

AHS Capstone Final Project Submission

US/Mexico Labor Migration and the Agricultural Industry
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Submissions

There are three items included in this complete project submission:

1. Mock Debate Script
2. Debate summary
3. Digital Story (Just Business? Fellowship)

Debate

Organization

We will be conducting two debates which present contrasting perspectives on the issue of migrant workers in the southwest US. The first is between representatives of the Mexican and US government, considering the higher level policies and economic effects. The second will be between a Mexican immigrant and a native-born American, which will highlight the impact on the community and ethical concerns. Both debates are set in the present (spring 2013).

Mexican/US Government Officials

This debate will be between a US government official and a Mexican government official during a diplomatic visit. They will be presenting a higher level, economic/policy perspective. The US official is labeled with **US** and the Mexican official is labeled with **Mexico**.

Mexico - Thank you again for welcoming me to Washington. I would now like to proceed with some of our main topics for our meeting, starting with immigration. This has been a major issue in the past few visits and there has not been a solid agreement to date. We would like to continue to request more lenient immigration laws for temporary workers and other immigrants.

US - Although we recognize your position, the US labor market is just not in a state to allow this. Our citizens are complaining about how undocumented immigrants can be a huge economic drain due to the costs that go into law enforcement, education, health, and other services without paying the appropriate taxes¹.

Mexico - Immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, contribute to sales, income and other taxes for the US². Low-skilled workers tend to pay less in taxes due to the fact that they

¹See Becerra et al., "Fear Vs. Facts: Examining the Economic Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in the US."

²For income tax, many present fake or invalid Social Security numbers and the payment eventually ends up in the funds of the federal government. See Hanson, "The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration."

have very low annual income and therefore are in a low wage bracket. This can appear to generate a net fiscal drain; however, they pay just as much tax as other US citizens in the same wage bracket.

US - Even so, this is a net fiscal drain that should not exist. In order to control the current situation, we have had to pour billions of taxpayer dollars into border enforcement. In 2009 alone, we had almost \$15bn used for both border and interior enforcement³. We have done what we can to prevent inflow of undocumented immigrants by building a fence, stationing more border patrol officers and investing in advanced monitoring systems⁴. Internally, we have been using resources to convince those undocumented immigrants within the country to return home to Mexico. There is no use increasing the legal quota for Mexican immigrants into the US if the number of undocumented immigrants cannot be controlled effectively.

Mexico- These undocumented immigrants provide cheap labor for the US. What if we look at this in a different way. The current NAFTA does not include any mention of the trade of labor, which is essentially what is happening. Many of these Mexican immigrants send their money to Mexico to help support their families back home; therefore, Mexico “imports” money in the form of remittance income from the US⁵. In return, Mexico “exports” labor in the form of immigrants to the US. What if we were to propose a free trade of labor clause as part of the NAFTA? This will make the entry of these undocumented immigrants legal and will allow the US to lower enforcement costs. We can look at the Schengen Area in Europe as an example. The Schengen Area is comprised of 26 independent countries; however, their Immigration borders have been removed. In terms of international travel this area functions as one country, which allows for the free trade of labor between these countries⁶.

US - By allowing the free trade of labor, opportunities for low-skilled Mexican workers will increase; however, what benefits would there be for the US? Mexico may be dependent on the US, but the two-way trade between us is only 3% of the US GDP⁷. There is also a wage gap between our countries - why should we open up to Mexican workers when there seems to be little opportunities for Americans in Mexico?

³ In 2009, US Customs and Border Protection (border enforcement) spent \$9.5b and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (interior enforcement) spent \$5.4b. In 2009, the number of Border Patrol agents in the field nearly doubled from 11,000 to 20,000 since 2004. In addition there are costs associated with upgrading technology and equipment. See Hanson, “The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration.”

⁴ See above.

⁵ In 2009, it was estimated that about \$20b~\$22b of remittance income flowed from the US to Mexico. See Congressional Budget Office, “Migrants’ Remittances and Related Economic Flows,” and Villarreal, “US-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications.”

⁶ NAFTA “paid little attention to worker mobility” in contrast to the European Union. The EU got rid of immigration between certain countries which essentially allows for the free trade of labor between countries. See Fernández-Kelly and Massey, “Borders for Whom?”

⁷ See Villarreal, “US-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications.”

Mexico - Free trade of labor will allow a legal, seasonal labor force that will lead to resources being exploited more efficiently and ultimately producing more output⁸. Lower wages will also lower the prices of goods and services, allowing the real income of US households to rise⁹. One study showed that a 10% increase in local immigrant population resulted in an average decrease of 1.3% in price for labor-intensive services and 0.2% for other non-traded goods¹⁰.

