

CONSTRUCTING OFFICIAL DATA AND INSTITUTIONAL REALITY: THE DECREASE IN UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT FLOW IN INM RECORDS

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International undocumented transmigration via Mexico has become a source of public attention in the 21st century, particularly due to the ongoing mass abductions and collective murders, unparalleled in recent history. Given the U.S. economic crisis, its global effect, and those violent events, it made sense to wonder whether transmigration would diminish, to what extent and for how long. Data issued by Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) seem to indicate a decrease in flow, however temporary, among those who are caught and deported by Mexican immigration authorities. Given the importance of the international transmigration flow that passes through Mexico, this paper takes a look at official arguments as well as information not presented by the government, casting doubt on this presumed decline and pondering how much of it could be a product of official stances.

Keywords: International transmigration, undocumented migrants, INM, deportations, official data.

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INTRODUCTION

Official data and arguments

Since the late decades of the 20th century, most of the undocumented migrants detained by Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM)¹ have been Guatemalan, Honduran, Salvadoran and Nicaraguan² (Table 1). Government statistics show a steady growth in the amount detentions until 2005 and, later, a noticeable fall with a subsequent recovery that does not, however, equal former peaks (see Table 2).

Records from the 1990s show a high amount of Central American detainees. In this regard, it should be pointed out that governmental statistics account for deportations, not people; this means the same person could have been arrested by the INM several times over the same year, which casts a doubt on the actual number of people in official calculations. This issue continues to challenge the creativity of both officials and analysts.

Table 1.
Deportations and rejections of foreigners by nationality,
Inm, 1990-2000

Year	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Other	Total
1990	58845	45598	14954	3039	4004	136440
1991	69991	40441	18419	1265	3226	133342
1992	65304	26643	25546	1632	3871	123046
1993	58910	28646	26734	3438	4277	122005
1994	42961	22794	32414	12330	2616	113115
1995	52051	19526	27236	2521	4686	105040
1996	50497	20904	31055	1878	2784	107110
1997	37837	18857	24890	1172	2832	85588
1998	46088	25783	35161	1854	2636	111572

1. The INM's stance has been disseminated across various media, printed and virtual, as well as conferences and forums. E.g., the INM's *Apuntes sobre migración*, no. 1, states that the opinions contained in it belong exclusively to the authors (all of them INM employees), but different officials have reiterated the same arguments and interpretations institutionally

2. In recent years, Nicaraguan flow has given way to those from other nations such as Ecuador.

1999	50924	26176	44818	1394	3106	126498
2000	79431	37481	45802	1960	8261	172935
Total	612839	312849	327029	32533	42349	1327599

Source: www.inm.gob.mx

What can lead to the repeated detention of a single person? A number of potential reasons: 1) migration experience; 2) competition and network success; and 3) a successful governmental policy for the detection and detention of undocumented migrants. We will later see how these elements affect the total number of events reported by the INM.

During the first decade of the 21st century, the situation is as follows:

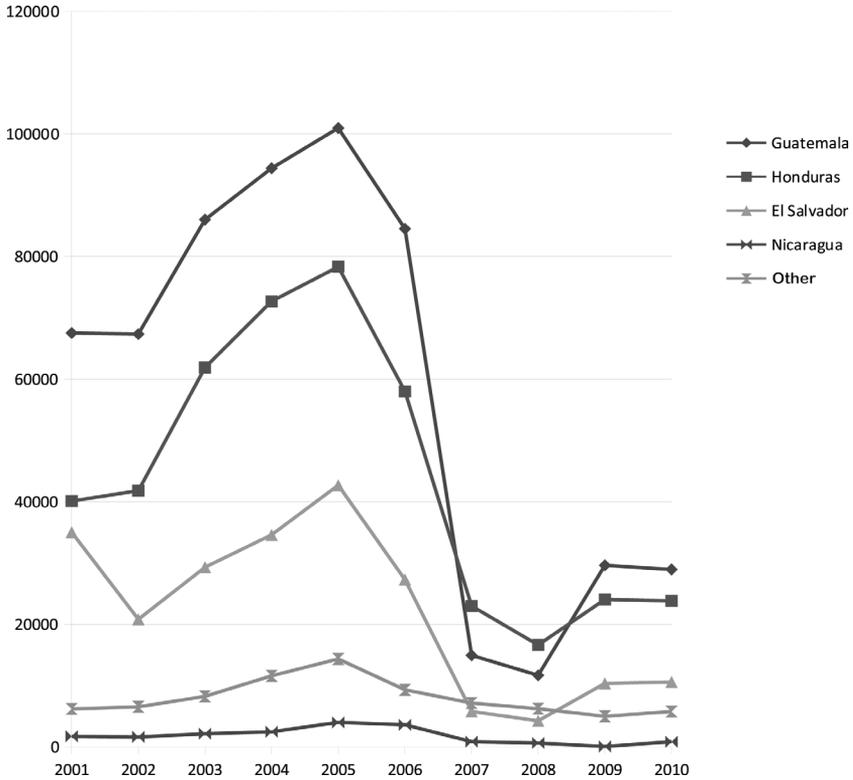
Table 2.
Deportations and rejections of foreigners by nationality,
INM, 2001-2010

