

**MIGRANTS AND SETTLERS: A COMPARISON OF UNDOCUMENTED
MEXICAN AND CENTRAL AMERICANS IN THE UNITED
STATES**

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses empirical data to explore such questions as: How do Mexicans and Central Americans compare in their experience of the migration process? Is the process of settlement in the United States similar for both groups? And, what role do women play in these processes?

Central Americans often cite political motives for leaving their homelands. Mexicans, as suspected, were overwhelmingly motivated by economic factors. Both men and women articulated their reasons for leaving home and community, and both Mexican and Central American women were active agents in the migration process. Central Americans were, also more likely than Mexicans to have been informed of their legal rights by U.S. authorities. The informal sector, particularly gardening and landscaping for men and household-related labor for women, was an area of employment for large proportions of both groups. Mexicans were more likely than Central Americans to have their spouses and children in the United States and to indicate they intend to stay in the United States permanently. Central Americans, who often gave political reasons for migrating, were less positive than Mexicans that they were going to stay permanently in the United States and more likely to indicate that return depended on political and economic changes in the place of origin.

The study was carried out in San Diego, California and Dallas, Texas, using a "snow-ball", sampling method. The 296 interviews were evenly divided between Mexicans and Central Americans.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se analiza la información recabada en investigación de campo con el fin de contestar a preguntas tales como: ¿qué semejanzas existen entre mexicanos y centroamericanos en cuanto a su experiencia migratoria? ¿será similar para ambos grupos el proceso de establecimiento en Estados Unidos? ¿qué papel juegan las mujeres en estos procesos?

El estudio se realizó en las ciudades de San Diego, California y Dallas, Texas, utilizando el método de muestreo denominado "bola de nieve". Las 296 entrevistas realizadas fueron divididas por igual entre mexicanos y centroamericanos.

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Entre otros datos las entrevistas revelaron que mientras que los centroamericanos, en forma repetida, identificaron las razones políticas como el motivo por el cual abandonaron su lugar de origen, los mexicanos en su amplia mayoría, fueron motivados por razones de índole económica. Las mujeres de ambos grupos son elementos activos en el proceso migratorio y ellas al igual que los hombres, expusieron sus motivos para emigrar. En el terreno legal, fueron los centroamericanos quienes con mayor frecuencia manifestaron haber sido informados de sus derechos por parte de las autoridades migratorias de Estados Unidos.

Al hablar del empleo, la jardinería de ornato para los hombres y el trabajo doméstico para las mujeres, dentro del sector informal, fueron los renglones en los que la amplia mayoría de estos dos grupos se ubicaron.

En referencia a la familia, los mexicanos mostraron una mayor tendencia a tener a esposa e hijos en Estados Unidos y expresaron su intención de residir en forma definitiva en ese país. Los centroamericanos a pesar de haber mencionado con frecuencia razones políticas para emigrar, se mostraron menos decididos que los mexicanos a permanecer indefinidamente en aquel país y por lo general, dijeron que el regreso a su tierra dependería de los cambios políticos y económicos que se produjeran en ella.

MEXICANS have been migrating to U.S. territory since the middle of the nineteenth century. (Álvarez 1986.) For the most part (except during the Mexican Revolution) they have migrated for economic reasons, sometimes through government-sponsored labor contract programs. This migration has brought individuals, families, and sometimes whole communities in Mexico into what has been termed an international labor market (Álvarez 1986; Bustamante 1983). The majority of Mexican migrants stay in the United States for relatively short period of time, yet a significant proportion have stayed and settled there, contributing to the rapidly growing population of Americans of Mexican descent (Chávez 1988, Massey et al.1987).

In contrast, large numbers of Central Americans have migrated only recently to the United States. Among Central Americans, Salvadorans are the most numerous with as many as 850,000 in the United States in 1985 (Ruggles and Fix 1985), However, there are also growing numbers of migrants from Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The increased Central American migration is often associated with the widespread political and economic instability resulting from civil wars in the region in the late 1970s (Rodríguez 1987).

These migratory movements and experiences have been studied with varying intensity. Research on Mexican migration has increased greatly over the past fifteen years, with studies covering a variety of societal and international dimensions (see Massey *et al.* 1987; Chávez 1986; McCarthy and Valdez 1986; Portes and Bach 1985; Muller and Espenshade 1985; Flores 1984; Samora 1971). Central American migration, on the other hand, has received much less attention (Rodríguez 1987; Kritz 1983). Recently, a number of scholars have begun to compare the economic and political migrations of Mexicans and Cubans, or Mexicans and Indochinese for example (Rumbaut and Chávez *et al.* 1988; Porters and Bach 1985; Pedraza Bailey 1985). However, there has been very little of empirical research comparing Mexican and Central American migration to the United States.

