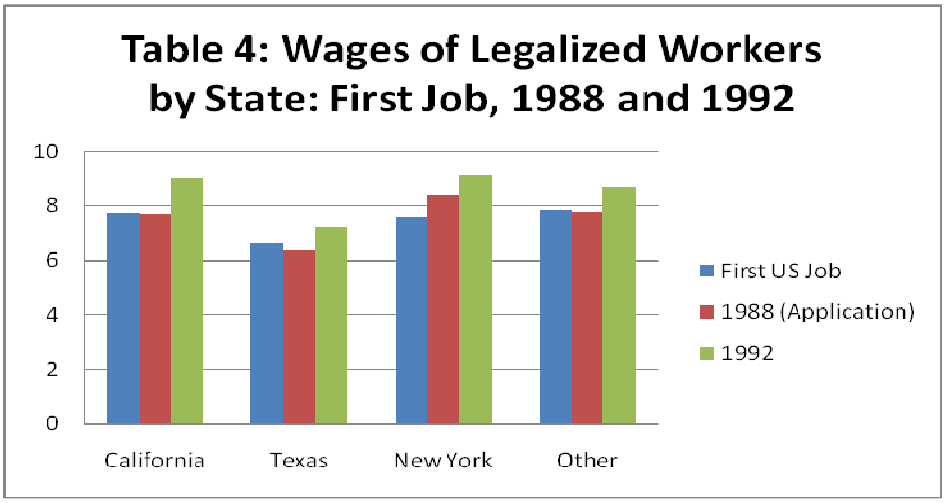


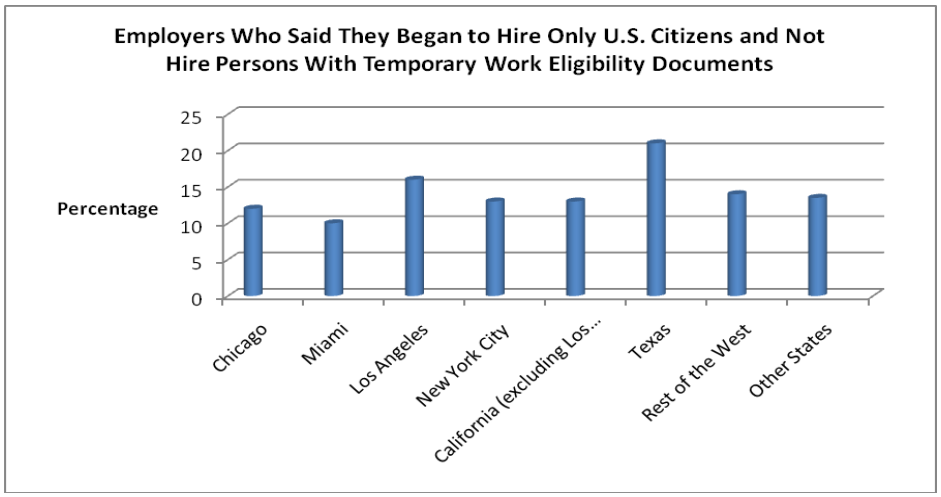


- Legalized immigrant wages grew the highest in those states with the highest concentration of immigrant workers (such as in New York and California – Table 4). Even Texas, with the lowest (and pre-IRCA declining) immigrant wages, saw a 13.9% increase in legalized immigrant wages.

- IRCA Employer sanctions had a negative impact on some non-U.S. citizen wages. The GAO reported that sanctions caused discrimination based on appearance, accent, race, place of origin and citizenship, with the highest incidence of discrimination being reported in Texas. (Table 5 Source: GAO Employer Survey, 1989.)

- Immigrants self-invested heavily in their own education, language skills and training, generating a 200% increase in the rate of human capital accumulation, strongly associated with growth in per worker productivity.