US - What use is it to have the real income rise when Americans could lose even more jobs? As the competition for these jobs rises, American citizens will inevitably be offered lower wages and have potential jobs taken away and given to immigrants. Additionally the wage gap between the US and Mexico is large. A 25-year-old Mexican male with 9 years of education would receive an average wage of \$2.30 an hour in Mexico versus \$8.50 an hour in the US¹¹. If you were a US citizen, would you want to go over to Mexico to earn less than a third of what you could earn right at home?

Mexico - In response to the possibility that more Americans could lose jobs, immigrant workers tend to do jobs that are undesirable for US workers, so there will be minimal impact. One of the problems with the current immigration process is that the legal channels are cumbersome, even for the temporary workers, and often take a long time¹². Many economic studies conclude that when immigration is opened, there will be large gains for both nations involved. The free trade of labor could create more mobility for Mexican workers and also allow workers to move between jobs and industries that have the greatest demand for labor. This will create a boost in the US economy and therefore would also create more job opportunities in other sectors¹³. Overall, there will be more workers in the labor force, but there will also be more jobs in the US.

US - Unfortunately there is no guarantee that the free trade of labor will be the best option for

⁸ See Hanson, "The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration."

⁹ Immigration allows the US to get low-skilled workers and increases the efficiency of certain industries. This also means there is more competition for the work and therefore wages drop - between 1980 and 2000, wages for native workers without a high school degree dropped by 9%. Lower wages, however, means lower prices for goods and services which allow the real income of US households to rise. See Hanson, "The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration."

¹⁰ One study by Patricia Cortes states that US cities that had a large inflow of low-skilled immigrants experienced larger decreases in prices for a variety of labor-intensive services such as housekeeping, gardening, and child care. The real income of US households will then rise as they spend less on these services - households now have more money to spend on other goods and services. See Hanson, "The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration."

¹¹ See above.

¹² US employers tend to avoid the highly regulated immigration process for temporary workers as it is a cumbersome process. Additionally, if a temporary worker is allowed in the US, it takes time to receive the visa and once inside, they are tied to working that specific job at that specific company. For the full benefit of the US economy, workers should be able to move between jobs and companies where demand for labor is present. This will in turn boost the US economy and therefore provide job opportunities in other business sectors. See Hanson, "The Economic Logic of Illegal Immigration."

¹³ See above.

both countries - what you mentioned regarding a boost in the US economy and therefore new jobs in other sectors is based on assumptions and theory. If everything went as expected, it is true that we may see beneficial results for both countries; however, I believe we should have a better assessment of what the possible faults of this proposal may be and then re-discuss the effectiveness of this plan. Let us take a short break before proceeding with the rest of our meeting agenda.

Rights Advocate/Mayor Candidate (RA/MC)

This debate will be between representatives from a rights advocate and an agricultural labor union representative, and offer an internal perspective, considering more ethical and personal concerns of this issue.

RA: We're here today to discuss some important concerns regarding immigration reform. There are an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States today, over half originate from Mexico¹⁴. With the large majority of the laborers in US agriculture coming from a Latino background, it's important for us to consider the treatment of our migrant labor force¹⁵.

MC: Yes, I agree that it's important for us to consider all the different facets of this issue so that we can make the best choice for America. Farms spend over \$20 billion annually on labor to produce the food that ends up on the dinner tables every day¹⁶. Seasonal migrant labor has been a large part of that responsibility for the past century, and we want to ensure that we can achieve the right balance for all those involved.

RA: Speaking of large expenditures, we'd like to begin by pointing out that last year, the US spent almost \$18 billion on immigration enforcement, which exceeded spending for all other law enforcement, including the FBI, Secret Service, the DEA, and others¹⁷. We've effectively militarized our border states, waging a war against migrant laborers by raising a wall, encouraging racial profiling in law enforcement¹⁸, and deporting more people now than at any other point in history¹⁹. Communities are being torn apart by these issues, and our focus on the border is only exacerbating the problem.

MC: We agree that we've gone overboard with border security. We've never been in strong support of that approach. It's a waste of our taxpayer dollars. It doesn't make sense that we're spending about as much on immigration enforcement as farms do on agricultural labor costs. But, I also think it's important that we keep our communities safe, particularly with the crime situation in Mexico²⁰. Law enforcement doesn't tear communities apart, crime does.

¹⁴ 59% are estimated to come from Mexico (7 million), excluding migrants that originate from Central America and pass through Mexico to enter the US. See BECERRA et al., "Fear Vs. Facts: Examining the Economic Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in the US."