The role of women in the migration and settlement of immigrant groups has been important, but often overlooked until recently (Simon and Brettel 1986) The literature on migration has ignored women as consequential actors in the migration process. Inquiring into the reasons for the lack of research on female immigration, Kossoudji and Ranney reported that some experts in the field have depicted the migration of Mexican women as insignificant in both number and purpose —i.e., family reunification (Kossoudji and Ranney 1984:1120). However, an estimate of the undocumented population in the United States, based on the 1980 Census, indicated that nearly half of all illegal migration to the United States from throughout the world has been female (Sassen-Koob 1984:1156).

The objective of this paper is to examine empirical data which will contribute, to answering a number of questions left unanswered in the literature: How do Mexicans and Central Americans compare in their experience of the migration process? Is settlement in the United States a similar process for both groups? AND what role do women play in these processes? These questions are Important For Policy Concerns as well as for academic interests. We will conclude with the implications of the implementation of the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

Methodology

The study was designed to compare the behavior, experiences, and perceptions of undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans. It was carried out San Diego, California and Dallas, Texas, two cities of similar size and ethnic composition that are points of destination for undocumented immigrants. Dr. Chávez coordinated the interviews in the San Diego area, and Drs. Flores and Lopez-Garza coordinated the interviews in the Dallas area.

Interviews were conducted between June and September 1986. A target of 300 interviews in each area was set, with interviews to be evenly divided between Mexicans and Central Americans. Interviews averaged an hour and fifteen minutes. (It should be noted here that these interviews were conducted prior to President Reagan's signing of the Simpson-Rodino immigration bill into law on 6 November 1986.)

A random sampling methodology was not utilized due to a number of obstacles to such a methodology in a population of undocumented immigrants. One difficulty is that the members of the population to be sampled are not known beforehand. Another is that many undocumented immigrants will refuse to be interviewed at home without having received assurances about the interviewer's motives from a relative or friend. Faced with such obstacles, the study used a "snowball" sampling method (Cornelius 1981). The researchers made several contacts with social and religious agencies serving the Latino immigrant population and with immigrants themselves. Initial interviewees were then asked to introduce us to friends and relatives. Thus, the immigrants' own kinship and friendship networks served as the basis for finding interviewees. In Dallas, however, churches and legal assistance organizations facilitated the interviewing of parishioners and clients in far greater numbers than interviewees contacted through the snowball method.

The snowball sampling methodology tends to produce a sample with different characteristics from what might be expected using a random sample. It results in a larger proportion of individuals with more developed social networks and longer periods of residence in the United States. This bias is reflected in the data on residence presented below. This inherent bias in the design was not viewed as a detriment, however, as one of the key objectives of this research is to examine the factors leading to settlement, or at least long-term residence, in the United States. We were, therefore, more interested in obtaining a sample of undocumented immigrants with established residence in the United States than of recent, and possibly temporary, migrants.

Our original intention was to interview only undocumented immigrants who had been in the United States for three years or more. However, our initial contacts and interviews revealed that while this criterion would not appreciably deter us from finding Mexicans to interview, it would eliminate many Central Americans from consideration. Consequently, we reduced the residence criterion to one-and a half-years.

San Diego and Diego: An Overview

San Diego has a diverse population that includes blacks, Asians, Chicanos or Mexican Americans, and immigrants from a number of other countries. According to the 1980 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1984, 6-1206), more than a quarter of the county's 1.8 million inhabitants are minorities or nonwhites. Hispanics, as defined by the U.S. Census, are the largest group (14.8 percent). Given San Diego's proximity to Mexico, it is not surprising that persons of Mexican origin form its largest single group among Hispanics, accounting for 12 percent of the population of San Diego County.

Approximately fifty thousand undocumented immigrants were counted in San Diego County in the 1980 Census, of which about thirty-four thousand (68 percent) were from Mexico (Passel 1985,18). According to one assessment of the data on undocumented Mexicans in San Diego County, enumerators for the 1980 Census did an exceptional job of seeking out undocumented immigrants, even farmworkers living without housing in remote and isolated canyons adjacent to farm properties (Nalven 1986). Consequently, the Census Bureau's estimate reflects the most reasonable and accurate estimate to date of undocumented immigrants in San Diego.

The greater metropolitan area of Dallas County, with approximately 1.5 million inhabitants, is similar in size to San Diego County. Over 10 percent of the population of Dallas County is Latino, and 92 percent of the Latinos are of Mexican origin. As to the proportion of the Dallas population that is undocumented, researchers have estimated, based on the 1980 U.S. Census, that the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area had about 44 000 undocumented persons. Of that number, about 32 000 were born in Mexico (Passel and Woodrow 1984).