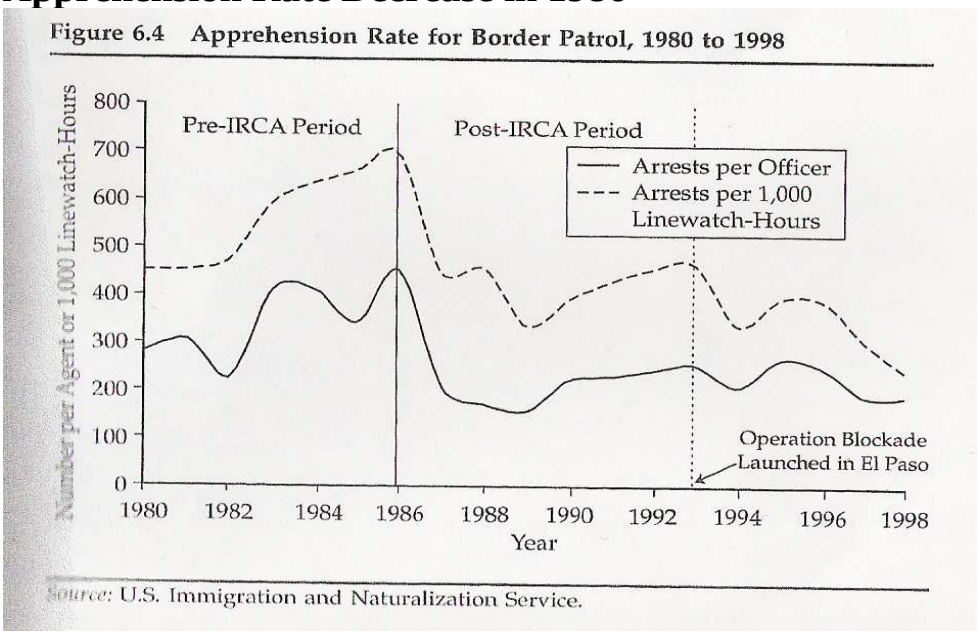




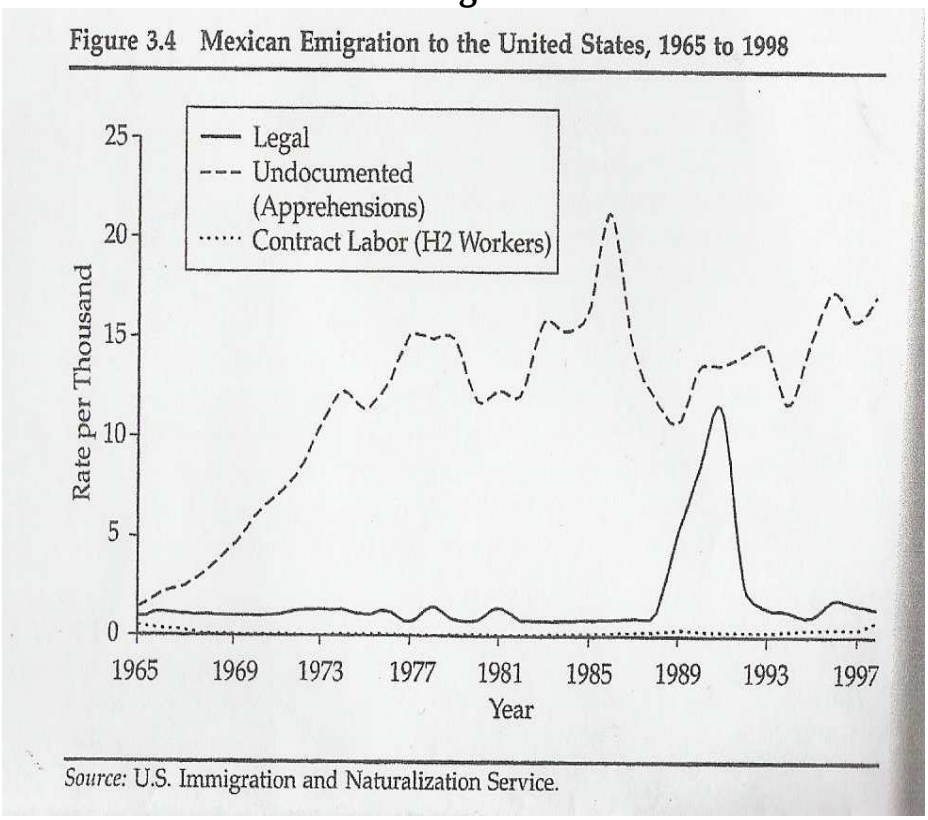
IRCA also had important impacts on Border Crossings and Apprehensions

- IRCA also led to the largest decline of Illegal Immigrant crossings and apprehensions in the history of the United States – without huge expenses and border walls.
- A variety of studies coincide with the analysis that the reduction of illegal immigrant apprehensions after IRCA indicates a sharp reduction of illegal immigration crossings for a number of years after the passage of IRCA.
- Bean et. al (1990) used INS 1977 to 1989 data on apprehensions and found a declined by 27% after IRCA.
- Donato, Durand, and Massey (1992) found in San Diego the probability of apprehension was 56% in 1980, 47% in 1986, and 60% 1989. Thus the apprehension decreases post 1986, combined with a higher probability of apprehension, is interpreted to suggest a decline in illegal crossings.

