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*Bakalářská práce*

**Immigration to the U.S. Through the  
Mexican Perspective: Examining the Push  
Factors Before and after NAFTA**

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## **Anotace**

Mexiko je důležitým, ale opomíjeným aktérem v rámci severoamerického regionu. Mexiko a Spojené státy jsou spojeny mnohými pouty od ekonomiky přes politiku a historii, a jejich kooperace je nesmírně rozsáhlá. Mezi kritické otázky bilaterální spolupráce patří problém imigrace, který tato práce zkoumá z mexické perspektivy a rovněž sleduje tzv. push faktory, které tlačí Mexičany přes hranice. Tento pohled má za cíl rozšířit vnímání imigrační problematiky. Hlavní otázkou, kterou se budu zabývat, je proč NAFTA, neměla za důsledek snížení imigrace a proč mexická populace ve Spojených státech stále roste. Cílem není zkoumat zdali NAFTA byla nebo nebyla ekonomicky úspěšná, ale spíše představit důsledky NAFTA na imigrační problematiku. V této práci budu analyzovat ekonomické, politické, bezpečnostní a demografické důvody migrace. Také se poukážu na měnící se profil imigrantů, z hlediska jejich původu a délky pobytu v USA. Tento text by měl přispět k vyváženějšímu pohledu na imigraci do USA.

**Klíčová slova:** Imigrace, migrant, push faktory, NAFTA, Mexiko, Spojené Státy

## **Anotation**

Mexico had been overshadowed by the U.S. within the North American area even though it is an important actor in the region. It has close historical, political and economic bonds with the United States. Given the geographic proximity, one of the critical issues in the bilateral relationship is the question of immigration. I will look at immigration through the Mexican perspective and examine the push factors that drive generations of Mexicans across the northern border. My main goal is to introduce Mexico through a thorough investigation of the factors that push Mexican citizens to emigrate to the United States. The main problem I will discuss throughout this paper is the reasons why immigration hasn't decreased since 1994, when NAFTA had come into effect and why has there been an increase of the Mexican-born population in the U.S. The premise is not to analyze the economical successes or failures of NAFTA itself, but to introduce its impact on immigration. I will look into the political, demographic, security related and economical reasons for immigration as well as analyze immigration from the regional perspective, in order to demonstrate there has been a change in the migrant profile. Overall this paper should provide a more balanced perspective on the immigration issue to the U.S.

**Key words:** Immigration, migrant, push factors, NAFTA, Mexico, United States

## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedené prameny a literaturu. Současně dávám svolení k tomu, aby tato práce byla zpřístupněna v příslušné knihovně UK a prostřednictvím elektronické databáze vysokoškolských kvalifikačních prací v repozitáři Univerzity Karlovy a používána ke studijním účelům v souladu s autorským právem.

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## **Introduction**

Migration from Mexico to the U.S. is the most extensive in the world. Mexicans now account for 32% of all immigrants living in the United States.<sup>1</sup> No other country in the world has as many total immigrants as the United States has immigrants from Mexico alone. Therefore I believe it is not only interesting but necessary to examine this subject in order to understand the complex relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. There are numerous studies on the subject of Mexican immigration, but few which examine the push factors that cause them to leave their country in such vast numbers. The purpose of this paper is to provide a more balanced perspective on this fascinating issue, and examine it from the Mexican perspective.

I will examine the push factors that force Mexicans across the northern border, and the relationship between immigration and the NAFTA agreement. This will be accomplished by comparing push factors before and after NAFTA, and analyzing whether NAFTA has met the expectation that it would lower Mexican-U.S. immigration, and whether it was even designed to do so. I will also discuss the political and economic environment of Mexico in order to answer the main question of my research: Why has not immigration to the U.S. decreased since the implementation of NAFTA?

This question is relevant for a number of reasons. First, I see NAFTA as an economically important agreement, leading to the liberalization of trade in all three NAFTA countries, Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Nonetheless, only in Mexico can we see that the agreement went beyond the economic sphere and became a fundamentally important, policy-changing accord, accelerating the transformation of politics and society. NAFTA, by being a one of a kind agreement, fostered many expectations, especially in the United States and Mexico. For Mexico, NAFTA was seen as a blessing. It was expected to set a course toward modernization and to inject foreign

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<sup>1</sup> J. S. Passel, D.V. Cohn, *Mexican Immigrants: How Many Come? How Many Leave*, Pew Hispanic Center, 2008, available at: <http://pewhispanic.org>.

capital that would enable growth of the Mexican economy by facilitating the adoption of new technology, leading to greater efficiency.<sup>2</sup>

Second, aside from the economic opportunities, Mexico also saw a possible road to democratic transition, although the pressure for democratization came primarily from the American position. The United States, led by its exceptionalism ideology, believed it had a duty to create positive changes in Mexico, economic, political, and social.

Third, the somewhat disillusioned expectations of NAFTA led to the apprehension that NAFTA would stimulate migratory flows in Mexico and ultimately lead to the elimination of illegal immigration and an overall decline in Mexican migration into the United States. There have been remarkable changes in the migration culture in the past decade alone. Not only has the number of Mexicans in the U.S. increased, but it has reached new highs. It is necessary to explore the reasons for this change.

Although the NAFTA territory also includes Canada, which is undoubtedly an important part of North America, it is not a subject of my study for simple reasons. First, Canada and Mexico do not have a long, binding history, and have therefore never developed such an intense bilateral relationship. Second, compared to the number of Mexican migrants in the United States, the number of Mexicans residing in Canada is insignificant.

The objective of this paper is not to analyze the economic impact NAFTA has had on Mexico, but to determine its impact on immigration, as well as examine the reasons Mexicans migrate, including the role played by the U.S. demand for cheap labor. Would immigration to the U.S. be so high without the unspoken approval of U.S. companies? Did NAFTA have the means to prevent immigration in the first place? These are some of the questions I encountered during my research.

The origins of Mexican-U.S. migration can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this analysis will focus on the period which starts at the beginning of the 1980s, when Mexico began its economic and political transformation. The changes that took place in this time enabled it to enter into NAFTA and start down the road to

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<sup>2</sup> J.G. Castaneda: Can NAFTA Change Mexico?, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1993), p. 74, available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/49196/jorge-g-casta%C3%83%C2%B1eda/can-nafta-change-mexico>.

modernization. My aim is to write an up-to-date paper, therefore I will include research through 2008/2009, which is the latest period for which statistics are available.

This thesis is divided into four sections. The first chapter introduces the migration debate from both perspectives, and deals with most discussed aspects of immigration, the historical context, and the role of NAFTA in the immigration issue. Then the myths and expectations connected with NAFTA will be analyzed. Chapters two and three examine the situation in Mexico and analyze the push factors. Chapter two is dedicated to describing Mexico before NAFTA, whereas chapter three illustrates what happened in Mexico after the implementation of this agreement. My research has led me to the conclusion that the transformation processes of the 1980s, and to some extent NAFTA, have affected certain characteristics of Mexican migrants. The last chapter will therefore examine changes in these characteristics, particularly in the aspects of gender, status, and origin.

#### **Source analysis:**

When dealing with the issue of immigration, primary sources, such as statistics and governmental publications, play a key role in any comprehensive research. This paper relies on statistics from CONAPO, *Consejo Nacional de Poblacion*, which is a Mexican statistic agency dealing primarily with demography in Mexico, and INEGI, *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, for economic information. Two studies from the Pew Hispanic Center have also been of primary importance, the first conducted by Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, titled *Mexican Immigrants: How Many Come? How Many Leave*, and another, which was published as a fact sheet titled *Mexican Immigrants in the United States, 2008*. I have also made use of statistics from the Pew Research Center Project titled *Troubled by Crime, the Economy, Drugs and Corruption: Most Mexicans see better life in U.S.-One-in-Three Would Migrate*, as well as two bi-national studies conducted by the Mexican and U.S. governments, one published in 1998, the second in 2006.

Secondary sources for my research have included studies by leading experts such as Massey, Cornelius, Bustamante, Castaneda, Zenteno, and Durand. Many of these

studies contained analyses of the immigration problem, as well as information gathered directly in Mexican communities. I also had available a variety of publications concerning the Mexican-U.S. immigration issue. I would particularly like to cite the work of Jorge G. Castaneda, *Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*, which addresses the problems in Mexico, and the reasons so many Mexicans have chosen to leave and not come back. Castaneda was a minister of foreign affairs during the Fox administration, which enables him to provide a truly comprehensive background on the immigration issue. I would also like to draw attention to *NAFTA Revisited: Achievements and Challenges*, by G.C. Hufbauer and J.J.Schott, a book which is more economics-oriented, but which assesses to a great extent the achievements of the NAFTA agreement and the problems it faces. This book also contains a section dealing with immigration and its economic impact. It provides an excellent introduction to the NAFTA agreement.



## **1. The Immigration Debate**

The objective of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the immigration debate taking place on both sides of the border, by introducing three highly debated aspects of migration. I will present the basic factors that are relevant to the migration debate, provide a historical overview of Mexican-U.S. migration, and finally, analyze the NAFTA agreement as well as the expectations that it brought.

### **1.1 Aspects of Mexican Migration**

For over more than fifty years scholars on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border have been engaged in the ongoing immigration debate. Migration is a dynamic process with numerous variables, and conclusions drawn by different academics are often contradictory. The central question of the debate has always been the number of Mexicans actually crossing the northern border. On this key issue we can find diverse figures. The data available at INEGI and the U.S. Census Bureau are far from unanimous. One factor that could contribute to this disparity is the seasonal nature of Mexican migration. This is true especially in the years through the early 1990s, when the circularity of migration was cut off by strict law enforcement at the border.