The Interviewees

Table 1 presents the basic sociodemographic characteristics of the Mexicans and Central Americans in the sample. The 296 Central American interviewees came from a number of countries in the region (table 1): El Salvador (61.6 percent), Guatemala (19.7 percent), Honduras (10.2 percent), Nicaragua (7.1 percent), and Costa Rica (1.4 percent). By combining Central Americans from different countries into one category, this paper glosses over important differences in national origin and local cultural beliefs and behaviors among Central Americans (Rodríguez 1987)

Approximately 40 percent of our total respondents were women. Fifty-nine percent (N = 138) of the 232 women interviewed in the study were from Mexico, and 41 percent (N = 94) were from Central American countries. A majority of Central American women interviewees (62.8 percent) were from El Salvador. The remaining women interviewees from Central America had migrated from Guatemala (17 percent), Honduras (9.6 percent), Nicaragua (6.4 percent), and Costa Rica (4.3 percent).

A higher proportion of Mexican women were interviewed than Central American women. Part of the reason for this is that there were substantially more males than females living in the households headed by Central Americans.

Interviewees were generally in their early thirties, with little difference between Mexicans and Central Americans or between men and women (table 2). Since

we were selecting for a more settled population the median age among our interviewees is higher than what might be expected for undocumented immigrants, who tend to be in their twenties (Cornelius, Chávez, and Castro 1982). However, research on undocumented immigrants in Houston found a median age similar to that of our interviewees (Flores 1984).

Although both Mexican and Central American interviewees can be characterized as relatively recent arrivals, a major difference between the two groups of undocumented immigrants surfaces when length of residence in the United States is examined. The median length of U.S. residence for Mexican interviewees (seven years) is over the median for Central American interviewees (three years). This length of residence corresponds to regional migration patterns. Mexican migration has been virtually continuous for over a century. In contrast, significant levels of Central American migration did not begin until after 1979.

The Central Americans in our sample were slightly better educated than the Mexicans, with a mean of 7.1 years of schooling for the Central Americans and 6.1 for the Mexicans. Men and women interviewees differed little with regard to levels of educational achievement, though women achieved slightly higher levels than men. As a consequence of different education levels, slightly more Central Americans than Mexicans were able to read and write Spanish. For both groups, at least 90 percent of interviewees were literate in Spanish.

Competency levels drop off for English. As table 2 indicates, only about 40 percent of both groups indicated that they could speak English, with Mexicans responding affirmatively slightly more often than Central Americans. The proportions for reading English drop off slightly for both groups. Interestingly, about half the respondents in both groups indicated they had taken an English class since arriving in the United States, more than those who indicated that they speak English. By way of partial explanation for this discrepancy, many interviewees said that they had little opportunity to practice English, especially at their place of work, where the majority of people with whom they worked spoke Spanish.

Motivations for Migration

In their work on Central American refugees, Chinchilla, Jamail, and Rodríguez noted three basic reasons for migration: economic improvement; political (including direct threats to the individual, persecution of an organization with which the individual is affiliated, and flight from areas where random killings are taking place); and reasons related to political conflict, which include flight from the military draft and safety of children (Chinchilla *et al.* n.d, 15; Rodríguez 1987,23). The data also indicate multiple reasons for migration among Central American interviewees, in contrast to Mexican interviewees who come primarily for economic reasons. Mexicans and Central Americans view the reasons for their migration to the United States as stemming from a number of personal, economic, and politically-related factors. Respondents were asked an open-ended question, "Why did you decide to come the first time to the United States?" We registered over twenty-six different responses. We collapsed the responses into three major (and one

residual) categories: familial, economic, political, and other (table 3). The fourth category, "other," includes those few migrants who asserted that they came to the United States chiefly for adventure, tourism, or to attend school.

Mexican and Central American interviewees differed significantly in their motivation for migrating to the United States. While Mexican migration is, and has been for most of this century, essentially a labor migration, a large proportion of our Central American respondents migrated for political reasons.

As table 3 shows, a substantial number of undocumented women, particularly Mexican women, come to the United States for familial reasons. Some women followed their husbands or parents, or came to assist the members of an extended family. Further examples of the reasons for familial migration include the family's need for someone to be at home to care for an elderly relative or children while the other adults work outside the home. Of the four groups of respondents represented in table 3, Mexican women were most likely to have migrated for familial reasons (36.9 percent), followed by Central American women (32.2 percent). Comparatively few Mexican (11.5 percent) or Central American (8.5 percent) males cited familial motives for migrating.

Among Mexican and Central American men and women, Mexican men were the most likely to cite economic motivations for migrating to the United States. Moreover, despite the relatively high proportion of women migrating for familial reasons, a significantly higher proportion of Mexican women gave economic motivations than any other reason for migration. Almost half of the Mexican women in the study journeyed to the United States in search of work because they were unable to find employment in their country of origin, or because their income there was insufficient to sustain their families.