Apprehension Rate Decrease in 1986



Mexican Undocumented Emigration Decrease in 1986 until 1989



II. The Civic Engagement Benefits of Legalization and Naturalization

Movement now towards legalization and naturalization of the roughly twenty million legal permanent residents and undocumented persons would create local and state regional mini-booms in civic engagement. Furthermore, enabling civic participation of these previously excluded groups will geometrically increase broader public support for an inclusive and humane tenor with regard to immigration reform and policies aimed at providing support to low income and socially disadvantaged socioeconomic profiles.

Total U.S. estimates of the combined undocumented and legal permanent resident (LPR) population is over 22 million. This figure includes a recently revised estimate of 10 million undocumented (table 2.1) and 12.1 million in LPR status (table 2.3). Table 2.3 also shows that of the total LPR population, the vast majority (8.25 million) are already eligible for naturalization. Breaking down these population by states show that California has the highest undocumented as well as LPR population in the county (tables 2.2 and 2.5 respectively), followed by Texas, Florida and New York. The LPR population eligible for naturalization is even more highly concentrated in these four states, 61% of the total, compared to 58% of all LPR, and 54% of all the undocumented. Future naturalizations and legalizations would thus have a wider geographic impact than current eligible naturalizations. Table 2.4 shows that foreign born Mexicans represent 27.3% of the total LPR population but a larger share (32.1%) of the LPR naturalization eligible population. A move towards immediate naturalization would be more concentrated on Mexicans, while future naturalizations would have a wider national origin impact.

Table 2.1 ESTIMATES OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT POPULATION, RANKED BY STATES: 2002–2004	
California	2,400,000
Texas	1,400,000
Florida	850,000
New York	650,000
Arizona	500,000
Illinois	400,000
New Jersey	350,000
North Carolina	300,000
All Other	3,150,000
TOTAL	10,000,000
Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on March 2002, 2003, and 2004 Current Population Surveys (Passel 2005); includes an allowance for persons omitted from the CPS. Estimates for California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey use "direct" methods; other states based on "synthetic" methods.	

Table 2.2 ESTIMATES OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT POPULATION, BY STATES: 2002–2004				
200,000-250,000	**100,000-150,000**	**55,000-85,000**	**20,000-35,000**	**Under 10,000**
Georgia Colorado Maryland Massachusetts Virginia Washington	Nevada Oregon Pennsylvania Michigan Ohio Wisconsin Tennessee	Connecticut Utah Minnesota Kansas New Mexico Indiana Iowa Oklahoma Missouri	South Carolina Rhode Island Idaho Arkansas Alabama Kentucky Nebraska Louisiana Hawaii District of Columbia Mississippi Delaware	New Hampshire Alaska Wyoming Maine West Virginia South Dakota Vermont North Dakota Montana
Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates based on March 2002, 2003, and 2004 Current Population Surveys (Passel 2005); includes an allowance for persons omitted from the CPS. Estimates for California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey use "direct" methods; other states based on "synthetic" methods.				

Table 2.3
Year LPR Status Obtained for the Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2006

Year	All legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,110,000	100 0	8,250,000	100 0
Before 1960	210,000	1 7	210,000	2 5
1960 to 1969	470,000	3 9	470,000	5 7
1970 to 1979	1,170,000	9 7	1,170,000	14 2
1980 to 1989	1,410,000	11 6	1,410,000	17 1
1990 to 1999	3,680,000	30 4	3,680,000	44 6
2000 to 2003	3,060,000	25 3	1,320,000	16 0
2004 to 2005			2,110,000	17 4

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding
Source: U S Department of Homeland Security

Table 2.4
Country of Birth of Legal Permanent Resident Population: 2006

Country of birth	Legal permanent residents		Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,110,000	100 0	8,250,000	100 0
Mexico	3,310,000	27 3	2,650,000	32 1
Philippines	540,000	4 5	310,000	3 8
India	510,000	4 2	200,000	2 4
China, People's Republic	460,000	3 8	210,000	2 5
Dominican Republic	430,000	3 6	310,000	3 8
Vietnam	340,000	2 8	220,000	2 7
Canada	330,000	2 7	260,000	3 2
El Salvador	320,000	2 6	220,000	2 7
Cuba	310,000	2 6	230,000	2 8
United Kingdom	290,000	2 4	230,000	2 8
Korea	270,000	2 2	180,000	2 2
Jamaica	220,000	1 8	160,000	1 9
Haiti	220,000	1 8	140,000	1 7
Colombia	190,000	1 6	110,000	1 3
Germany	190,000	1 6	160,000	1 9
Guatemala	170,000	1 4	110,000	1 3
Poland	160,000	1 3	110,000	1 3
Japan	130,000	1 1	100,000	1 2
Russia	130,000	1 1	60,000	0 7
Ukraine	120,000	1 0	60,000	0 7
Other	3,480,000	28 7	2,190,000	26 5