There are many factors we can examine when dealing with U.S.-Mexico migration: class composition, age, gender or origin of U.S. migrants. It is also necessary to consider the legal status of the migrants, and the temporary or permanent nature of their migration. One of the most widely studied aspects of Mexican migration to the United States is the socioeconomic selectivity of migration.<sup>3</sup> Various studies had come to various conclusions. It is believed that migrants come from the lower middle sector of the income and wealth distribution.<sup>4</sup> This statement seems logical, since the very poor and the landless are often unable to cover the expenses of crossing the border. Conversely,

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<sup>3</sup> J. Durand, D.S. Massey: "Mexican Migration to the United States: A Critical Review", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1992), p. 14, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503748>.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Marcelli, W.A. Cornelius: "The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2001), p.118, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2692122>.

one can argue that a highly developed social network, built in the United States by previous migrants, substantially lowers the costs and risks, and make migration more available even to the very poor. One study has even suggested that class plays no role at all, and that over time migration became less class-selective and ultimately a mass movement.<sup>5</sup>

Within this movement we can find a great span of migrants of all ages, but generally we can conclude that people are more likely to migrate before or during their productive years. According to the study of Wayne Cornelius and Enrico Marcelli, *The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico*, continuity in the age profile of migrants can not be found. The percentage of Mexican migrants from the age of 12 to 18 varies, according to different studies, from 8.9 to 39% in years 1990-1992.<sup>6</sup> This demonstrates the leeway that exists among different statistics.

A well debated subject in immigration studies is the gender composition of migrants. The study of Durand, Massey and Zenteno<sup>7</sup> found that the prevailing category of migrants is male. In fact the proportion of males rose throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s to the present we can see a decline in the male migration. The female proportion of those seeking a better life in the North is now estimated to range from 35 to 45%, whereas 20 years ago the percentage of migrating women was not more than 20%.<sup>8</sup> The changing gender composition of migrants will be considered at length further on in this paper.

Migrants who arrived into the United States throughout the 1900s up to the 1980s were primarily from the four states of the central region of Mexico: Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato and Zacatecas. These states can be considered as historic or traditional

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<sup>5</sup> J. Durand, D.S. Massey: "Mexican Migration to the United States: A Critical Review", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1992), pp. 17-18, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503748>.

<sup>6</sup> E. A. Marcelli, W.A. Cornelius: "The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2001), p.116, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2692122>.

<sup>7</sup> Mexican Immigration to the United States: Continuities and Changes Author, published in *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2001).

<sup>8</sup> L. Alvarez, J.M. Broder.: "More and More Women Risk All to Enter U.S.", *NY Times*, January 10, 2006, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/national/10women.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/national/10women.html?_r=1&emc=eta1).

sending states.<sup>9</sup> From the 1980s we can see a shift away from migrants from these rural states to more migration from urban states. However, some argue that most migrants still come from rural states, either the countryside itself or from small towns that demographically qualify as urban, but in fact remain culturally and socially agriculture.<sup>10</sup> We can see another clear shift of the sending states after the implementation of NAFTA.

**Figure 1. Political Map of Mexico**



**Source:** Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, available at: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/mexico\\_pol97.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/mexico_pol97.jpg)

Within the immigration debate we also encounter a terminological dispute. Should we refer to illegal aliens, undocumented workers, or unauthorized workers? It depends on which side of the issue you are on. American conservatives prefer to work with the first term, while progressive Mexicans favor the second term. A bridge between the two sides, liberals from the north and realists from the south of the border choose to

<sup>9</sup> E. A. Marcelli, W.A. Cornelius: “The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico”, *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2001), p.117, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2692122>.

<sup>10</sup> J.G. Castaneda: *Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*, The New Press, NY, 2007, p. 44.

operate with the third term.<sup>11</sup> According to data available from the Pew Hispanic Research Center, there were 12.7 million Mexicans living in the United States in 2008. Of this large number, which is slightly more than 1/10 of the overall Mexican population, 55% of Mexicans living in the United States were unauthorized.<sup>12</sup>

There is great debate about the cause of this large influx of Mexican migrants. One possible explanation is the end of circularity in the migration movement. Before the 1990s and the existence of fences and walls along the border, migrants were free to come and go. Now, due to tougher border security, most Mexicans are choosing to settle down. The risk of being caught and deported while reentering the U.S. is now too high. We see this change in the mid 1980s and mid 1990s, when migration was no longer a seasonal event. Most migrants before the 1980s worked in the United States one or two seasons, and then returned to Mexico. Now they choose to stay. This has caused an increase of permanent Mexican settlers as well as a rise in the migration flow, as divided family members travel to reunite with their partners or other family members north of the border.

There have been numerous changes in every aspect of migration mentioned above. Existing views on the migration subject differ. The debate is led by various scholars on the American and Mexican sides. I would like to mention a few that have influenced my view and position on immigration. On the Mexican side, academics like Jorge A. Bustamante, Jorge Durand, Jorge G. Castañeda or Augustin Escobar have constructed a platform for a more than comprehensive immigration debate. I would also like to mention their colleagues on the American side, Douglas S. Massey, Wayne A. Cornelius and Jeffery S. Passel.

To understand immigration we must analyze the historical continuity of this dynamic process. The migration flow between Mexico and the United States is one of the most extensive in the world.

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<sup>11</sup> J.G. Castaneda: *Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*, The New Press, NY, 2007, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, *Fact Sheet: Mexican Immigrants in the United States, 2008*, available at: <http://pewhispanic.org>

## 1.2. Historical Context of Mexican-U.S. Immigration

Due to the historical background, economic interests and geographic proximity of the two countries, migration was, and by my opinion still is, natural. Mexicans moved freely across the border from the period from 1848 to 1929. This was a time without border patrol officers, modern sensor techniques or *coyotes*<sup>13</sup>, it was not illegal to cross the border without documents. To illustrate the freedom of movement, I would like to point out the fact that the only border patrol officer in 1893 in Texas was Leonidas B. Giles stationed in El Paso, who secured the border from the horse's back.<sup>14</sup>

With the Immigration Act of 1929 law enforcement began to toughen. This was a reaction to the economic hardship of the late 1920s and early 1930s. As a result, immigration from Mexico had dramatically curtailed. Additionally, on the Mexican side some of the policies had changed. During the 1930s Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas introduced and implemented the land reform program, known as the *Reparto Agrario*, distributing land from haciendas to *campesinos*<sup>15</sup>. This could have been a reason for the decline of immigration to the United States, although one can also argue that it might have been one of the push factors that forced Mexican migrants across the border due to the insufficient size of the land obtained, poor land quality, or the absence of capital.<sup>16</sup>

By the 1940s, immigration was being encouraged by the American Bracero program, which invited Mexican migrants to work in various labor sectors. This demand for workers was caused by the preoccupation of American citizens by the war.

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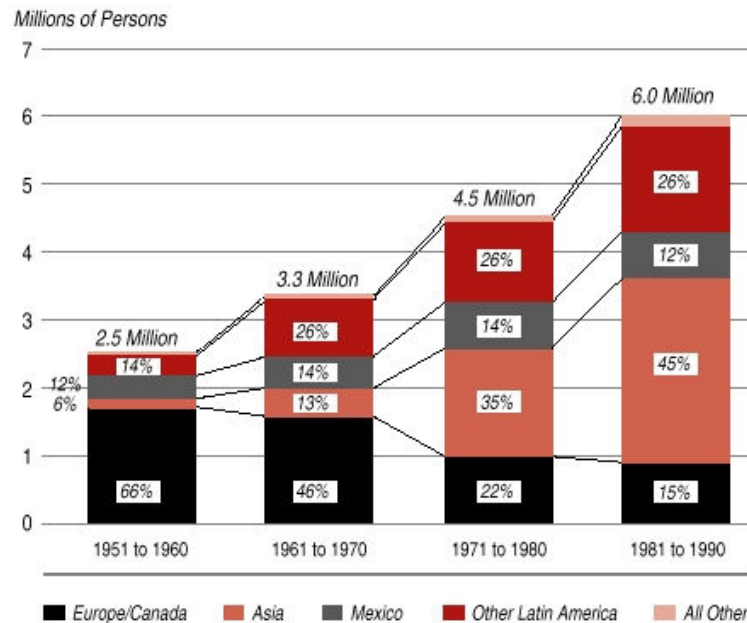
<sup>13</sup> *Coyotes* or *polleros* specialize in human smuggling, bringing people across the United States border from Mexico. Illegal border crossings are often extremely dangerous, and many coyotes command a high fee as a result; often, this fee must be paid up front, in case an immigrant does not make it across. The cost can come up to \$2500.

<sup>14</sup> T. Payan: *The Three U.S. – Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security*, Praeger Security International, London, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Campesinos* is a term referring to farmers, peasants with connotations of subsistence or simple farming that aims to survive rather than generate a profit.

<sup>16</sup> J. Durand, D.S. Massey: "Mexican Migration to the United States: A Critical Review", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1992), p. 29, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503748>.

**Figure 2. Legal Immigration to the U.S. by Country or Region, 1951-1960 to 1981-1990**



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service (1993).

Source: The Urban Institute, <http://www.urban.org/publications/305184.html#III>

During the Bracero program, which came into effect in 1943 and lasted until 1964, as many as 4 million Mexicans worked in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Within this period an estimated annual flow of Mexican migrants was as high as 200,000 thousand legal workers. This number was supplemented by another 150,000 illegal workers.<sup>18</sup> Some scholars, such as Julian Samora, the author of *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story*, suggest that by the end of the program, the number of *braceros* was about the same as the number of undocumented workers. The sum is only slightly lower than 2006. Thus the flow has not changed much, but from 1986 onward the stock began to rise substantially.<sup>19</sup> Of course we must take into account Mexico's population then and now.

<sup>17</sup> T. Payan: *The Three U.S. – Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security*, Praeger Security International, London, 2006, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> J.G. Castaneda: *Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*, The New Press, NY, 2007, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Jorge Castañeda mentions that the dramatic change in the nature of immigration-circularity had already begun with the end of the Bracero Program in 1964.<sup>20</sup> I am inclined to believe that a more significant reduction of circularity did not come until the 1990s, with the border actions that started in 1994, such as Operations Hold the Line, Gatekeeper and Safeguard.