The data indicate that women's motivations for migration are more complex than the literature would lead one to believe. Many Mexican women migrate for familial considerations, in keeping with the responsibilities placed on females in the daily care and upkeep of their families. These are responsibilities generally not expected of nor performed by males. However, women also migrate for nonfamilial reasons. As mentioned above, many are driven by economic considerations; moreover, a significant number of Central American women cited political reasons for migrating to the United States. This category includes escaping conflict, fear of death due to threats to their lives, and fleeing persecution by authorities.

About one-fourth of the Central American women in our study cited economic reasons for migrating to the United States. Motives related to economic problems, however, may not be completely independent of the region's political strife.

These data help expand our understanding of the factors leading to migration, especially for women. Kossoudji and Ranney (1984) argue that women who come to the United States have been characterized in the academic literature as strappy accompanying male family members (e.g., fathers and husbands, the "primary" migrants) in the migration process. Female migration in this characterization is typically "secondary" and is not motivated by a decision made by the women themselves. Rather, women are seen as migrating fundamentally for the purpose of family reunification. Elsa Chaney coined the term "sack of potatoes" for this view of women in migration (Chaney 1982,9), that sees female migration basically

as a process of family reunification, wherein women are merely moved from one location to another without regard for their feelings or opinions.

More recent studies provide an alternative view of migrant women (Morokvasic 1984; Simon and Brettel 1986). The data presented in our work support this emerging perspective of female immigration. Some of the women we interviewed migrated for familial considerations, but others migrated for economic and, in the case of Central Americans, political reasons.

Migration and Apprehension Experiences

There were significant differences in the migration and apprehension experiences of Mexican and Central American interviewees (table 4). A large majority of Central Americans (70.6 percent) were on their first migration to the United States, compared to less than half of the Mexicans (48.0 percent). Over 30 percent of the Mexicans had experienced more than two migrations, compared to only a tenth of the Central Americans. Fewer Mexicans (45.0 percent) than Central Americans (68.5 percent) paid a smuggler (*coyote*) to bring them across the border. In short, Mexican interviewees were much more experienced migrants, with more migratory experiences and greater knowledge of the border than their Central American counterparts.

More than half of both Mexicans and Central Americans were successful in eluding the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and had never been apprehended in the United States. However, Central Americans were less likely than Mexicans to have been apprehended at least once, which may be related to their greater use of a smuggler on their most recent (and for most, only) migration. Since most INS apprehensions occur at the border, and since Mexicans crossed the border more often, they were more likely to be apprehended.

Of those apprehended, twice as many Central Americans than Mexicans claimed that they were informed of their rights by INS or Border Patrol officers: two-thirds of the Central American interviewees indicated that they were informed of their right to a court hearing before an immigration judge. Importantly, similarly low proportions of both groups said they knew their rights before detention by the authorities. Part of this difference may be due to the Mexican detainee's willingness to sign a voluntary departure form for a quick return to Mexico, in order to make a new attempt to cross the border. Central Americans may not be so willing to voluntarily return to their country of origin, both out of fear of physical harm from reprisals and because of the distance and the cost of undertaking a return trip.

Labor Market Experiences

Once in the United States, undocumented immigrants must earn a living. The types of jobs available to them depend on the opportunity structure (the labor market) in the places where they settle.

In *Birds of Passage*, Piore (1979) examined the structure of the labor market in the United States and found that immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, were relegated to jobs in the secondary sector. In contrast to primary sector jobs, which are well paid and offer advancement, benefits, and relative security jobs in the secondary sector typically offer low wages for seasonal, often temporary employment with little opportunity for advancement and few benefits, rarely providing medical insurance, paid vacations, or retirement plans. According to Portes and Bach (1985), firms which employ a large proportion of immigrants in secondary sector jobs must do so to remain competitive with other, low-capitalized, often marginal industries, or with foreign manufacturers.

More recently, research on the participation of immigrants in the U.S. labor market has shown that a dual labor market approach is too limited (Piore 1987; Porton and Bach 1985). In addition to the primary and secondary sectors, immigrants often work in the informal sector of the economy. They take jobs on an ad hoc basis, offering their work directly to an employer on a per-job basis with no formed contractual arrangement. Workers in the informal sector typically are paid in cash and move from job to job (Portes and Sassen Koob 1988; Chávez 1988, 1986). In addition, the ethnic enclave offers immigrants employment opportunities that are substantially different from employment in the secondary sector (Portes and Bach 1985).

Interviewees in our sample participated in their local economies in keeping with the structure of opportunities outlined above. As reflected in table 5, practically all the men (more than 95 percent) and most of the women interviewees were employed at the time of the interview. Sixty-four percent of the Mexican women and 88 percent of the Central American women were participating in the U.S. labor market. This is a much higher participation rate than the 54 percent rate for the general population of working-age women in the United States. (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1987,375).