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding
Source: U S Department of Homeland Security

Table 2.5 LPR Population and Eligibility for Naturalization: 2006				
State of residence	**Legal permanent residents**		**Legal permanent residents eligible to naturalize**	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
Total	12,110,000	100 0	8,250,000	100 0
California	3,430,000	28 3	2,490,000	30 2
New York	1,490,000	12 3	1,030,000	12 5
Texas	1,160,000	9 6	840,000	10 2
Florida	1,040,000	8 6	680,000	8 2
New Jersey	570,000	4 7	350,000	4 2
Illinois	550,000	4 5	370,000	4 5
Massachusetts	300,000	2 5	190,000	2 3
Washington	250,000	2 1	170,000	2 1
Virginia	240,000	2 0	140,000	1 7
Arizona	220,000	1 8	150,000	1 8
Pennsylvania	210,000	1 7	130,000	1 6
Maryland	210,000	1 7	120,000	1 5
Michigan	200,000	1 7	130,000	1 6
Georgia	190,000	1 6	110,000	1 3
Connecticut	140,000	1 2	90,000	1 1
Ohio	130,000	1 1	80,000	1 0
Colorado	130,000	1 1	80,000	1 0
North Carolina	120,000	1 0	70,000	0 8
Oregon	110,000	0 9	80,000	1 0
Minnesota	110,000	0 9	60,000	0 7
Other	1,290,000	10 7	890,000	10 8
Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding Source: U S Department of Homeland Security				

County Level Information

Data from the Census Bureau's 2007 county population estimates, supplemented by 1990 and 2000 county population counts from the Decennial Censuses reinforce this trend towards broad geographic dispersal. County level data of the fast growing dispersal of the newer Latino populations indicating that the foreign born, non-citizens and Mexican are more highly concentrated in the more fastest growing counties as compared to counties showing lower Latino growth. Move towards legalization of the undocumented and increased future naturalizations would thus have a wider geographic impact.

Table 12
Select Characteristics of Hispanics in Fast-Growing and Slow-Growing Hispanic Counties, 2007
(%)

Characteristic	Fast-Growing Hispanic Counties	Slow-Growing Hispanic Counties
Children younger than 18	36	33
Foreign born	42	39
Non-citizen	32	27
Mexican born	29	25
In household with foreign-born head	60	58

Note: These statistics are effectively a weighted average of county/county group characteristics. The weights are the size of the county/county group Hispanic population. In other words, each county/county group does not receive equal weight in the tabulation. County/county groups with larger Hispanic populations receive more weight.
[1]"Unmarried" refers to those divorced, widowed or never-married. Males who are married, spouse absent are included as married.
[2]The IPUMS determines a person's poverty status in a slightly different manner than the original Census Bureau released version of the PUMS. For further details see http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=POVERTY
Source: Pew Hispanic Center analysis of the 2007 American Community Survey IPUMS

Undocumented Population by Congressional District

Recently released data from the 2005 American Community Survey permit us to update our previous estimates of the undocumented population by congressional district and to compare these estimates with those from the 2000 census. Although the undocumented population of the United States as a whole increased substantially over these five years, trends in undocumented immigration varied widely from district to district: [2]

In 2005, undocumented immigrants accounted for about 10 percent or more of the total population in 27 (or roughly 6 percent) of the 435 congressional districts. However, undocumented immigrants comprised about up to 5 percent of the population in more than half (or 232) of all congressional districts in 2005. Between 2000 and 2005, the undocumented population of 107 districts doubled, although most of these districts had relatively few undocumented immigrants to begin with. More strikingly, 39 districts experienced either a decline or no change in their undocumented population between 2000 and 2005. Many of these districts had been major destinations for new arrivals in the past, but are becoming less so as immigrants move to other parts of the country.

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[2] Undocumented Immigrants by Congressional District by Rob Paral, 2006
http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/immigration/2006/10/undocumented_im.html

See Appendix1 for a listing of the **Approximate Size of the Undocumented Population By Congressional District**.