Just one year after the termination of the Bracero Program, the Immigration Act of 1965 came into effect, regulating the total number of migrants, not only Mexican, by setting a cap of 120.000 persons per year. The demand for Mexican labor in American agriculture and services remained higher than the artificially set cap, causing a massive influx of illegal immigration. This increase was also supported by the complicated economic situation of the 1980s, which forced many Mexicans abroad.<sup>21</sup>

Until the beginning of the 1980s, immigration grew steadily but not excessively, even though Mexico experienced a population boom throughout the 1970s and an economic crisis in 1976. Both unauthorized and legal migration from Mexico has continued to grow during the past three decades. In particular, the size of the legal population in the U.S. increased dramatically during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in part due to the legalization provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).<sup>22</sup>

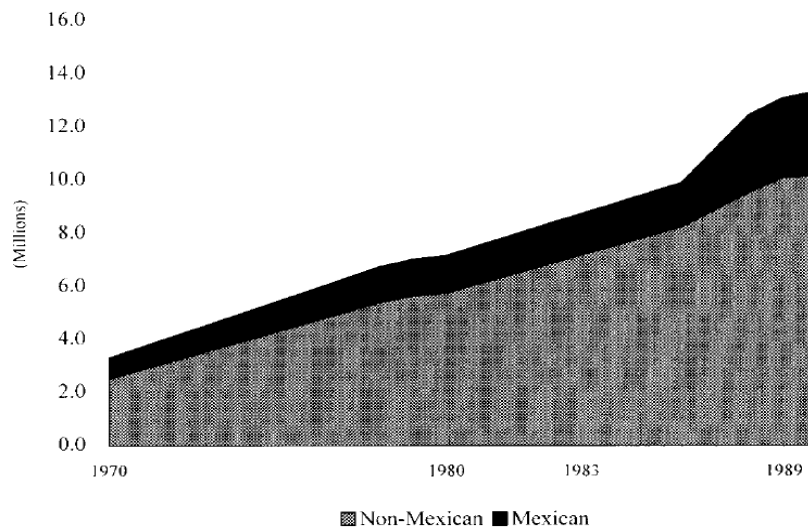
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<sup>20</sup> J.G. Castaneda: *Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants*, The New Press, NY, 2007, pp. 13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Kozák,K.: *Immigration From Mexico Since 1965 – Challenges for U.S. Policy*, 2008, p.8., available at: <http://instituty.fsv.cuni.cz/~kozak/>.

<sup>22</sup> Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study 1998, Vol. 1, p. 8 available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>.

**Figure 3. Legally Resident Foreign Born by Mexican Origin 1970-1990**



**Source:** Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study 1998, available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>

This Act is also known as the Simpson-Rodino Act, and was quite remarkable in its nature. It granted amnesty to nearly 3 million undocumented migrants already in the United States, most of them of Mexican origin.<sup>23</sup> Mexicans who were eligible to obtain permanent residency had to be working in the United States in the agriculture sector or had to be living in the United States prior to 1982. In figure 2, we can see the effect of IRCA on the migration flow from Mexico.

Besides legalizing the migrants' status, the Act also concentrated on penalizing employers in the United States who hired illegal immigrants, as well as enforcing Border Patrol. From 1986 to 2006, the Border Patrol grew from 2,000 to about 12,000 agents, and its budget expanded from \$200 million to \$1.213 billion.<sup>24</sup> As Payan suggests, the immigration issue was not tackled as a general labor policy problem, but as a border law enforcement problem. This persisting view could be considered one of the key problems in resolving the immigration issue. After the implementation of IRCA immigration grew rapidly throughout the 1990s.

<sup>23</sup> T. Payan: *The Three U.S. – Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security*, Praeger Security International, London, 2006, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.



We must not neglect the developments in Mexico in the 1980s. Mexico was facing a series of financial crises, starting with the debt crisis in 1982, continuing with the crisis of 1987-1988, which I will discuss thoroughly in chapter 3. In the late 1980s and 1990s the Mexican government's position toward migration began to shift. Instead of ignoring the problem, the government started accepting responsibility for the vast numbers of Mexicans living abroad. With the election of Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988, Mexico began to grow politically closer to the United States.

### **1.3. NAFTA, Myths and Expectations**

The NAFTA agreement is until today one of the most frequently debated accords across all fields of study. Scholars and academics are now analyzing whether NAFTA has been successful or whether it is a failure. In the 1990s the debate was primarily concerned about the effects on all three countries involved, its expectations, and whether this agreement is even feasible. I would like to begin with a very brief discussion of what NAFTA is.

This unique agreement, uniting two developed nations and one developing nation, was proposed by Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari in June 1990.<sup>25</sup> As a result the largest free trade bloc in the world was created. Formal negotiations began in 1991, in the same year Canada joined the project. The final agreement was signed on December 17, 1992, by Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and U.S. President George H. W. Bush. The NAFTA side agreements addressing labor and environmental issues were signed on September 14, 1993. NAFTA entered into effect on January 1, 1994.<sup>26</sup> The goal of the agreement was to improve general living conditions by reducing the barriers to the free flow of goods, capital, and

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<sup>25</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> J. Cavanagh,, S. Anderson, J. Serra,, J. Espinosa: Debate: Happily Ever NAFTA?, *Foreign Policy*, No. 132 (Sep. - Oct., 2002), p. 61, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3183456>

services.<sup>27</sup> I would like to emphasize that the free flow of people was not included in the agreement and was systematically ignored throughout the negotiations, even though it is only logical to assume that with trade liberalization should also come the free movement of people. To demonstrate the absence of the immigration problem in the NAFTA agreement, I have listed the final objectives of NAFTA below:

- a) eliminate barriers to trade in, and facilitate the cross-border movement of, goods and services between the territories of the Parties;*
- b) promote conditions of fair competition in the free trade area;*
- c) increase substantially investment opportunities in the territories of the Parties;*
- d) provide adequate and effective protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in each Party's territory;*
- e) create effective procedures for the implementation and application of this Agreement, for its joint administration and for the resolution of disputes; and*
- f) establish a framework for further trilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation to expand and enhance the benefits of this Agreement.*<sup>28</sup>

Voices of opposition emerged during the negotiation process, especially in the United States. To understand why, we must take into account the political environment of the 1990s and the myths nurtured both by the United States and Mexico.

The NAFTA debate in Mexico was not very controversial, in contrast to the ongoing debate that daily filled the headlines in the American press. The absence of any public debate in Mexico was due to the tough stance of the Mexican government, which did not allow any larger opposition to materialize. The NAFTA “debate” was more propaganda than anything else. Throughout the debate, slogans like “*If you are against*

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<sup>27</sup> J. S. Robey: Civil Society and NAFTA, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 565, Civil Society and Democratization (Sep., 1999), p. 116, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049540>

<sup>28</sup> North American Free Trade Agreement, Chapter 1, Article 102, available at: <http://www.nafta-sec-alena.org/en/view.aspx?x=343&mtpiID=122#102>.

*reform in Mexico, you are against NAFTA.*"<sup>29</sup> were frequently used. The Mexican government spent millions of dollars for a positive campaign, which resulted in unrealistic expectations. The NAFTA agreement was perceived as a chance for Mexico to leap from being a third world country to being a developed nation with a competitive market. Mexico was striving for foreign investment in order to improve its economy. Promises had been made by the highest officials. President Salinas even promised that NAFTA would give such a boost to the Mexican standard of living that illegal immigration to the United States would drop.<sup>30</sup> In one of his more ambitious statements he declared: "*I don't want Mexicans leaving the country anymore, only our products.*"<sup>31</sup> It was believed that NAFTA, apart from decreasing immigration, would bring higher wages, stronger industries, and cheaper services as well as a narrower income gap in society.<sup>32</sup> Could these ambitious expectations regarding immigration ever be fulfilled? Could NAFTA succeed without an established civil society, something that seems to be absent in Mexico to this day? These questions were the subject of study of many academics.

On the other hand, a number of critiques pointed out some disadvantages of the agreement. The absence of any tangible immigration policy was viewed as a fundamental failure. Throughout the negotiation process, immigration was not touched upon due to the sensitivity of the topic. The Mexican negotiator believed that if the subject of immigration had been included, the NAFTA agreement as a whole would not pass through the United States Congress. During the debate on both sides of the border, three scenarios of how the migration flow could develop were sketched out: A) no illegal immigration, B) influx of 4 million illegal immigrants, C) influx of 5 million illegal immigrants and more.<sup>33</sup> Possibilities B and C in Mexico were discussed mostly on the

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<sup>29</sup> J. Mazza: *Don't Disturb the Neighbors: The United States and Democracy in Mexico, 1980- 1995*, Routledge, NY, 2001, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> J. Cavanagh,, S. Anderson, J. Serra,, J. Espinosa: Debate: Happily Ever NAFTA?, *Foreign Policy*, No. 132 (Sep. - Oct., 2002), p. 62, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3183456>.

<sup>31</sup> J.S. Robey: Civil Society and NAFTA, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 565, Civil Society and Democratization (Sep., 1999), p. 118, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049540>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>33</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, p. 450.

academic floor. Possibility A was constantly repeated publicly by Mexican and U.S. officials. U.S. President Clinton stated: “*By strengthening the Mexican as well as the American economy, NAFTA will decrease Mexican unemployment, which is the leading cause of illegal immigration into the United States*”<sup>34</sup> Hopes were undoubtedly high.

The debate that developed in Mexico was rather one-sided and followed the line set by the Mexican government, while on the other side of the border the NAFTA discussion was far more complex. The issue transformed from a trade deal into a challenge to American identity.<sup>35</sup> Besides the fear of job losses, decreased wages, increased environmental pollution and an influx of illegal immigration, another question played a huge role in the debate. Was Mexico the right partner for this economic deal? Most of the population of the United States saw Mexico as a low wage, environmentally polluted country serving as an exporter of illegal immigrants to the United States.<sup>36</sup> In a public survey in 1993, no more than 25% of Americans supported the NAFTA agreement.