The finding of an exceptionally high level of participation in the labor market for Central American women bears further examination. The recentness of their arrival in the United States and the conditions under which many fled their countries of origin means that work is an immediate economic necessity for many Central American women. In contrast, the Mexican women interviewed had been in the United States longer, with a relatively higher proportion indicating they were housewives. It is important to note that women who stay in the home occasionally earn money from babysitting, housecleaning, and other informal work arrangements.

The most important area of employment for all interviewees was the service sector, followed by commerce, manufacturing, and construction. Compared to Mexicans, very few Central Americans worked in agriculture. Within these broad areas there are observable differences in employment between Mexican and Central American interviewees, as well as between men and women.

About four out of ten interviewees in both groups worked in services. Many men worked servicing automobiles, as gardeners, and in landscaping. This type of work often operates under informal agreements, sometimes on a day-to-day basis, and kinship ties are important in this area. Recent arrivals often find work in gardening

with relatives, typically brothers, brothers-in-law, or cousins. Since this line of work offers limited income and mobility, workers eventually tend to start their own gardening routes or move into other areas of employment. Migrants who work for relatives and then strike out on their own as gardeners reflect, to a certain degree, employment patterns characteristic of ethnic enclave behavior (Portes and Bach 1985). Women in service sector jobs worked as maids in hotels-motels, in private homes as housecleaners, as live-in maids, and in childcare.

One of the major disadvantages of working in the informal sector is that the employee has little protection from unscrupulous employers. Day-laborers who wait on street corners to be picked up for work on an ad hoc basis are easy prey for their temporary employers, who may decide to pay them less than an agreed-upon daily wage, or even not to pay them at all. Immigrants who engage in domestic work under informal arrangements take similar risks, as illustrated by the case of Alfonso and Leticia Ruiz. The Ruizes left Central America and migrated to California, where they found work as a live-in maid and gardener in a private home in La Jolla. They worked for three months without being paid. When it became clear that promises of an eventual payday would never be kept, they quit and sought help from a local social service agency. They have written off their lost wages as a bad experience.

Many interviewees worked in the commerce sector. Restaurants offered a variety of jobs in this area, ranging from jobs that required little skill, such as busboy and dishwasher, to increasingly skilled jobs such as cook's helper, waiter/waitress, cook, and hostess. Men, in particular, worked in restaurants. About equal percentages of Mexican and Central American women worked in offices as secretaries and in other general office work.

Manufacturing was another important sector of employment for interviewees. Some interviewees were able to acquire skilled factory work, but few had risen to the level of supervisor. Central American women were more likely than Mexican women to be working in the garment industry, a phenomenon which once again is related to their relatively recent arrival to the United States.

Relation to Country of Origin

A number of interrelated questions help us gauge the extent of immigrants' relationships to their countries of origin. This in turn helps us to understand the factors influencing undocumented immigrants' return to their countries of origin or continued living in the United States. It has been suggested that a spouse and/or children in the country of origin provides an important social linkage for migrants (Chávez 1988, 1986; Massey *et al.* 1987).

Mexicans and Central Americans in our sample differed significantly with regard to immediate family in their countries of origin (table 6). More than half of the Central Americans had a spouse and/or children in their countries of origin, compared to slightly more than a quarter of the Mexican immigrants. In addition, more than twice as many Central Americans than Mexicans were likely to have children in their countries of origin. These results suggest that many Mexican

Interviewees were not married when they migrated and that others have had time to bring their spouses and children to the United States. The pattern for Central Americans may be related to the expedience of a politically motivated migration and the fact that a majority of the Central Americans are on an initial, exploratory migration to the United States, a journey perhaps best undertaken by adults.

Remittances provide another indicator of immigrants' ties to their countries of origin (table 6). A majority of both Mexicans and Central Americans remit money to relatives "back home," although Central Americans were more likely to do so. The Mexican and Central American interviewees who remitted indicated they sent a median of \$100 and \$130 a month, respectively, in the three months before the interview took place.

These findings indicate differences in the strength of the ties binding Mexican and Central American interviewees to their places of origin. These differences are further evident in responses to questions concerning residence intentions.

U.S. Residence

Table 7 presents responses to a number of questions concerning the interviewees' views about returning to their country of origin, their principal home, and future U.S. residence. The first question examined is, "Do you think you will return to Mexico (El Salvador, etc.) to live permanently?". Among more recent arrivals, those with less than five years U.S. residence, similar proportions of both Mexicans (59.6 percent) and Central Americans (58.3 percent) indicated that they intend to return to their homelands to live permanently. In both groups, about one in three respondents did not intend to return.