Year	Guatemala	Honduras	El Salvador	Nicaragua	Subtotal	Other	Total
2001	67522	40105	35007	1712	144346	6184	150530
2002	67336	41801	20800	1609	131546	6515	138061
2003	86023	61900	29301	2150	179374	8240	187614
2004	94404	72684	34572	2453	204113	11582	215695
2005	100948	78326	42674	3980	225928	14341	240269
2006	84523	58001	27287	3590	173401	9304	182705
2007	14939	22980	5777	855	44551	7149	51700
2008	11656	16624	4233	626	33139	6297	39436
2009	29604	24040	10355	53	64052	4981	69033
2010	28933	23811	10567	839	64150	5753	69903
Total	585888	440272	220573	17867	1264600	80346	1344946

Source: www.inm.gob.mx

The supposed flow reduction can be seen clearly in the following figure:

Figure 1.
Foreign nationals detained in migrant holding centers according to nationality,
2001-2011, inm, mexico



Source: www.inm.gob.mx

How can this reduction be explained from a governmental viewpoint? As a combination of events in the United States, Mexico and Central America that basically consider three factors: 1) U.S. immigration containment policy; 2) the U.S. economic crisis, which has reduced demand and, consequently, labor supply; (3) public insecurity in Mexico, particularly the confrontation between organized crime and Mexican authorities, as well fighting between drug cartels.

According to Mexican governmental sources, the combination of these three elements could explain the decrease in migrant flow; this

is reportedly backed by U.S. statistical sources, which also registered a drop in detentions of undocumented Central Americans. This ostensibly proves that INM data are correct, even if a validation of the Mexican registry due an eventual match with U.S. data is not convincing. One must, in fact, wonder if those arguments are solid and sufficient to explain the decrease in the INM's statistical register.

The institutional construction of statistical data

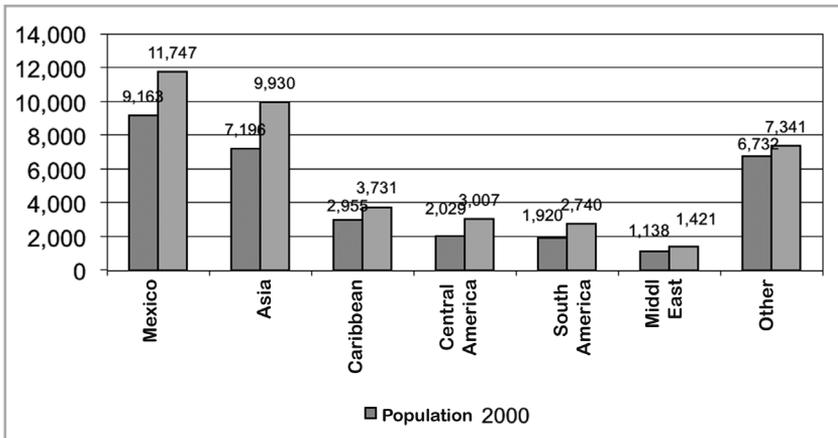
The first thing to consider is that one thing is how the data is constructed and another how it is interpreted. So far, the methodology used by the INM is unknown, and the only known thing is that their regional delegations (one per state) directly capture information, give it a certain treatment, and this is later processed and published in print and digital versions by the INM's Center of Migration Studies. But nothing is known about how the data are captured and what are the technical phases in the delegations and the Center. One has to assume that this delicate and important process is carried out properly and without mistakes. Although the Federal Government should do this transparently, the truth is that, for now, we cannot know how the official data were produced. The staff is not always properly trained, and the conditions and circumstances in which the work is done justify some misgivings about the initial capture and treatment of statistical data. Even if we cannot tell with certainty how the data is constructed, we can still analyze it. This will be done contextually, based on what is happening in Mexico and the preparation and implementation of INM immigration policy, something that exceeds internal data capture and processing and helps us understand and assess these specific tasks.