#### **1.4. Summary**

We can conclude that Mexican-U.S. migration is a dynamic process which can be examined through various aspects. Researchers often find contradictory conclusions as well as a vast number of disputed issues, from terminology to the actual number of immigrants flowing across the U.S.-Mexican border. There are many factors we can examine when dealing with U.S.-Mexico migration: class composition, age, gender, and origin of U.S. migrants, whether they are legal or illegal, temporary or permanent. Migration began as a U.S.-approved or U.S.-tolerated recruitment of Mexican workers for mining, railroad, and seasonal U.S. farm jobs a century ago, but now has resulted in a far more complex migration relationship that is moving rural Mexicans into traditional

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<sup>34</sup> A. Skonieczny: Constructing NAFTA: Myth, Representation, and the Discursive Construction of U.S. Foreign Policy, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 2001), p. 451, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096086>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 455.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

and nontraditional industries, occupations, and areas of the U.S.<sup>37</sup> It is necessary to understand the debate in order to understand developments in Mexico after NAFTA. It is also essential to mention that during the negotiation process of NAFTA the immigration issue was not included. I believe the NAFTA agreement is an essential part of the Mexican-U.S. relationship, and especially for Mexico, represents a turning point. Whether the change is good or bad I will discuss further on, along with the fundamental question of the effect NAFTA has had on immigration.

## **2. Mexico's Transition Process of the 1980s and early 1990s and the effect of immigration to the U.S.**

As I mentioned in chapter one, Mexico started down the road to transformation in the 1980s. The objective of this chapter is to present the political and economic situation in Mexico from the early 1980s to 1994, and analyze the reasons for migration in that time period.

### **2.1. Economics**

Even though Mexico has witnessed dramatic change in the last fifty years, it still cannot be described as a modern country. Mexico has been transformed from an illiterate, predominantly rural country to a partly industrialized nation with a growing middle class and civil society.<sup>38</sup> But still, corruption and the absence of the rule of law are impeding the completion of economic and political transformation that began in the 1980s. In 1980, Mexico was largely closed to foreign trade and investment, and was filled with inefficient government-owned businesses. Under the rule of President José López Portillo (1976-

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<sup>37</sup> Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study 1998, Vol. 1, p. 13, available at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>.

<sup>38</sup> J.G. Castaneda: Can NAFTA Change Mexico?, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (1993), p. 68, available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/49196/jorge-g-casta%C3%83%C2%B1eda/can-nafta-change-mexico>.

1982), Mexican oil supplies were discovered to be much larger than expected.<sup>39</sup> This discovery led to the irresponsible manipulation of public finances that eventually led to a severe debt crisis in 1982. Mexico had borrowed large stocks at very high interest rates, promising revenues from oil. When oil prices fell sharply in 1981, Mexico was stuck with mountains of debt and announced the suspension of its foreign debt payments.<sup>40</sup> The value of the peso fell dramatically, although at first president Portillo resisted devaluation.<sup>41</sup> The exchange rate of the peso plunged from 22 to 70 per U.S. dollar, and was still falling.<sup>42</sup> This caused a tremendous loss of confidence in the Mexican economy.

It was the task of the next president, Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), to initiate the recovery of the Mexican economy. He sought to liberalize the economy by eliminating subsidies and price controls, reducing barriers to imports, and closing or privatizing unprofitable government-owned companies.<sup>43</sup> Eventually Mexico reached sufficient economic stability to enter GATT, although throughout this *sexenio*<sup>44</sup> the Mexican economy struggled to lower inflation. By 1987, the inflation rate had reached 160 percent. To tackle this problem, the Economic Solidarity Pact was adopted and effectively lowered inflation to 12 percent by 1992.<sup>45</sup> While the economic goal of de la Madrid's administration was macroeconomic stabilization, his successor, Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), focused on the completion of deep structural reforms and consequently accelerated the process of *la apertura*.<sup>46</sup>

One of the focuses of the reform was the agricultural sector. The aim was to liberalize and dismantle the current *ejido* system, which was a communal rural land grant

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<sup>39</sup> E. Krauze.: *Mexico: biography of power: a history of modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, NY: Harper Perennial, New York, 1998, p. 755.

<sup>40</sup> J. Mazza: *Don't Disturb the Neighbors: The United States and Democracy in Mexico, 1980- 1995*, Routledge, NY, 2001, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> President José López Portillo claimed he will defend the peso “*como un perro*” (like a dog), which led to many sarcastic taunts throughout Mexican society even after his presidency.

<sup>42</sup> E. Krauze.: *Mexico: biography of power: a history of modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, NY: Harper Perennial, New York, 1998, p. 760.

<sup>43</sup> S. Haber, H.S.Klien,N. Mauer, K.J. Middlebrook: *Mexico since 1980*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p.16

<sup>44</sup> *Sexenio* is the term limit on the Mexican Presidency, which limits the office holder to only one six-year term and is constitutionally barred from running for office again.

<sup>45</sup> J. S. Tulchin, A.D. Selee: *Mexico's Politics and Society in Transition*, Lyanne Rienner Publishers, USA, 2003, pp.180-181.

<sup>46</sup> *La apertura* is a term for the opening up of the Mexican economy after long decades of protective tariffs.

program which gave the poorest segment of the population the right to property. The reform of the *ejido* system, which was grounded in Article 27 of the Constitution of 1917, primarily affected the indigenous population in the south of Mexico. The reform of the Article granted foreign investors the right to buy off land, with the result that the *indigenos* were no longer protected. President Salinas came up with The National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) which permitted local communities to petition the federal government directly for resources for small projects, but the overall feeling of fear and insecurity eventually led to armed uprisings, which I will discuss further on.

Salinas's primary goal was to attract foreign investment and thereby prop up the peso and maintain the macroeconomic stabilization success, but he was quite careful in privatizing some segments of the economy, fully opening the Mexican stock market, but preserving some protective tariffs.<sup>47</sup> By the early 1990s the Mexican economy was stabilized and liberalized, at least in the eyes of foreign investors, who did not see through the machinations of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), which greatly overvalued the peso. Just a few months after NAFTA came into effect, the Mexican economy experienced one of the worst crises in its history. To what extent NAFTA caused the peso crisis will be examined further on.

## **2.2. Politics in the 1980s and early 1990s**

From 1929 to 2000, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* held a virtual monopoly on political power. In order to keep the appearance of democracy, the PRI - led administrations crafted a complex set of electoral rules that permitted other parties to participate in the lower house of congress and in local governance. The PRI had control over regulatory and legal systems. PRI officials appointed state and federal judges, as well as directors of government-owned firms.<sup>48</sup> The rise of strong political opposition was not possible until the early 1990s, and then only at the state level. PRI was not afraid

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<sup>47</sup> J. S. Tulchin, A.D. Selee: *Mexico's Politics and Society in Transition*, Lyanne Rienner Publishers, USA, 2003, p. 183.

<sup>48</sup> S. Haber, H.S.Klien, N. Mauer, K.J. Middlebrook: *Mexico since 1980*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 1.

to sustain its political hegemony by electoral fraud and corruption. Corruption was ubiquitous in all spheres of society. In the 1982 presidential elections, the victorious Miguel de la Madrid declared a war against corruption as a populist tactic. This was well received by the public, but had little effect in the long term.

President de la Madrid was popular at first, but he was discredited, along with the entire political establishment, after the catastrophic earthquake of 1985. The government response was slow and ill-prepared. Although the public was clamoring for help, Mexico refused to accept any form of foreign aid, particularly from the United States, as was declared by former minister of foreign affairs, Bernardo Sepúlveda Amor.<sup>49</sup>

The public demonstrated its frustration with the Mexican government in the state elections of 1986. In the northern state of Chihuahua the opposition party, *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) declared victory. This action reflected the general resentment toward the PRI- led government. In order to secure its hegemony, PRI refused to accept the victory of PAN, which caused growing criticism, not only from the public, but also from the United States. The peak of electoral fraud came during the 1988 presidential election. This election did not follow past patterns. The left wing candidate, Cuáthemoc Cárdenas, broke off from the PRI and established a new political party, the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD).<sup>50</sup> The growing dissatisfaction with the previous PRI government caused the probable victory of the PRD candidate. The validity of the result remains uncertain to this day. During the election, unexpected “technical difficulties” occurred, causing the electoral system to break down and allowing Carlos Salinas de Gortari to secure the presidential post. After the contested election, the governmental strategy changed dramatically. The possibility to win elections and remain in power through fraud was dramatically reduced, because now the government had to face a more developed civil society.<sup>51</sup> Throughout the early 1990s something of a political plurality

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<sup>49</sup> E. Krauze.: *Mexico: biography of power: a history of modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, NY: Harper Perennial, New York, 1998, p. 776.

<sup>50</sup> J. Mazza: *Don't Disturb the Neighbors: The United States and Democracy in Mexico, 1980- 1995*, Routledge, NY, 2001, p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> J. S. Tulchin, A.D. Selee: *Mexico's Politics and Society in Transition*, Lyanne Rienner Publishers, USA, 2003, p. 150.



began to emerge. In the state level election in 1989, PRI for the first time accepted the electoral victory of a PAN candidate in Baja California Norte.<sup>52</sup>

The Salinas presidency had two top priorities: economic and political reform. This eventually led to an ideological division within the PRI between the “technocrats” and the “dinosaurs”. By no means can we characterize Mexico as a democratic country in the 1990s, and its democratic character can be questioned even today. Salinas’ reforms led to the opening of the Mexican political system, but corruption and nepotism still played a pivotal role in political life in Mexico.