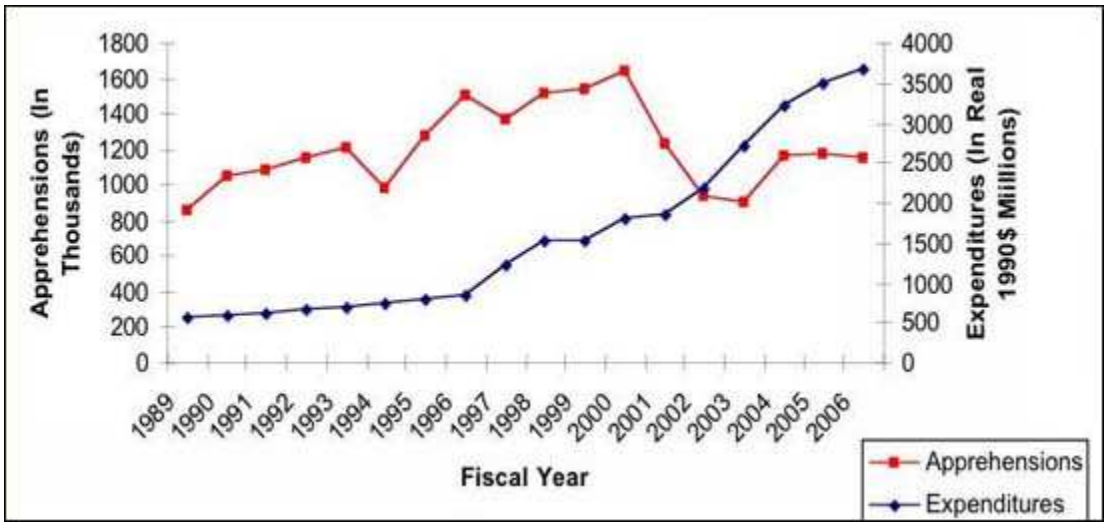
III. Time to Move Beyond the "Enforcement-Only" Immigration Policy Approach

The need for change in the US approach to immigration policy has to begin with the recognition that the approach of the Bush Administration (and the Clinton Administration to a lesser extent) has been increasingly very costly (in money, lives, and rights) and increasingly produced ineffective and counter-productive results. The multi- billion dollar border enforcement approach is an unnecessary expenditure when the country can least afford it. The policy is also holding back our economic potential by generating a permanent shadow economy and producing greater inequality, which creates an artificially low wage floor in the economy, blocking innovation and productivity by firms and sectors. By keeping millions of families in the shadows outside the economic mainstream, it stifles their consumption and investment potentials, blocking the creation of new and better paying jobs.

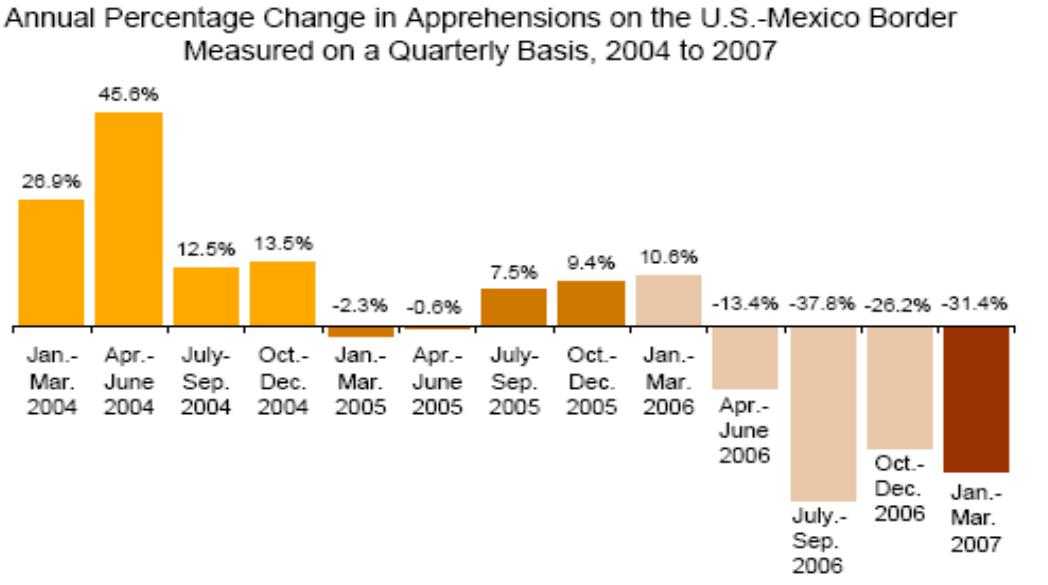
Diminishing Returns and Counter-productive consequences of the "Enforcement-Only" Approach:

This policy failure is best appreciated in the seemly paradox of dramatic and massive rise in expenditures on Border Enforcement while total apprehensions have been falling dramatically, beginning **before** the fastest growth in expenditures (see Figure 1). Border Patrol data emphasizes the failure of the border-enforcement-only approach. Even though the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents tripled between 1990 and 2005, and funding for the program increased tenfold, the undocumented population in the United States doubled in size, the death rate of border crossings tripled, and the per-apprehension cost increased to $1700 in 2002 from only $300 in 1992 or nearly 567%! It is time to refocus our immigration efforts so that border security efforts can concentrate resources on the fraction of foreigners who may seek to enter the United States—be it from the north, south, east, or west—with evil intentions.[3]

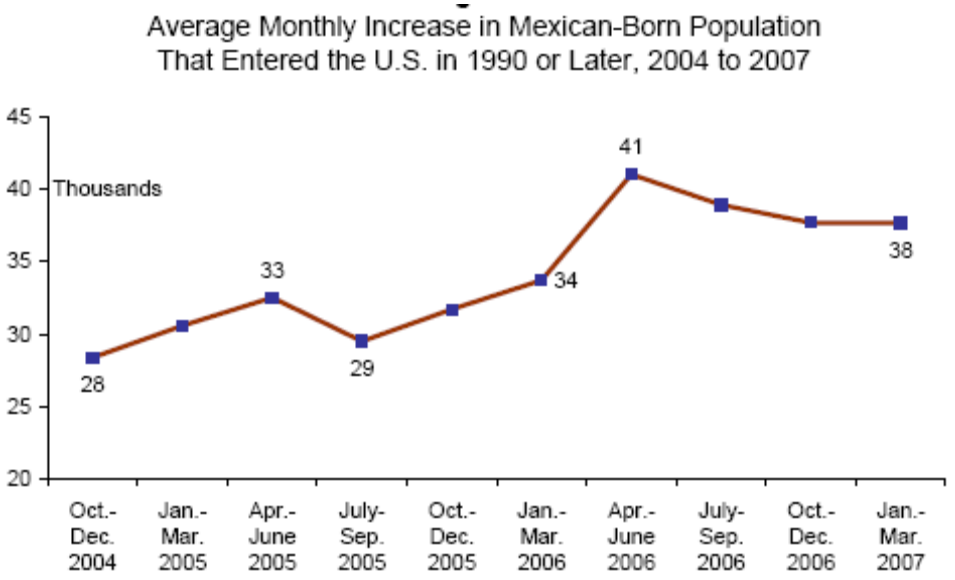
[3] Time to Act, a report on the implementation of the 9/11 Commission recommendation released this month by the Center for American Progress, outlines a more effective strategy for our borders.



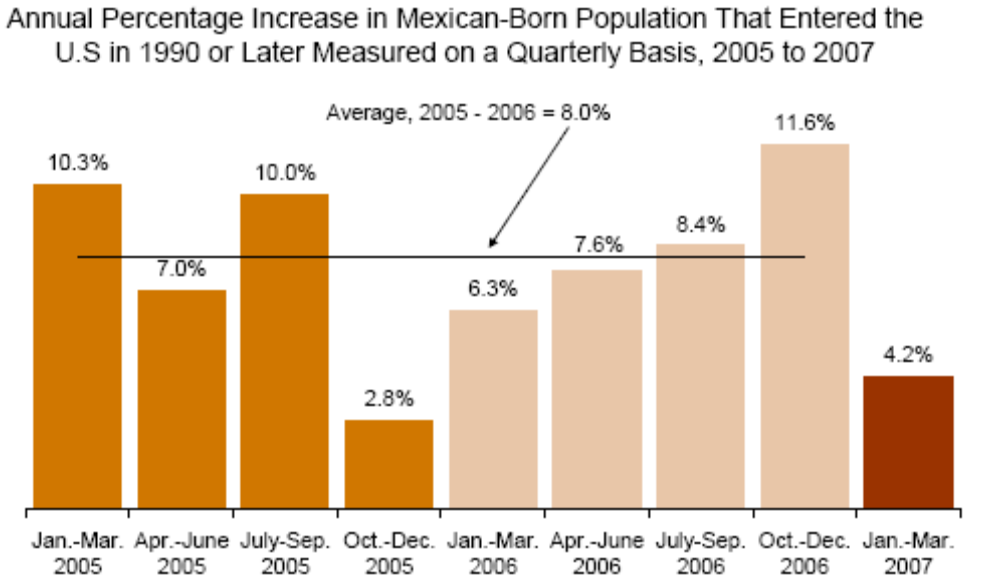
It is time to ask why the trends in FALLING apprehensions and INCREASING spending on border enforcement intersect in Fiscal Year 2003? What explains that, despite dramatically increasing spending, the total apprehensions have actually been falling at an even faster rate? The answer is that Mexican border-related migration flows to the U.S. have been slowing for years and have actually been falling since Q2 2006, even before the decline in economic activity.