The proportion who indicated "No, they did not intend to return" increased over time for both groups, although Mexicans accounted for the most dramatic increase. Central Americans (46.2 percent) with five or more years in the United States were much less likely to rule out returning than Mexicans (73.9 percent) in that category. Among long-term, undocumented Mexican residents, women were somewhat more likely than men to be against returning. Among their Central American counterparts, women were much more likely than men to be sure about returning to their homelands.

Interviewees gave similar responses to the question, "Where do you consider your principal household to be?" A majority of interviewees with less time in the United States cited their place of origin, with little difference between Mexicans and Central Americans or between men and women. Importantly, four out of ten individuals in both groups cited the United States as the location of their principal household. With longer time of residence in the United States, 80 percent or more of both Mexican and Central American interviewees with little difference by gender, identified the United States as the location of their principal household.

In order to help explain this shift in sentiment toward such a fundamental institution as the household, we asked the open-ended question, "Why do you believe your principal household is in the United States?" For Mexican interviewees, economic conditions back home were cited by 10 percent of the men with less

than five years in the United States, but this reason became unimportant among men with longer residence (table 7). In contrast, the proportion of Central American men and women citing political unrest back home as an important factor increased with longer residence.

For male and female Mexican interviewees, a large shift occurred in the reasons given for the United States being perceived as the location of their principal household. The response, "because my family is here" became more important as interviewees resided longer in the United States. Central American men and women cited this reason most frequently, with little change occurring with longer residence. The formation of a family, either by having children in the United States or bringing family from the country of origin, influences the perception of rootedness of where one is committed to being and, presumably, staying. Related to this is the second most important response focusing on work and the ability to provide better conditions for the family.

Interviewees were asked directly, "Do you now intend to live permanently in the United States?" Responses often did not fit neatly into a yes or no category, and so an open-ended response category was included that allowed the respondents to give qualified responses such as "it depends on..." The responses to this question are summarized in table 8.

About the same proportion of Mexican (40.0 percent) and Central American (38.6 percent) interviewees with less time in the United States indicated they intended to stay permanently, with women more likely than men to give an emphatic "Yes." Although a minority response, this indicates that many undocumented immigrants with less than five years' residence intend to stay in the United States beyond a brief, temporary period. The proportion of interviewees who indicated they intend to stay permanently increases with longer residence in both groups, once again with Mexicans accounting for the largest proportional change.

For others, staying permanently in the United States depended on some other factor. Acquiring immigration papers was a condition for 7.4 percent of Mexicans and 13.6 percent of Central Americans with less than five years U.S. residence. This condition remained the same for Mexicans with longer residence, but lessened among the Central Americans. Adequate work is a condition influencing residence for Mexicans with less time in the United States, but one that becomes less important with longer residence; work is not a condition for Central Americans at all. For Central Americans, economic and political changes in the country of origin are strong conditions influencing possible settlement in the United States, but they become less important over time. Mexicans did not indicate that conditions back home were an influence on their residence intentions.

Conclusions

Undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans differ in their experiences of the migration process. Central Americans often cited political reasons as the motive for leaving their homeland. Mexicans, as suspected, were overwhelmingly motivated by economic reasons. But even among Central Americans economic motives play

an important role in migration. This suggests two possible explanations. One is that these responses illustrate the difference between the genesis of a migrant stream and the continuation of that migration. Thus, the first individuals migrating from a Central American country may have been motivated by political reasons, while subsequent migrants may have left to join the original migrants for more economic reasons (e.g., the possibility of obtaining a job through intervention by one of the original migrants). A second explanation for the large proportion of economic motives cited by Central Americans is that the local economy is disastrously affected as a region becomes engulfed in warfare. Migrants may cite immediate economic realities as the motive for migration, but such circumstances are tied directly to political causes. Of course, both of these reasons may be operating simultaneously.

Women, like men, articulated their reasons for leaving home and community. They were not merely passive passengers on the trail north. Both Mexican and Central American women were active agents in the migration process.

Mexicans and Central Americans differed significantly in their experiences in crossing the U.S.-Mexican border. Central Americans were more likely than Mexicans to use *coyotes*, or smugglers, and were less likely to be detained by the Border Patrol. Central Americans were also more likely than Mexicans to have been informed of their legal rights by U.S. authorities.

Unlike Mexicans, few Central Americans worked in agriculture. However, many in both groups occupied low-paying jobs in the service sector and in restaurants. The informal sector, particularly gardening and landscaping for men and household related labor for women, was an area of employment for large proportions of both groups. Both Mexican and Central American women were much more likely to be in the informal sector than men, a reflection of their relatively more disadvantaged economic position.