Before we move on to the analysis we must take some external considerations on official discourse into account. One that would seem obvious but is not is that the decline in the total number of undocumented migrants detained by the INM is not equal to the eventual reduction of transmigration flow. As the INM puts it, a percentage of migrants are not arrested by immigration authorities. So the INM *estimates* their number from the number of arrests made by U.S. immigration authori-

ties, plus the Central American population that settles in the United States according to U.S. sources, to reach the same conclusion: a reduction in the transmigration flow, ratified again by U.S. statistical sources. Given that the strength of the INM’s argument lies in what U.S. immigration authorities do or not do, the U.S. sources themselves should be analyzed, but that is not the aim of this paper even though we acknowledge the need for an in-depth study. Either way, what matters in this text is to analyze what happens in Mexico and what Mexican immigration authorities do or fail to do.

The foreign population residing in the United States grew during the first decade of the 21st century, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Foreign-born U.S. population by region of birth, 2000 and 2010

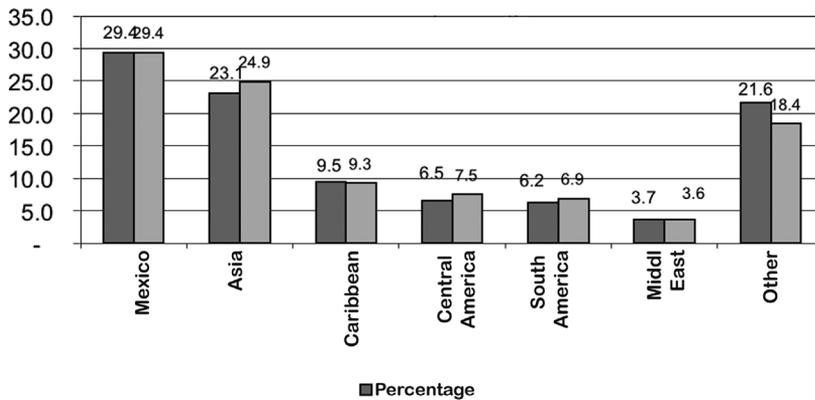


Note: The Middle East includes Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan.
Source: Author’s graph based on Eileen Patten (2012).

At first glance, we observe an increase in all immigrant groups during the 2000-2010 period. However, when we look at the percentage distribution of these same figures over this period (see Figure 3), we see a number of constants that indicate that, in spite of increases, the weight of some immigrant groups has not changed. Such is the case of Mexi-

cans, whose share in the total of the foreign population residing in the United States has not changed. Immigration from the Middle East and the rest of the countries has declined, while that from Asia, the Caribbean, Central America and South America has risen.

Figure 3.
Percentages of foreign-born U.S. population by region of birth, 2000 and 2010

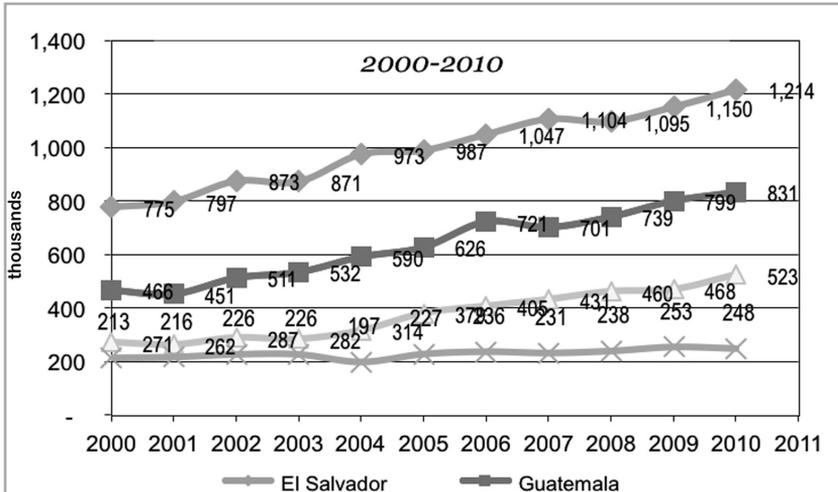


Note: The Middle East includes Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan.
Source: Author's graph based on Eileen Patten (2012), "Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-born Population in the United States, 2010," Pew Hispanic Center, February 2012.

These differences, particularly in the case of Mexico, are explained by some analysts as the result of the economic crisis during mid-2007. However, it seems that this situation is not shared by other groups of immigrants such as Central Americans.