¹⁵ Latinos represent seven-eighths of the US crop work. See Farm Foundation, Immigration Reform, Agriculture and Rural Communities.

¹⁶ See above.

¹⁷ Spending for the FBI, Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Marshal Service and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in 2012 totaled \$14.4 billion. See Meissner et al., "Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery."

¹⁸ Arizona SB 1070 allows law enforcement officers to check people for proof of valid residency in the US. See Pearce, Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act.

¹⁹ Close to 400,000 people are deported each year. See, Meissner et al., "Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery."

²⁰ Crime threats correlated with perceived minority population size, rather than actual size. Also perceptions shaped by economic conditions and correlation with race. See Wang, "Undocumented Immigrants as Perceived Criminal Threat."

RA: That's preposterous. Crime rates in US border towns are orders of magnitude lower than that of Mexican border towns²¹. If anything, there's more crime caused by border security. Ramped up security has further strengthened organized crime in Mexico, driven border crossings to more remote locations that placed already disadvantaged people at the mercy of coyotes²², and encouraged mistreatment of migrants by both border and local law enforcement²³. It's a massive human rights problem that we've sanctioned under the false pretense of protecting America's interests.

MC: The root of the problem is that for the past half century, despite taking greater steps to regulate our borders, our community has witnessed a dramatic influx of undocumented immigrant labor²⁴. The border wall is already a delayed response to immigration issues. So, yes, tightening up the border is causing some pain now, but it's about time we did something about it. It's not fair to our fellow Americans for Mexico to piggyback on our economy. That money they make? It doesn't get spent here. Mexico gets \$22 billion dollars from us every year through remittance income²⁵. We have to regulate the border to protect our own economy.

RA: That's not the solution at all. The reality is that regardless of the condition of the border, the agriculture industry is already dependent on Mexican labor. Without migrant labor, it wouldn't be possible for farmers to meet their seasonal labor demands²⁶. Furthermore, while legal residence is individual, but many of these so called "criminals" are also fathers and mothers. Deportations puts over 5 million children, three quarters of whom are citizens, at the risk of being separated from their families²⁷. Are their interests not as important as any other Americans?

²¹ 96 homicides per 100,000 people within 100 miles of the border in Mexico compared to 3.6 in the US. See Adam Isacson and Maureen Meyer, "Beyond the Border Buildup: Security and Migrants Along the U.S.-Mexico Border."

²² Increased border security shifted border crossings to more remote areas, increased time in transit, and raised prices for coyotes. The total additional costs total ~\$200 which is comparable to approximately 10 additional working days in the US. Hence border security alone is insufficient to deter illegal migration. See Gathmann, "Effects of Enforcement on Illegal Markets."

²³ "attrition by enforcement". See Pearce, Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act. Thousands of cases of mistreatment of migrants at the hands of US authorities have been reported. See Adam Isacson and Maureen Meyer, "Beyond the Border Buildup: Security and Migrants Along the U.S.-Mexico Border."

²⁴ See Figure 2 in Kate Brick, A. E. Challinor, and Marc R. Rosenblum, "Mexican and Central American Immigrants in the United States."

²⁵ In 2009, it was estimated that about \$20b~\$22b of remittance income flowed from the US to Mexico. See Congressional Budget Office, "Migrants' Remittances and Related Economic Flows," and Villarreal, "US-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications."

²⁶ Hired labor accounts for an average of 17% of agricultural production expenses, going as high as 48% for labor intensive sectors, such as fruits. About half of the hired laborers are unauthorized immigrants from Mexico. See Zahniser et al., The Potential Impact of Changes in Immigration Policy on U.S. Agriculture and the Market for Hired Farm Labor.

²⁷ About 5.5 million children (3/4 citizens) with undocumented parents. Parent deportation puts children at great risk. Even the fear of deportation can have an impact on child development. See Becerra, "Fear Vs.

MC: We have a responsibility to native Americans before we can address the needs of others²⁸. We have families in our community that are struggling to just get by right now²⁹. Did you know that unemployment along the border is close to 3 times as high as the national average³⁰? We can consider legitimate pathways for migrant labor, but it's important for us to balance it with the current circumstances instead of handing out free passes to anyone who wants to come to the US for work.

RA: Have you considered how difficult living in America is for immigrants? They face discrimination and racism everywhere, not to mention all the sensational media that fuels people's fear that "Jose is going to steal my job"³¹. So, the majority immigrants end up in their own sub-communities, rejected by American society and putting up with substandard infrastructure³². That \$22 billion you mentioned earlier is going to Mexico because it's the only way their families in Mexico can get by. The average household in Mexico gets over half its income from family members in the US³³. These are hard-working men and women who are trying to live out their own version of the American dream, not thieves or criminals as the justice system would put it. It's time for us to recognize the role that migrant workers have in our global economy and give them the respect they deserve.