### **2.3. Analyzing Numbers**

It is necessary to bear in mind that the number of Mexican migrants is affected not only by the push, but also by the pull factors. If there hadn’t been such strong demand in the U.S. market, would there have been such an influx of immigrants, or, as seen from the U.S. perspective—cheap labor? Throughout the 1980s Mexican migrants were motivated not only by economic crises, low employment opportunities and very low wages in comparison to wages in the United States, but also by the U.S. demand for labor. High immigration since the 1980s, and legalization in 1987-88 as a consequence of IRCA, allowed Mexican-born workers to become a significant component of the U.S. food processing, construction, service, and manufacturing labor forces throughout the United States.<sup>53</sup> Not only do low wages in Mexico comprise a fundamental push factor, but the problem is also aggravated by the fact that Mexican immigrants are often the only ones willing to do certain types of jobs that most American citizens would refuse to do. These jobs can be described as the 4D: dangerous, dirty, dull, and domestic.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, I believe that the demand for Mexican immigrants by the U.S. labor market is continuous. This characteristic is present even today.

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<sup>52</sup> E. Krauze.: *Mexico: biography of power: a history of modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, NY: Harper Perennial, New York, 1998, p.774.

<sup>53</sup> Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study, 1998, Vol. 1, p. 8, available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Kozák,K.: *Immigration From Mexico Since 1965 – Challenges for U.S. Policy*, 2008, p.13, available at: <http://instituty.fsv.cuni.cz/~kozak/>.

The numbers of the legal population increased dramatically during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in part due to the legalization provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. These provisions caused an expansion of the Mexican social network, as more and more Mexicans decided to stay permanently in the U.S. Along with the pivotal role played by the economic push factor, kinship ties among family and friends also contribute to migration. By 1980, Mexicans comprised the largest foreign-born population in the U.S., with 2.2 million. Just ten years later the Mexican population had risen to 4.4 million.<sup>55</sup> By 1994, the number of Mexicans living in the United States, either legally or illegally, had risen to nearly 6.5 million.<sup>56</sup> The number of Mexicans immigrants to the U.S. doubled from 1980 to 1990, and more than doubled from 1990 to 2000.

## 2.4. Summary

In summary, the major reasons for the emigration of Mexicans lie primarily in the economic sphere. Migration from Mexico was motivated for decades by U.S. labor demand and by wage disparities. But starting the late 1980s, another push factor for migration gained significance. With the legalization of 2 million Mexicans after the IRCA Act, a social network of Mexicans was formed and enlarged in the United States. This factor caused an increase in the migration flow as well as in the overall percentage share of the new Mexican-born population. Political reasons for migration, such as corruption and lack of democracy, could be seen as a push factor, but in the 1980s and 1990s it did not play a role in the total number of migrants.

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<sup>55</sup> P. Leit, M.A. Angoa, M. Rodríguez: Emigración mexicana a Estados Unidos: balance de las últimas décadas, CONAPO, 2009, p. 117 available at:

<http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/sdm/sdm2009/07.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> CONAPO, available at:

[http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=323&Itemid=295](http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=323&Itemid=295).

### **3. Mexico after NAFTA**

As I mentioned in chapter one, with NAFTA came many expectations. Mexico adopted an ambitious restructuring and privatization program in the 1990s that promised to increase economic efficiency and job growth in the medium to long term, but in fact displaced workers in the short term. Over a million new jobs were expected to be generated annually.<sup>57</sup> Wages were expected to rise and eventually reach the level of wages in the United States. What was not expected was the increase of economic disparity within Mexico. The objective of this chapter is to introduce the situation in Mexico after NAFTA, analyze the push factors of migration and examine the flow of migrants.

#### **3.1. Economics**

What overall effect did NAFTA have on the economy? Responses to this question are various and contradictory. I am inclined to believe that NAFTA had been successful in trade and investments, but less so in the area of employment and wages.

NAFTA contributed to a sharp expansion of regional trade. Before NAFTA the average annual flow of foreign direct investment into Mexico was approximately \$3.47 billion. But since 1994, this average has exceeded \$13 billion.<sup>58</sup> Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Mexico have risen since NAFTA. In 1994 Canada invested \$0.7 billion, but by 2003 investments had increased to \$4.3 billion. The United States invested \$23.5 billion in the first year of NAFTA. In 2003 investment had been boosted to \$103.6 billion.<sup>59</sup>

The Mexican government promised that NAFTA would generate more than one million jobs per year, and would alleviate the problem of poverty in rural areas. The trade

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<sup>57</sup> Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study 1998, Vol. 1, p. 168 available at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>.

<sup>58</sup> J. Cavanagh, S. Anderson, J. Serra, J. Espinosa: Debate: Happily Ever NAFTA?, *Foreign Policy*, No. 132 (Sep. - Oct., 2002), p. 63, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3183456>.

<sup>59</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, p. 32.

accord failed to meet these promises. Since the introduction of NAFTA, the real manufacturing wages declined by 5 percent as well as real wages that fell 5.2 percent.<sup>60</sup> Some supporters of NAFTA say that this development can not be solely attributed to NAFTA, but also to the peso crisis of 1994-1995.

The peso crisis exploded less than one year after NAFTA came into force. The critics of the agreement simply can not believe the connection between the economic collapse of Mexico and the ratification of NAFTA was coincidental. The peso crisis was caused by the overvaluation of the currency, and by political machinations attempting to cover up the widening Mexican current account deficit. The problem was left for the next president, Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), to solve. The government first tried to address the issue by devaluing the peso by 15 percent, but unable to support the peso even at this level, allowed it to float.<sup>61</sup> The consequences of this crisis were harsh. The peso lost 50 percent of its value. The United States government, bound by the NAFTA agreement, crafted an international financial rescue package of immense proportion. This rescue took the form of loan guarantees, \$20 billion from the U.S. government and an additional \$30 billion from other sources.<sup>62</sup> The peso crisis was not caused by NAFTA itself, but as a result of this accord, confidence in the peso and the Mexican economy was overrated. If NAFTA had not been in place, the financial assistance to Mexico would not have been so large. Mexico managed to pay off the U.S. loans by 1996, the same year the Mexican economy revived. Since the crisis, Mexico has managed to maintain its current account balance in a sustainable range.

NAFTA was also criticized for its devastating impact on small and medium-sized farms, which could not compete with large agribusinesses from Canada and the U.S.<sup>63</sup> The old *ejido* system, which granted land to the poorest segment of society, was endangered. Additionally, NAFTA opened the floodgates to imports of cheap U.S. corn

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<sup>60</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, pp. 44-46.

<sup>61</sup> J. Mazza: *Don't Disturb the Neighbors: The United States and Democracy in Mexico, 1980-1995*, Routledge, NY, 2001, p. 125.

<sup>62</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, pp. 10-11.

<sup>63</sup> P. Rich: NAFTA and Chiapas, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 550, NAFTA Revisited: Expectations and Realities (Mar., 1997), p. 82, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1047707>.

and other products, driving local Mexican farmers out of business. Although protective tariffs on corn and beans were left in place until 2008, the flood of cheap maize drove many farmers out of business. Mexican agriculture was expected to refocus its production, and as a result many workers were displaced. All these factors led to the growing economic disparity within Mexico. While the north was getting richer, the south and rural communities were in misery, as the rural poverty rate rose from 79 percent in 1994 to 82 percent in 1998.<sup>64</sup> NAFTA also enhanced the scissor phenomenon, widening the gap not only between the rich and the poor in Mexico, but also between U.S. and Mexico. After NAFTA was signed the number of migrants from Mexico heading to the richer north increased steadily.

According to the most recent result from Mexican opinion polls, Mexicans are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the way things are going in their country. About seven in ten say the nation's economy is in bad shape, although most say it will improve over the next year.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.2. Politics

The political environment in Mexico could not be considered to be democratic throughout the 1990s, and the question of whether or not this status has changed remains to this day. Nevertheless, with the 2000 presidential elections, we see a radical change that escorted the PRI out of *Los Pinos*.<sup>66</sup> However, corruption, nepotism, assassinations, kidnappings and armed uprisings are still connected to Mexican politics.

On the same day NAFTA came into effect, insurgencies broke out in the southern state of Chiapas, where over 2000 men seized the state capital, San Cristobal de las Casas. The *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) or Zapatista movement is fighting against basically everything that NAFTA represents - capitalism, globalization,

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<sup>64</sup> J. Cavanagh,, S. Anderson, J. Serra,, J. Espinosa: Debate: Happily Ever NAFTA?, *Foreign Policy*, No. 132 (Sep. - Oct., 2002), p. 64, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3183456>.

<sup>65</sup> Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S. - One-In-Three Would Migrate: Troubled by Crime, the Economy, Drugs and Corruption, Washington, D.C., September 2009, p. 17, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/266.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> *Los Pinos* is the seat of the Mexican government.

and the Mexican government, which is seen as corrupt and illegitimate. The EZLN chose to protect *campesinos*, farmers that in Chiapas are represented by the indigenous people. They demanded basic rights: The right to land, schools, and medical care, and an end to discrimination. NAFTA was seen as a death sentence for the indigenous people. However, the rebellion in Chiapas is a reaction not to one crisis in Mexico, but to several ongoing crises - political, economic, and social.<sup>67</sup> It should be emphasized that NAFTA is not going to help Chiapas. There are 30 million people who are completely outside of the money economy. The *campesino* has no government safety net available. This situation, which can be considered a strong motivation to emigrate, has not changed after NAFTA, but unfortunately has grown even worse. Therefore, the shift in the origin of migrants to the U.S., which I will discuss in the next chapter, is no surprise. The insurgence in Chiapas had the positive effect that the issue of poor farmers was finally recognized on a larger scale in the media. But still, according to polls, Mexicans in general are far more concerned about economic issues than about the situation in Chiapas.<sup>68</sup>

In 1994, the Mexican political system endured additional distress. Luis Donaldo Colosio, the presidential candidate of the PRI, was assassinated while campaigning in Tijuana. Colosio, the former minister of social development, was well known for his commitment to social programs.<sup>69</sup> He was highly popular, and there was little doubt he would have been elected, with out electoral fraud or manipulation. This was the first assassination of a presidential candidate in the history of the PRI. Six months later, José Ruiz Massieu, the PRI secretary general, was also assassinated, leaving Mexico's political system profoundly shaken. And matters were not about to brighten. Raul Salinas, the former president's brother, had been accused of ties to these political murders and was arrested. He was also linked to corruption scandals and entangled in the drug trade. This not only led to a steep decline in the popularity of former president Salinas,

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<sup>67</sup> P. Rich: NAFTA and Chiapas, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 550, NAFTA Revisited: Expectations and Realities (Mar., 1997), p. 73, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1047707>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>69</sup> Foster, L. V.: *A Brief History of Mexico*, Facts On File, NY, 1997, p. 225.

but also demonstrated the lack of democracy, transparency and accountability in Mexican politics.