Note: The annual percentage change is the change in apprehensions from the same quarter the previous year.
Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, unpublished data



Note: Data points are slopes of regressions of Mexican-born population over time; each point covers a 2-year period ending in the quarter shown. (Successive data points overlap for 7 quarters.)
Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of Current Population Survey data



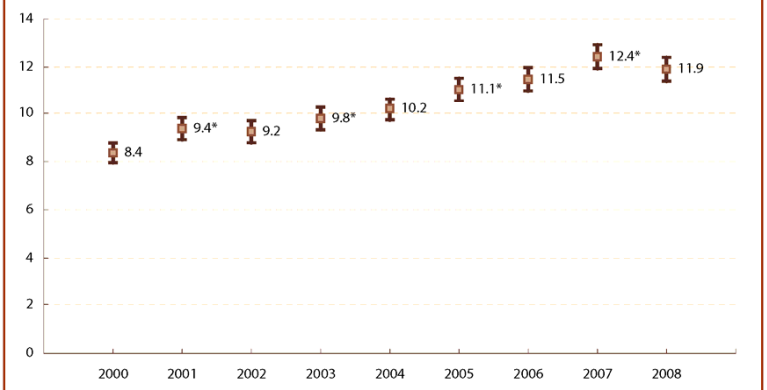
Note: The annual percentage increase is the increase in population from the same quarter the previous year.
Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of Current Population Survey data

Rather than undergoing a continuous increase in immigrant levels as is commonly perceived, the United States experienced a sharp spike in immigration flows over the past decade that had a distinct beginning, middle and end. From the early 1990s through the middle of the decade, slightly more than 1.1 million migrants came to the United States every year on average. In the peak years of 1999 and 2000, the annual inflow was about 35% higher, topping 1.5 million. By 2002 and 2003, the number coming to the country was back around the 1.1 million mark.

There were 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in March 2008, according to new Pew Hispanic Center estimates. The size of the unauthorized population appears to have declined since 2007, and it is clear from the estimates that the unauthorized immigrant population grew more slowly in the period from 2005 to 2008 than it did earlier in the decade. It is clear that from 2005 to 2008, the inflow of immigrants who are undocumented fell below that of immigrants who are legal permanent residents.

The Pew Hispanic Center also estimates that inflows of unauthorized immigrants averaged 800,000 a year from 2000 to 2004, but fell to 500,000 a year from 2005 to 2008 with a decreasing year-to-year trend. By contrast, the inflow of legal permanent residents has been relatively steady this decade.

Figure 1
Estimates of the U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population, 2000-2008
(millions)



Note: Estimates are based on residual methodology; see appendix. Bars indicate low and high points of the estimated 90% confidence interval (Table 1). The symbol * indicates that the change from previous year is statistically significant.

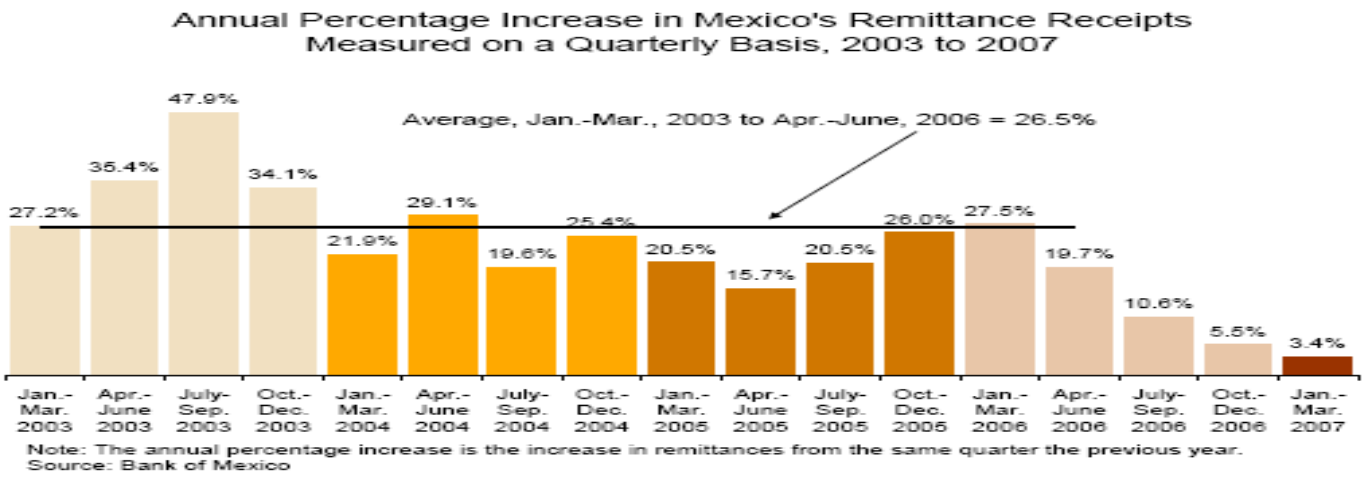
Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates, 2008, based on March Supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