Many of the differences between undocumented Mexican and Central American interviewees with regard to settlement can be attributed to the longer periods of time the Mexican interviewees have been in the United States. Mexican interviewees were generally further along in a process of long-term settlement and consequently tended to view themselves as settlers, especially those with five years or more of U.S. residence. Attesting to this is that Mexicans were more likely than Central Americans to have their spouses and children in the United States to indicate they intend to stay permanently in the United States.

However, motivations for migration also affect the immigrants' perceptions of themselves as settlers. Central Americans, who often gave political reasons for migrating, were less positive than Mexicans that they were going to stay permanently in the United States and more likely to indicate that return home depends on political and economic changes in the place of origin.

Only our interviewees with five years or more of U.S. residence would qualify for amnesty under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

Our data indicate that a relatively large group of individuals have not been in the United States long enough to qualify for the legalization program but do not view themselves as return migrants. This indicates that a large proportion of individuals who came after the cutoff date for the legalization program may have already established, or at least perceive that they have established, stronger ties to households in the United States than in their places of origin.

Reflections on interviewees' situations in relation to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 indicate that undocumented immigrants will continue to live in the United States. The data suggest that many of the interviewees will not willingly return to their country of origin, regardless of their lack of participation (either by choice or by exclusion) in the legalization program. Other considerations, such as the possibility of continued U.S. employment, family attachment to life in the United States, and economic and political conditions in the country of origin also influence the interviewees' decision to continue residing in the United States.

TABLE 1**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN BY SEX
FOR UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS**

Country of Origin	Men (N=360) %	Women (N=232) %	Total (N=592) %
México	44.4	59.5	50.3
El Salvador	33.9	25.4	30.6
Guatemala	11.7	6.9	9.8
Honduras	5.8	3.9	5.1
Nicaragua	4.2	2.6	3.5
Costa Rica	0.0	1.7	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 2

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS BY SEX

	Mexican (N=300)		Central American (N=296)	
	Men (53.7%)	Women (46.3%)	Men (68.0%)	Women (32.0%)
		Total (100%)		Total (100%)
Median Age	33.0	31.0	33.0	32.0
Median Years in U.S.	6.0	7.0	3.0	3.0
Mean Years of School in Country of Origin	6.1	6.1	7.1	7.4
% Read Spanish	90.4	90.6	96.0	97.9
% Write Spanish	89.3	90.6	96.0	94.7
% Speak English	44.8	43.7	40.7	44.6
% Read English	38.9	40.4	35.4	42.6
% Taken English Classes	51.3	53.0	52.8	55.9
		52.1		54.6

TABLE 3

**REASONS FOR MIGRATION
FOR UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS BY SEX**

Motivations for Migration	Mexican		Central American	
	Men N=156 %	Women N=129 %	Men N=195 %	Women N=90 %
Familial motives				
Spouse brought	0.0	10.1	0.5	8.9
Parents brought	3.2	12.4	1.5	7.8
Babysit	0.0	3.9	1.0	3.3
Other family	9.0	11.6	4.6	10.0
Total familial motives	12.2	38.0	7.7	30.0
Economic motives				
Unemployed	12.8	9.3	5.1	2.2
Underemployed	3.8	7.0	4.6	7.8
Low wages	18.6	9.3	7.7	3.3
High wages in U.S.	12.2	10.1	8.2	6.7
Help parents	1.9	4.7	1.5	2.2
Other economic motives	9.0	2.3	4.6	0.0
Total economic motives	59.0	42.6	31.8	22.2
Political motives				
Escape personal conflicts, threats	0.0	0.0	4.1	1.1
Escape political conflicts, civil war	0.0	0.0	37.9	34.4
Escape threats from political/government organizations	0.0	0.0	4.1	2.2
Total political motives	0.0	0.0	46.2	37.8
Other				
Curiosity/adventure	9.6	2.3	3.1	1.1
For a better life	5.1	4.7	4.1	1.1
Study	1.9	1.6	0.5	2.2
Other	12.2	10.9	6.7	5.6
Total other	28.8	19.4	14.4	10.0
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.1*	100.0

* Error due to rounding off.

TABLE 4

**MIGRATION AND APPREHENSION EXPERIENCES
FOR UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS**

	Mexicans %	Central Americans %	X ² Sig. Level
Migration Experience	N=269	N=282	>0.001
On First Migration	48.0%	70.6%	
On Second Migration	20.4	18.8	
More Than Two Migrations	31.6	10.6	
Paid Smuggler			
Last Migration	N=269	N=257	>0.001
Yes, Paid	45.0%	68.5	
Apprehension Experience	N=283	N=271	>0.17 n.s.
Never Apprehended	54.4%	64.2%	
Apprehended One Time	20.8	19.6	
Apprehended Two or More Times	24.8	16.2	
Of Those Apprehended	N=108	N=78	
Informed of Rights by INS	33.3	60.3	>0.001
Told of Right to Court Hearing	32.1	65.4	>0.001
Knew Rights before Detention by INS	18.8	14.6	n.s.