Progress in the democratization process was visible in the presidential elections of 2000, when an opposition candidate from the PAN, Vicente Fox, was elected after 70 years of PRI rule. Supporters of NAFTA say that this was possible only because of the accord and the changes that followed its trade liberalization. But we also should not overlook the pressure applied by the United States in its effort to emphasize the importance of democracy. Did NAFTA promote real democracy in Mexico? The presidential elections of 2006 were far from transparent, a continuation of the tradition of corruption in Mexican politics. After a long dispute, the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, was finally declared the victor. He remains in office today, and is famous primarily for his tough stance against the drug trafficking which has spun out of control in the past three years.

### **3.3. Drug Wars and Crime**

Mexico is doubtlessly one of the most strategically important countries for the illegal drug trade. Its location next to the United States offers plenty of transit possibilities. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the drug trade underwent a boom, due to the lack of border control. But it was not until the 1980s that drug trafficking became a large scale business. While the United States was cracking down on Colombian drug trafficking operations, the Colombians saw an opportunity to enhance their business by connecting with Félix Gallardo's organization in Mexico. This alliance led to an immense increase of illegal drugs flowing across the U.S.-Mexican border. After the arrest of Gallardo in 1989, he continued to run operations from his prison cell, but collaborators were struggling for power within the organization, leading to increasing violence. After a war amongst drug traffickers, four cartels were established: the Tijuana cartel, the Sinaloa-Sonora cartel, the Juárez cartel and the Gulf cartel. Now the governments of the United States and Mexico had to face not one but four different drug smuggling

organizations. It is interesting to examine the positions on fighting these cartels under the PRI and PAN governments.

The PRI-led governments exhibited something of a “let it be” attitude. With the change of party dominance in 2000, a war against cartels was announced. During Fox’s mandate, fifteen bosses from the four cartels were arrested or killed. This, though, led to an increase in violence, as wars within the cartels spread across the country. An open war emerged between the cartels of Sinaloa and the Gulf over the border town of Nuevo Laredo. The city was paralyzed for more than six months when paramilitary commandos of *Los Zetas* and *Los Negros* were settling their scores. These commandos were and still are responsible for the murder, rape, and kidnapping of civilians, police officers, politicians, and wealthy businessmen and their families. President Fox ordered the military to step in and pacify the situation.<sup>70</sup>

In December 2006, newly elected President Felipe Calderón announced that he would continue the war against drug traffickers. Since then, the Mexican government has deployed its army and federal police to cities and communities across Mexico. More than 10,000 people have been killed in drug-related violence.<sup>71</sup> Calderón increased the budget for the war against violence, organized crime and drug cartels by 24% in 2007, and these three objectives became his top priorities.<sup>72</sup> But the cartels have become increasingly active as well. Examples of this increased activity include the bombings in Morelia on Independence Day in September of 2008, the occupation of the building that housed the TV station Televisa during the prime time news in January of 2009, and the killing of a high governmental official in that same month. There is no doubt that drug cartels are fighting back to the limits of their ability. In the early months of 2009, the city of Ciudad Juárez was completely paralyzed due to the drug wars.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Kováč, I.: *Vojna drogových kartelov v Mexiku a jej implikácie pre mexicko-americké vzťahy*, 2009, Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky, p. 4, available at: <http://www.amo.cz/publikace/vojna-drogovych-kartelov-v-mexiku-a-jej-implikacie-pre-mexicko-americke-vztahy.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S. - One-In-Three Would Migrate: Troubled by Crime, the Economy, Drugs and Corruption*, Washington, D.C., September 2009, p. 12, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/266.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> Kováč, I.: *Vojna drogových kartelov v Mexiku a jej implikácie pre mexicko-americké vzťahy*, 2009, Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky, p. 6, available at: <http://www.amo.cz/publikace/vojna-drogovych-kartelov-v-mexiku-a-jej-implikacie-pre-mexicko-americke-vztahy.html>.

<sup>73</sup> S. Fainaru, W. Booth: “As Mexico Battles Cartels, The Army Becomes the Law



Overall, 83% of Mexicans say they support the use of the nation's army to fight drug traffickers, while only 12% oppose it. Moreover, about two-thirds say that the army is making progress in the drug war, while 15% say it is losing ground and 14% say that nothing has changed.<sup>74</sup>

Although there are no statistics available, I believe that the growing violence is a primary concern of Mexicans, and could lead some to emigrate. If the Mexican government cannot guarantee the safety of its population, I believe this lack of security may have become a new push factor beginning in the 1980s. Even though NAFTA contributed to an increase in the amount of drugs crossing the border, it can not be connected to the level of violence spreading throughout Mexico.

### 3.4. Analyzing Numbers

As mentioned in previous chapters, NAFTA was expected to lower Mexican immigration to the U.S. However, after the implementation of the accord, Mexican migration to the U.S. did not decrease, but rose. I believe this was caused by the U.S. economic boom and a corresponding rapid increase in the number of jobs in the United States, as well as the peso crisis during which the peso lost half of its value, and the growing economic disparity within Mexico which was made worse by the NAFTA agreement. In contrast to this reality, some projections had indicated that the increase of Mexican migrants to the U.S. would decline in the 10 to 15 years after NAFTA came into force.<sup>75</sup>

The number of undocumented Mexicans has significantly increased since 2000. In the period between 2000 and 2006 the annual flow of migrants, both

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Retired Soldiers Tapped to Run Police Forces", *Washington Post*, April 2, 2009, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/01/AR2009040104335.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S. - One-In-Three Would Migrate: Troubled by Crime, the Economy, Drugs and Corruption*, Washington, D.C., September 2009, p. 14, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/266.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, p. 450.

documented and undocumented, reached 460,000.<sup>76</sup> But by mid 2006, immigration from Mexico to the U.S., especially unauthorized immigration, began to drop off, and that pattern has continued into 2009, according to population surveys in both countries and U.S. enforcement data.<sup>77</sup> According to the Pew Hispanic Center, annual immigration from Mexico has risen and fallen several times during the past decade. For example, immigration dropped by about one-third, from 570,000 in the period from March of 2000 to March of 2001, to an estimated 397,000 from March of 2002 to March of 2003.<sup>78</sup> This was not caused by an improving economic situation in Mexico, but by the stagnating U.S. economy and perhaps by the stricter law enforcement on the border after the terrorist attacks of 2001. In the three-year period from March 2003 to March 2006, Mexican inflows nearly regained their previous levels and averaged about 550,000 per year. Since then, immigration from Mexico has decreased substantially, dropping almost 40%. The flow out of Mexico, more than a million from February 2006 to February 2007, declined by more than 20% to about 814,000 in the same period in 2007-2008. It decreased by another 20% to about 636,000 in the same period in 2008-2009.<sup>79</sup>

While the growth rate of the Mexican immigrant population has slowed considerably since 2006, the total number reached a record 12.7 million in 2008. Mexicans make up the largest number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (7.0 million, or 59%) as well as the largest number of legal immigrants (5.7 million, or 21%).<sup>80</sup> This is caused by the end of circularity in the nature of Mexican migration, with fewer Mexicans deciding to leave the U.S. and move back to Mexico. Recent statistics indicate that 11% of the total Mexican population resides in the U.S. That is 1/10 of all Mexicans.<sup>81</sup> Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of the Mexican-born population in the U.S.

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<sup>76</sup> P. Leit, M.A., Angoa, Rodríguez, M.: Emigración mexicana a Estados Unidos: balance de las últimas décadas, CONAPO, 2009 available at: <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/sdm/sdm2009/07.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> J. S. Passel, D.V. Cohn, Mexican Immigrants: How Many Come? How Many Leave, Pew Hispanic Center, 2008, p. 3, available at: <http://pewhispanic.org>.

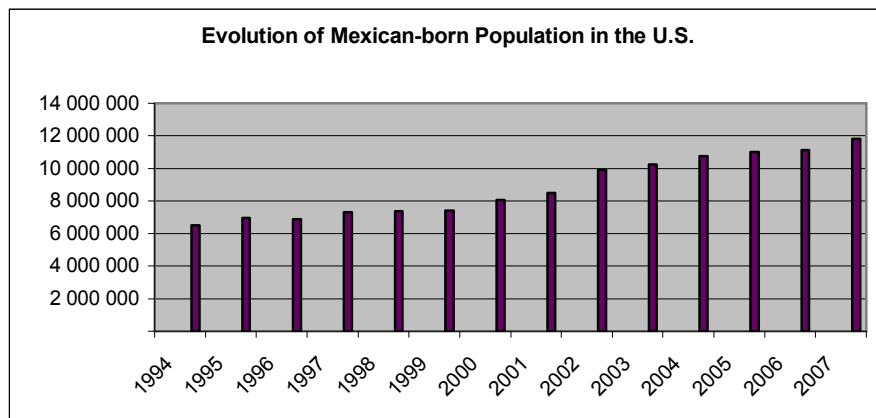
<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> México – U.S. Migration Management: A Binational Approach, Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, Secretaría de las Relaciones Exteriores, 2006, p. 12, available at: [http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda\\_migratoria/academicos/gestion\\_migratoria\\_ing.pdf](http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda_migratoria/academicos/gestion_migratoria_ing.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> CONAPO, available at: [http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=251](http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=251).

Figure 4. Evolution of Mexican-born population in the U.S.