Facts: Examining the Economic Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in the US."

²⁸ Restrictionist immigration attitudes can be connected with an isolationist or 'drawbridge' perspective. See 'Espenshade', "Contemporary American..."

²⁹ "Border per capita income is a core measure of community success. A low per capita income indicates that families are struggling to earn more money and break the cycle of poverty. Forty of the US border counties have capita income lower than the state averages." See Lusk, Staudt, and Moya, "Social Justice in the US-Mexico Border Region."

³⁰ "The unemployment rate along the US side of the Texas-Mexico border is 250–300% higher than in the rest of the country (Texas Secretary of State 2010)." See Lusk, Staudt, and Moya, "Social Justice in the US-Mexico Border Region."

³¹ Hate crimes and intimidation against Hispanic communities due to growing national xenophobic sentiments. See Chapter 13, Lusk, Staudt, and Moya, "Social Justice in the US-Mexico Border Region."

³² Approximately 400,000 individuals live in 'colonias' in Texas, 98% of which are Latino. These communities have poor roads and sewage facilities and lack garbage disposal services. See Lusk, Staudt, and Moya, "Social Justice in the US-Mexico Border Region."

³³ The average household in Mexico depends on more than 50% of its income from remittance, see Airola, "Labor Supply in Response to Remittance Income."

Debate Wrap-up and Concluding Remarks

We decided to use a debate structure to present the US-Mexico immigration topic because it highlights the strong differences in opinion. The perspectives in this debate represent opposing values and priorities among the stakeholders in the agriculture industry. Furthermore, we elected to script two debates to point out that the disagreement occurs in different dimensions. The first debate approaches the issue through an economic lens, considering the interaction between the US and Mexico. The second debate focuses more on the personal impact of immigration, focusing on human rights concerns. While the content of the debates differs, we structured each debate to discuss the same topics: border security, free trade, and unemployment. The structure is designed to highlight the problems with the current approach, discuss other options, and consider the potential consequences. While the debates are left open ended for the audience, we have developed our own personal opinion on this topic.

We believe that the best solution to the issue of undocumented immigrants in the US is to create a pathway for them to become legal residents or citizens. Currently, undocumented immigrants are in a “gray” area. They are not legal residents of the US and therefore always live with fear of being sent back to Mexico, where their economic potential is severely limited and criminal activity is rampant. Many of them have children born in the US that are granted US citizenship; therefore, if the parents who are undocumented immigrants get deported back to Mexico, they may not be able to be with their children who will be in the US. Additionally, their status invites authorities to take aggressive, sometimes abusive, actions against them - perhaps even if they are legal residents (Arizona Senate Bill 1070). Programs such as the Criminal Alien Program aimed at immigrants who commit crimes in the US serve as an excuse to single out immigrants. Less than 60% of CAP arrests result in convictions. A road for legal residency should be paved for these immigrants to allow them to live without constant fear and to address the human rights of these immigrants.

Pathways such as DACA only provide pathways to specific groups, such as minors. While this is a step in the right direction, there must be a more comprehensive solution. Currently, the US issues H-2A visas for temporary workers in the agricultural industry, which allows immigrants to work for their sponsor employer in the US for up to a year. This process, however, takes time, restricts workers to one employer, and is expensive for employers as there are various regulations such as providing acceptable living conditions and higher wages. Employers have little incentive to go through this visa process when there are undocumented workers readily available. From an economic standpoint, it would be beneficial for the US to allow a more effective type of temporary or seasonal immigration policy. As discussed in the debate between the US and Mexican diplomats, free trade of labor should boost the US economy; however, we do not believe that the US and Mexico are at a point where completely taking down the border is feasible due to other issues regarding border protection such as drug trafficking. Therefore we propose an alternative form of this idea.

Perhaps there should be certain months, those in which the agricultural industry needs laborers, when the borders to temporary workers should be open. Opening up the border for certain months will allow more freedom for immigrant workers to move across the border and

also move freely between companies and even industries. Immigrant workers can therefore take full advantage of the demands of the labor market, increasing productivity and the US economy. In turn, the Mexican immigrants will be able to receive US wages and be able to send more remittance income to Mexico, increasing Mexico's economy as well. Additionally, this will address many of the overlooked human rights concerns of Mexican immigrant workers.

Sources

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