Every Central American flow has its peculiarities and behaviors, its history; some of this is reflected in statistical records. The resulting heterogeneity is evident in the four countries of northern Central America, as shown in Figure 4: for El Salvador, 2003 and 2008 were the turning points in migration dynamics; for Guatemala, 2001 and 2007; for Honduras, 2004; and for Nicaragua, 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010.

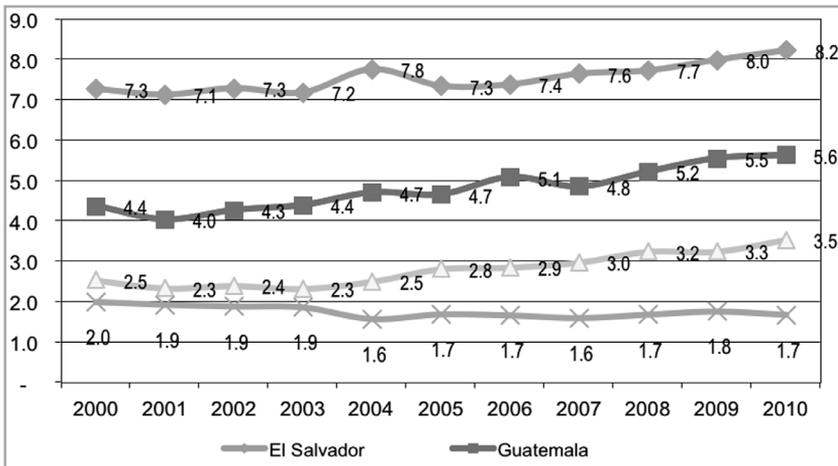
Figure 4.
Central American residents in the United States according
to country of birth, 2000-2010



Source: Author's graph based on Jesús Cervantes (2011).

The same is evident in the percentage distribution, according to Figure 5.

Figure 5. Percentage distribution of Central American residents in the United States according to country of birth, 2000-2010



Source: Author's graph based on Jesús Cervantes (2011).

Although an important part of the Central American population is undocumented, there are variations in population totals that do not follow an upward trend, as can happen with other international migration flows. This assumes that, although the U.S. economy has gone through a complicated period since 2007, in the case of the Central American population the data seem to indicate that the crisis has not discouraged migration to the United States since at least 2008. However, as shall be seen further, data involving the Central American economy provides other elements for analysis that, combined with factors in the United States, Central America and Mexico, do not support the INM's idea regarding Central American transmigration through Mexican soil.

Therefore, there are other things to consider. Some refer to supply and demand in the labor market; others to what happens in Central American places of origin. For brevity's sake, we will first address the market.

It is said that when the need for workers decreases due to an economic crisis in the United States, the labor offer also decreases; migrants are discouraged by lack of work and desist from emigrating. This is a highly questionable argument. There are no perfect market or social equations. From a theoretical point of view verified by fact, one of the elements that stimulate markets is imbalance: decreased demand usually leads to increased offer, which expands the profit margin. An essential part of market rationality is the enlargement of the profit margin, which is favored by imbalance between supply and demand, and not their balance. The first is typical of the market; imbalance, it is hoped, should not become a social problem and this should be the State's concern, which is not always the case.

The economic crisis has had a number of consequences out of which we will only address transmigration flow-related issues: 1) more stringent immigration measures in the receiving country because a greater presence of unemployed and foreign workers can become a problem for public services (e.g., health authorities) and public security; 2) a rise in people smuggling; 3) a contraction of the dependent economy, as is the case in Central America; and 4) increased pressure on workers in dependent economies to find jobs, inside or outside their country, that can satisfy their needs.

By tightening border control, states seek to regulate flows and avoid potential destabilizing effects although, on the other hand, market forces

keep attracting more manpower to secure a reserve of available workers with which to overcome the crisis. Low wages are a way of doing this. It is general knowledge that U.S. political and regional forces, particularly around the Sun Belt, can adopt strategies that differ from those of the White House to achieve their specific goals.

Two recent examples: after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the federal decision was to close the borders immediately, an understandable decision accepted by all U.S. social sectors. However, as the days went by, businesses along the United States-Mexico border began to complain because their sales were nil or negligible. Little by little, local provisions regularized trade, i.e., border transit, which comprises an estimated one million crossings a day. A second example: it would seem that U.S. authorities are highly effective when stopping undocumented migrants, but these same authorities, equipped with a broad deployment of staff and high technology, are unable to detect the impressive illicit arms trafficking flowing from the United States into Mexico, an issue that has often been denounced by Mexican President Felipe Calderón to no avail. U.S. border control, it seems, can see everything that goes from south to north but not the other way around. How can one then trust that their data are exempt from any kind of manipulation and, by extension, find the INM's data reliable?