Source: CONAPO, available at: [http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=251](http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=251)

The decline in the migration flow can be explained by the overall decrease in the Mexican population. In the 1970s, Mexico's population growth reached its peak, with an average birth rate of 7 children per woman. By 2000, this number had decreased to an average of 2.5 children. This trend also caused the number of Mexicans entering the labor force to drop by 50% between 1996 and 2010.<sup>82</sup>

According to recent poll statistics, a majority of Mexicans (62%) say that, at this moment, they would not move to the United States if they had the means and opportunity to do so. Yet a sizeable minority (33%) would move to the U.S. if they could. And among those who would move, 55% – or 18% of the total population – say they would be inclined to do so without authorization.<sup>83</sup> These numbers are tied to the ongoing economic crisis in the United States, and the limited availability of jobs.

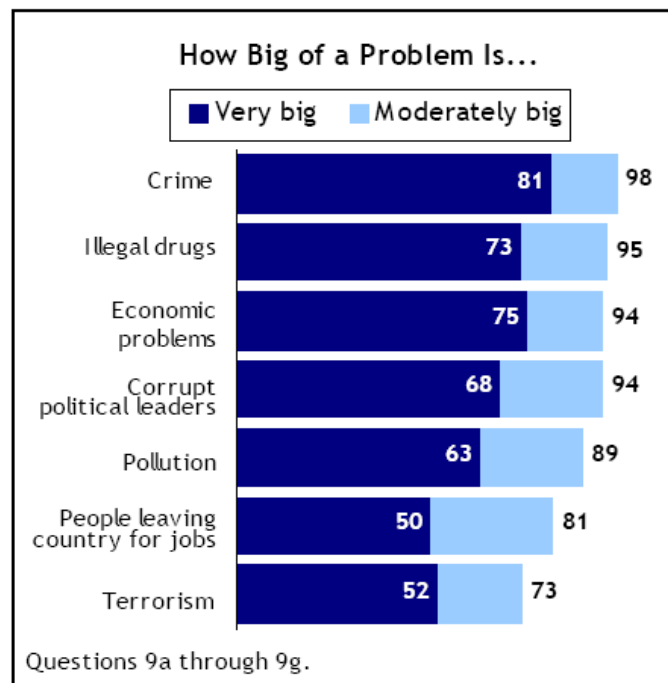
<sup>82</sup> C.G. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott: *NAFTA Revisited, Achievements and Challenges*, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 2005, pp. 454-455.

<sup>83</sup> Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S. - One-In-Three Would Migrate: Troubled by Crime, the Economy, Drugs and Corruption*, Washington, D.C., September 2009, p. 13, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/266.pdf>.

### 3.5. Summary

In summary, the reasons for migration to the United States are the same after NAFTA as before. A new push factor is emerging, namely the increase of violence and crime caused by the drug wars. The political problems Mexico has been facing can not be considered to constitute a strong motivation to migrate. Figure 5 shows what Mexicans consider to be the main problems and issues the country is facing.

**Figure 5. What Mexicans Consider as Main Issues**



**Source:** Pew Research Center, Pew Global Attitudes Project, Most Mexicans See Better Life in U.S. - One-In-Three Would Migrate: Troubled by Crime, the Economy, Drugs and Corruption, Washington, D.C., September 2009, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/266.pdf>.

After NAFTA, there is an increase in the flow of migration as well as a growing population of Mexicans in the United States. The annual flow of Mexican migrants has decreased since mid 2006, but the number of Mexicans living in the United States continues to rise, caused by the end of circularity of Mexican migration. I believe that the decreased level of migration is primarily caused by the lower fertility rate of Mexicans,

which has led to a decline in people entering the labor force, and also by the lack of jobs available in the United States.

#### **4. Characteristics of Mexican Migrants**

The objective of this chapter is to present a comprehensive portrait of the Mexican migrant, summarizing the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and examining changes in these characteristics over time.<sup>84</sup> I believe that the alteration of some migrant characteristics can be connected with the economic transformation process of the 1980s, with the IRCA act and most importantly for our research, with the NAFTA agreement. I would like to examine three variable data: gender, status, and origin. I believe that these three aspects were the main influences, and through them we can examine the effects of the transformation process, IRCA and NAFTA.

##### **4.1. Gender**

Especially on the question of gender, a researcher can come to contradictory statistical results. The percentage of women migrants differs dramatically. What we can say for certain is that throughout the 1980s, male migrants were predominant. Between 1982 and 1985, men accounted for 82% of the migrant flow, according to *Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica* (ENADID) data.<sup>85</sup> Data from the U.S. Census Bureau and *Centro de Información y Estadísticas del Trabajo* (CENIET) does not indicate that the male proportion is so dominant.<sup>86</sup> But after 1989, we see a decline in the proportion of males. In some counties in the United States, such as Los Angeles or San

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<sup>84</sup> Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study 1998, Vol. 1, p. 91 available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>.

<sup>85</sup> E. A. Marcelli, W.A. Cornelius: "The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2001), p.110, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2692122>.

<sup>86</sup> J. Durand, D.S. Massey: "Mexican Migration to the United States: A Critical Review", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1992), p. 20, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503748>.

Diego, females actually became a majority, comprising 56.2% of the total.<sup>87</sup> Even though this result is not applicable to all counties, the process of feminization of the Mexican migrant flow can not be ignored. I believe this trend is strongly related to the IRCA act of 1986 for several reasons.

As I mentioned in chapter one, the spread of migration networks may make migration more available to all segments of society, not only concerning class but also gender. Since the 1990s female migration has been strongly motivated by kinship ties. It is suggested by ENE data from the year 2000 that Mexican women tend to move less for reasons of employment.<sup>88</sup> Young single women are often encouraged by older siblings, and find jobs as caretakers and other domestic positions. Married women cross the border to keep their families together and join their husbands after long separations, and older women come to care for their grandchildren.

**Figure 6. Characteristics of the U.S. Population, by Nativity and Mexican Birth (2008)**

	U.S. Born <sup>1</sup>	Foreign Born		
		All Countries	Other than Mexico	Mexico
<b>Total</b>	261,828	39,302	26,631	12,671
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	128,169	20,101	12,842	7,259
Female	133,658	19,201	13,789	5,412
% Female	51%	49%	52%	43%

**Source:** Pew Hispanic Center Fact Sheet: Mexican Immigrants in the United States, 2008, available at: <http://pewhispanic.org>

Recently, though, a growing number of single women are coming not to join husbands, but to find jobs, send money home, and escape a bleak future in Mexico.<sup>89</sup> Due to the vast network of friends and family already existing in the U.S. as a consequence of

<sup>87</sup> E. A. Marcelli, W.A. Cornelius: “The Changing Profile of Mexican Migrants to the United States: New Evidence from California and Mexico”, *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2001), p.111, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2692122>.

<sup>88</sup> México – U.S. Migration Management: A Binational Approach, Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, Secretaría de las Relaciones Exteriores, 2006, p. 13, available at: [http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda\\_migratoria/academicos/gestion\\_migratoria\\_ing.pdf](http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda_migratoria/academicos/gestion_migratoria_ing.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> L. Alvarez, J.M. Broder.: “More and More Women Risk All to Enter U.S.”, *NY Times*, January 10, 2006, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/national/10women.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/national/10women.html?_r=1&emc=eta1).

IRCA, employment as maids, cooks, kitchen helpers, factory workers and baby sitters is not difficult to find. Perhaps the number of women migrants remains limited by the dangers of the crossing itself. As the borders have become tighter, the coyotes have become more violent and desperate. Sexual harassment, assault, rape and robberies are unfortunately not exceptions. But despite the dangers and fear, Mexican women say that it is worth the risk, especially when considering people back home in Mexico and how they can help them.<sup>90</sup>

#### **4.2. Status: temporary vs. permanent**

When discussing migration, we must recognize two major groups: those who become permanent residents of the U.S., and many others who come and go. Among circular migrants we can include undocumented migrants, legal temporary workers, and other legal temporary residents, including workers with H-1 visas, students, and tourists. The permanent Mexico-born population includes legal temporary residents and unauthorized migrants who spend long periods of time in the United States, as well as legal permanent resident aliens, some of whom are naturalized citizens. Both of these groups are diverse, ranging from agricultural workers to college degree absolvent working in high managerial positions.<sup>91</sup>

A large percentage of Mexican migrants who have crossed the border return back to Mexico after a few months or years. But in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, circularity began to decrease significantly for a number of reasons. First, Mexicans found more and more employment in urban, year-round jobs, and their families moved north. Second, with the IRCA many Mexicans were anchored in the United States, especially those in the agricultural sector, which depends primarily on seasonal workers. Third, stricter law enforcement has made crossing the border more dangerous and risky and has

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<sup>90</sup> L. Alvarez, J.M. Broder.: “More and More Women Risk All to Enter U.S.”, *NY Times*, January 10, 2006, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/national/10women.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/national/10women.html?_r=1&emc=eta1).

<sup>91</sup> Mexico-United States Binational Migration Study 1998, Vol. 1, p. 94, available at: <http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/uscir/binpap-v.html>.

put pressure on migrants to stay in the United States.<sup>92</sup> And finally, the rise in female migration also led to additional permanent settlers, due to the fact that women are more likely to remain permanently in the United States.