Figure 3
Estimates of the U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population from Mexico, 2000-2008
(millions)

Note: Estimates are based on residual methodology; see appendix. Bars indicate low and high points of the estimated 90% confidence interval (Table 3). The symbol * indicates that the change from previous year is statistically significant.

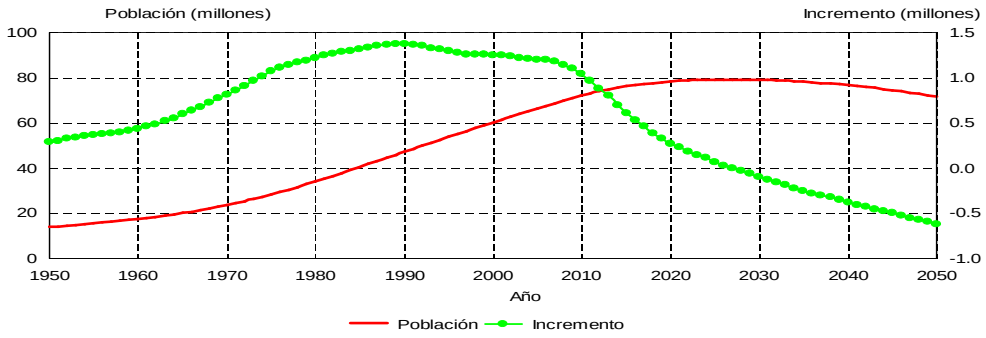
Source: Pew Hispanic Center estimates, 2008, based on March Supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS).

This decline in Migration can also be seen in the dramatic slowing in the levels and growth of remittances.



It is important to recognize that in the future a major enforcement focus on the Mexico border is bound to become less relevant to U.S. immigrant flows since Mexico has begun to experience what will soon be a major reduction in the supply of new entrants into the North American labor force.

Yet Mexico's Economically Active Population is Now Rapidly Decelerating



The *unintended* consequences of the post-1993 border enforcement effort have thus been more important than the intended ones. The key unintended consequences include:

- *Creating new opportunities for people-smugglers.* Stronger enforcement on the U.S.-Mexico border has been a bonanza for the people-smuggling industry. It has made smugglers essential to a safe and successful crossing. Our research in rural Mexico shows that more than 9 out of 10 unauthorized

migrants now hire smugglers to get them across the border. And the fees that smugglers can charge have tripled since 1993. By January 2006 the going rate for Mexicans was between $2,000-3,000 per head.

- *Making the southwestern border more lethal.* By forcing migrants to attempt entry in extremely hazardous mountain and desert areas, rather than the relatively safe urban corridors traditionally used, the concentrated border enforcement strategy has contributed directly to a ten-fold increase in migrant fatalities since 1995. A new record of 516 fatalities was set last year, and the real death toll could be far greater, because we only know about bodies that have been discovered. Since 1995, more than 4,045 migrants have perished from dehydration in the deserts, hypothermia in mountainous areas, and drowning in the irrigation canals that parallel the border in California and Arizona.

- *Promoting permanent settlement in the U.S.* We have succeeded in bottling up within the U.S. millions of migrants who would otherwise have continued to come and go across the border, as their parents and grandparents had done. Given the high costs and physical risks of illegal entry today, they have a strong incentive to extend their stays in the U.S.; and they longer they stay, the more probable it is that they will settle permanently.

- *Counter Productive consequences:* The internal-enforcement regime actually moves undocumented workers further underground, ironically creating a greater demand for undocumented workers who see themselves are more vulnerable and with less rights.

Additional investment of taxpayer dollars in a border and enforcement-centered strategy of immigration control is likely only to produce more of the same unintended consequences — not to construct an effective deterrent to illegal migration or greater economic recovery and growth in the United States.