Waiter/waitress	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
General office	0.0	5.2	2.3	0.0	0.0	5.6	1.8	0.0
General commerce	0.7	0.0	0.4	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	0.0
Subtotal	17.9	15.7	17.0	21.8	22.5	22.0	22.0	0.0
Professions								
Teacher	0.0	2.6	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nurse	0.0	0.9	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Accountant	0.0	0.9	0.4	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Other	0.7	0.0	0.4	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Subtotal	0.7	4.3	2.3	2.1	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0
Inactive or infrequently active								
Housewife	0.0	18.3	7.9	0.0	4.5	1.4	1.4	0.0
Agend, retired, disabled	3.3	2.6	3.0	2.6	1.1	2.1	2.1	0.0
Student	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.0	1.1	0.4	0.4	0.0
Looking for work since arrival	0.0	1.7	0.8	1.6	0.0	1.1	1.1	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.0
Subtotal	4.0	23.3	12.5	4.7	6.7	5.3	5.3	0.0
Totals	100.1*	100.0	100.0	100.1*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 6**RELATIVES IN COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND REMITTANCES
FOR UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS**

	Mexicans %	Central Americans %
Relatives in Country of Origin	N=245	N=271
Children	14.7	32.5
Spouse	2.0	3.7
Children and Spouse	11.4	15.9
No Child or Spouse	71.8	48.0
Totals	99.9*	100.1*
Remittances to Relatives	N=258	N=278
Yes	65.0	82.9
No	35.0	17.1
Totals	100.0	100.0

* Error due to rounding off.

TABLE 7
RESIDENCE INTENTIONS BY SEX AND TIME
FOR UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS

	Mexicans						Central Americans					
	<5 yrs.			≥5 yrs.			<5 yrs.			≥5 yrs.		
	Men	Women	N	Men	Women	N	Men	Women	N	Men	Women	N
Return to origin permanently,												
% Yes	62.1	53.6	28	80	100	131	56.5	62.5	64	40.6	55.6	27
% No	31.8	42.9	20.0	70.0	77.0	29.0	35.7	35.7	46.9	46.9	44.4	44.4
% DK/depends	6.1	3.6	10.0	10.0	5.0	14.5	1.8	1.8	12.5	12.5	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.1*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Principal household,												
% in U.S.	46.3	41.4	29	81	97	129	40.3	46.0	64	81.3	80.0	25
% in origin	53.7	58.6	16.0	16.0	17.5	59.7	54.0	54.0	18.7	18.7	20.0	20.0
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Why U.S.												
I live here	23.3	18.2	10	68	81	51	11.8	10.0	35	5.7	0.0	9
Family here	13.3	36.4	27.9	30.9	42.0	35.3	31.4	31.4	28.6	2.9	11.1	55.6
Work and better conditions fam.	30.0	18.2	27.9	27.9	17.3	21.6	6.7	6.7	22.2	22.2	22.2	22.2
Content here	10.0	9.1	5.9	5.9	9.9	5.9	5.9	5.9	6.7	6.7	11.1	11.1
Political unrest in country of origin	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.7	3.3	3.3	17.1	17.1	11.1	11.1
Economic Problem in country of origin	10.0	0.0	1.5	1.5	6.2	2.0	0.0	0.0	5.7	5.7	0.0	0.0
Other	10.0	18.2	5.9	5.9	8.6	9.8	20.0	20.0	8.6	8.6	0.0	0.0
Totals	99.9*	100.1*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* Error due to rounding off.

TABLE 8
INTENTIONS TO REMAIN IN U.S. BY SEX
AND LENGTH OF RESIDENCE
FOR UNDOCUMENTED MEXICANS AND CENTRAL AMERICANS

	Mexicans				Central Americans			
	<5 yrs.		≥5 yrs.		<5 yrs.		≥5 yrs.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Intend to stay permanently in U.S. N=	65	30	80	96	124	60	64	28
% Yes	36.9	46.7	75.0	83.3	36.3	43.3	57.8	67.9
% No	43.1	33.3	10.0	6.3	26.6	33.3	21.9	14.3
% If get papers	9.2	3.3	8.8	6.3	14.5	11.7	4.7	7.1
% If find work	4.6	10.0	3.8	1.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
% Depends on economic change in origin	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.5	1.7	6.3	0.0
% Depends on political change in origin	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.7	8.3	3.1	3.6
% Other	6.2	6.7	2.5	3.1	4.0	1.7	6.3	7.1
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.1*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1*	100.0

* Error due to rounding off.

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