As we found in the previous chapter, migration rose steadily up to the outbreak of the economic crisis. By examining statistical data available from CONAPO, we can also see a steady rise of permanently settling migrants. Between the years 1987-1992, 990,172 out of 1,865,312 migrants of Mexican origin did not return to Mexico. Between 1992 and 1997, 1,309,428 Mexican migrants out of a total 1,952,459 settled permanently in the United States. The quinquennial counted a total of 1,523,121 Mexican migrants out of the total flow of 2,474,222 that have not returned to Mexico.<sup>93</sup> In the five years prior to and including 2008, the increase in the flow of Mexican migrants has continued. For a visual depiction of this trend, see Figure 7. As a consequence of the rise in permanent settlers, the overall population with a degree of Mexican origin, including second and third generations, also dramatically increases. According to latest estimates, the total population of the United States with Mexican origin in 2010 will account for 32%.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> México – U.S. Migration Management: A Binational Approach, Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, Secretaría de las Relaciones Exteriores, 2006, p. 12, available at:

[http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda\\_migratoria/academicos/gestion\\_migratoria\\_ing.pdf](http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda_migratoria/academicos/gestion_migratoria_ing.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> CONAPO,

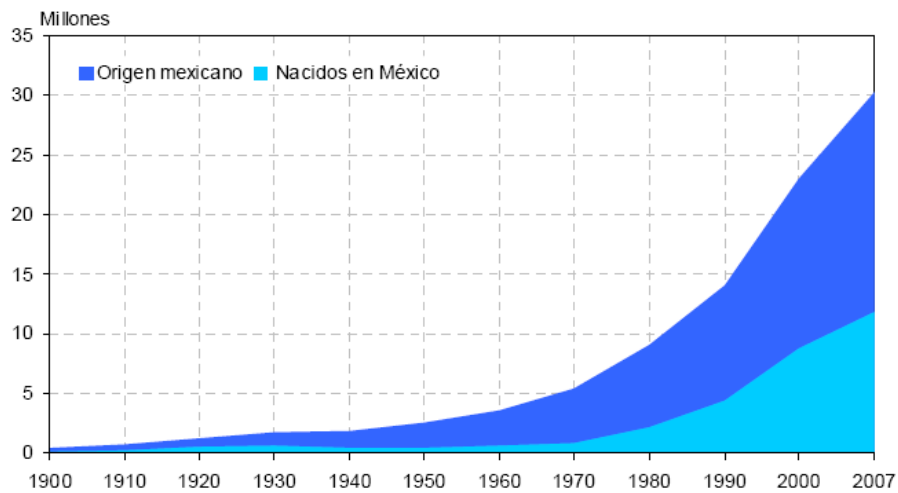
[http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=325&Itemid=295](http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=325&Itemid=295).

<sup>94</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, Fact Sheet: Mexican Immigrants in the United States, 2008, p. 2, available at:

<http://pewhispanic.org>.



**Figure 7. Mexican-origin Population living in the United States, 1900-2007**



**Source:** Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB), Informe de México: El cambio demográfico, el envejecimiento y la migración internacional en México, available at: <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/prensa/2008/02cepal.pdf>

### 4.3. Origin

In order to distinguish the shifts of sending states, I will divide the Mexican states into four regions: traditional or historical, Northern, Central and South- Southeastern. Among states which have historically exported a vast number of migrants we can include Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato and Zacatecas. Throughout the 1980s, the Mexican migration flow became more diversified. This historical region was enlarged by the addition of Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Nayarit and San Luis Potosí. In the Northern region we will count the states of Baja California, Baja California Sur, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Sonora and Tamaulipas. The Central region is made up of Distrito Federal, Hidalgo, México, Morelos, Puebla, Querétaro and Tlaxcala. The South-Southeast region is composed of the states Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatán.

Prior to NAFTA, the historical region was responsible for over 52% of all migrants heading towards the United States from 1987 to 1992.<sup>95</sup> But the lack of

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<sup>95</sup> CONAPO, [http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=325&Itemid=295](http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=325&Itemid=295).

employment opportunities, low wages, growing disparities, and poverty spread throughout the Mexican territory, leading to the shift of sending states, although Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí practically doubled their share of migrants in the period from 1997 to 2002.<sup>96</sup> Apart from this predictable development, states such as Jalisco, Michoacán and Zacatecas decreased their share of the migrant flow. Overall, the number of migrants coming from the historical region declined slightly in the late 1990s, but had risen again by 2005.<sup>97</sup> The second largest sending region, the Northern region, exported over 21% of migrants between the years 1987 and 1992. After the NAFTA agreement, we can see a sharp decline in its percentage share, which fell to 15%.<sup>98</sup> Contrary development is evident in the Central and South – Southeast regions. The Central region exported 18% of migrants prior to NAFTA. After implementing the agreement, that percentage has risen, but only very marginally.<sup>99</sup> A sharp increase has occurred in the last couple of years. The South-Southeast region, which has traditionally had the lowest emigration rate, underwent a perceptible increase in percentage share of the migrant flow, accounting for 13% in 2002.<sup>100</sup> Especially the migration from Veracruz has risen remarkably.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> México – U.S. Migration Management: A Binational Approach, Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, Secretaría de las Relaciones Exteriores, 2006, p. 12, available at: [http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda\\_migratoria/academicos/gestion\\_migratoria\\_ing.pdf](http://www.ime.gob.mx/agenda_migratoria/academicos/gestion_migratoria_ing.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> S.A. Socorro: *La migración a Estados Unidos y la frontera noreste de México*, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Tijuana, Baja California, 2007, pp. 38-39.

<sup>98</sup> P. Leit, M.A. Angoa, M. Rodríguez: *Emigración mexicana a Estados Unidos: balance de las últimas décadas*, CONAPO, 2009, p. 120 available at:

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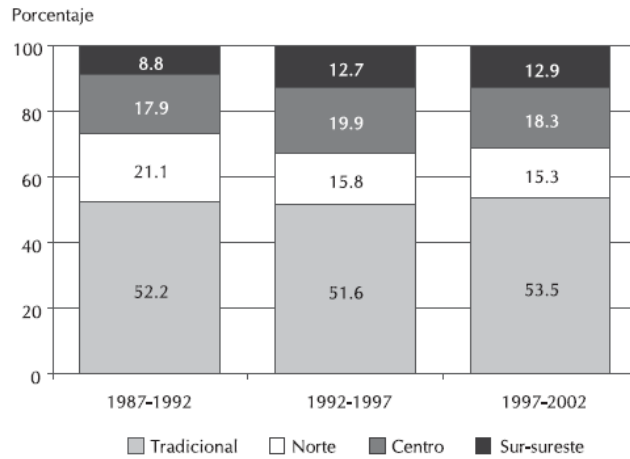
<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>100</sup> CONAPO, available at:

[http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=325&Itemid=295](http://www.conapo.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=325&Itemid=295).

<sup>101</sup> INEGI, available at: <http://www.inegi.org.mx/inegi/default.aspx?s=est>.

**Figure 8. Mexican population that emigrated to the United States by region of origin and period, 1987-2002**



**Source :** P. Leit, M.A. Angoa, M. Rodríguez, Emigración mexicana a Estados Unidos: balance de las últimas décadas, CONAPO, 2009, available at: <http://www.conapo.gob.mx/publicaciones/sdm/sdm2009/07.pdf>

#### 4.4. Summary

The reason I am presenting the characteristics of Mexican migrants is to show that NAFTA, as well as the previous transformation process, generated a change in the nature of the *migrante*, affecting the gender and socio-economic composition of the migrant flow, leading to the end of circularity and the increase of permanent settlers in the United States. These changes also affected the geographic origin of the migrants. Suddenly motivations to emigrate were felt among previously unaffected segments of society.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Mexican-U.S. migration is a dynamic process that first started as an American supported initiative for cheap and exploitable labor. But over the years, and due in part to Immigration Reform Acts legislated in the United States, it became a massive movement, the largest of its kind in the world.

From examining all the push factors that might cause Mexicans to migrate, I have reached the conclusion that Mexican migration is still largely motivated by economic reasons and kinship ties. Although a vast majority of the Mexican population is disturbed by the level of corruption in Mexican politics, this has not become a major reason to leave the country. I believe that recent Mexican migration to the United States has been caused by new motivation. According to statistics from the Pew Research Center, a majority of Mexicans see crime and the illegal drug business, and the violence connected to it, as a much larger concern than economic problems. I believe that this concern could become a motivation for emigration.

Even though the flow of Mexican migrants has decreased in the past couple of years, the Mexican-born population in the United States has been steadily rising, reaching 12.7 million in 2008. This trend is caused by the end of circularity of Mexican migration. More and more Mexicans are choosing to settle in the United States instead of returning to their home country. This is caused first, by the difficulties and dangers of crossing the border illegally, and second, by the growing percentage of women migrants, who are inclined more than men to stay permanently in the United States.

Can this decreased immigrant flow be attributed to NAFTA? There are two reasons for the decreased flow. First, the decline in the Mexican fertility rate that resulted in lowering and stabilizing the labor participation level by 50% in years 1996-2010, and second, because of the lack of jobs available in the United States as a result of the economic crisis. NAFTA itself did not decrease migration for the simple reason that it was not designed to do so. If we examine the push factors before and after NAFTA we can see that they remain basically the same, and except for the security-related motivation, they have nothing to do with NAFTA.

It is interesting and revealing to examine what Mexicans think of the NAFTA agreement. In August 2008, they were asked in a survey whether NAFTA has had a "mainly positive" or "mainly negative" effect on the Mexican economy. Twenty percent of Mexicans replied that the effect of NAFTA has been "mainly positive," while twenty three percent said its effect has been "mainly negative", eighteen percent said NAFTA has been neither positive nor negative for the country's economy and roughly 4 in 10 Mexicans did not have an opinion.<sup>102</sup>

From my research I have learned that Mexican migration depends on the demand for labor in the U.S., as well as the motivation offered by the higher wages available there. Therefore, migration will continue until wages in Mexico reach the level of wages in the United States, or wages in the U.S. fall to the Mexican level, which is unrealistic. NAFTA produced the hope for increased real wages in Mexico, but this hope has not been realized. In fact, wages there have decreased. Therefore, we can conclude that NAFTA has not caused a decrease in immigration to the U.S. because it was not designed to do so, in that it did not affect the push factors motivating Mexicans to migrate.

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<sup>102</sup> C. English: Opinion Briefing: North American Free Trade Agreement: Half of Americans say NAFTA has mainly negative effect on the economy, Gallup, 2008, available at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113200/opinion-briefing-north-american-free-trade-agreement.aspx>.

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<http://www.inegi.org.mx/inegi/default.aspx?s=est>

U.S. Census Bureau, available at: <http://www.census.gov/>

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