All international sources agree on the critical situation of Central American economies (though this is not mentioned in the Mexican government's analyses), which would lead one to think that Central American migration flows have not decreased,³ nor have migrants chosen significantly new destinations⁴; rather, they have increased or, in the lesser cases, remained constant beyond possible minor decreases over a couple of years.

3. There has not been an increase in wages or new jobs. On the contrary, the situation has deteriorated.

4. Migration within the Central American region has increased in recent years, but not to the point of becoming a new option for workflows headed toward the United States. Central Americans do not migrate to the south, it is very difficult for them to enter Western Europe, and Mexico is still far from being a consolidated destination, even if there has been a gradual increase in those who stay in the country.

Table 3.
Economic indicators for Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras
and Mexico, 2000, 2005 and 2010. Percentages.

Country/year	Trade deficit	Inflation*	Population*	Unemployment*
Guatemala				
2000	6,103	9,079	11,225	n.d.
2005	4,559	8,567	12,701	n.d.
2010*	2,908	5,485	14,362	n.d.
El Salvador				
2000	3.02	4,288	5,474	6.94
2005	3,545	4,261	5,666	7.23
2010*	2,775	1.5	5,864	6,628
Honduras				
2000	7,096	10.1	6.23	4
2005	2,988	7,748	6,893	4
2010*	6,284	5.7	7,614	4.6
Mexico				
2000	2,971	8,869	97,966	2.2
2005	0,536	3,287	103,946	3,579
2010*	1,159	4.5	108,627	5

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook.

- a. Trade deficit as a share of GDP.
- b. Rate of annual variation in consumer prices.
- c. Millions of people.
- d. Percentage of the unemployed amongst the economically active population.
- e. Estimates.

If to this we add political elements such as the presidential removal in 2009 in Honduras, growing public insecurity (e.g., El Salvador) or governmental changes (e.g., new presidents in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador), we will find a lack of economic and political stability, as well as public security, in the Central American region. It would then be reasonable to assume that the decrease in migrant detentions posited by the INM is related to a stable transmigrant flow, maybe even a growing one, even though it corresponds to the same years with a low in the statistical register by the INM. The reasons for which are explained below.

The most plausible explanation, then, is that a part of Central American transmigration (as well as from other parts of the world) leaves no record in official Mexican statistics (Casillas, in press).

Before addressing Mexican migration policy, let us review some indicators of the critical moment being experienced by Central American countries, which encourages transmigration: the behavior of the gross domestic product (GDP), foreign direct investment (FDI), exports, remittances, the manufacturing industry, employment and unemployment. The general and per capita GDP declined in all the countries of the Central American region. El Salvador is the most extreme case, where growth in 2007 was 4.3% and -3.5% in 2009, while per capita GDP was -4%. Honduras recorded a growth rate of 6.3% prior to the crisis and this fell to -1.9% in 2009, with a more pronounced drop of -3.8% in the per capita GDP. Guatemala was perhaps the least affected country: its growth of 6.3% in 2007 dropped to 0.5% in 2009, while per capita GDP that year was -2%.

Between 2007 and 2009, the FDI in the region plummeted by 40%. El Salvador and Honduras were the most affected countries, with respective drops of 71.4% and 43.6%. We should remember that their economies are greatly dependent on the United States. The fall in the FDI led to the closing of establishments and an increase in the number of unemployed, especially in the manufacturing sector.

Today, family remittances are higher than FDI, something was already the case prior to the crisis when, in 2007, the FDI reached the historical figure of 5.4 billion dollars, while the remittances amounted to 11.12 billion. Between 2007 and 2008, remittances experienced an increase of 5%; however, between 2008 and 2009, there was a drop of 9.74%. In absolute terms, the region stopped receiving 1.1 billion dollars in 2009, an amount that exceeds the amount of remittances received by Nicaragua in 2008. In 2010, remittances grew by 3.4% and yet did not reach the amount of 2008.

Due to the contraction in demand in the United States and the fall in FDI, exports of Central American goods fell by 11.3% in 2009. The biggest drop was recorded in manufacturing, with *maquila* being a significant sector. With 21%, Honduras had the biggest drop in exports; El Salvador followed with 16.26%, and then Guatemala with 6.5% and

Nicaragua with 5.9%. Between 1994 and 2005, the number of *maquilas* in Honduras grew 75%, going from 175 to 306 companies, while the number of employees increased by almost 200% (from 42,541 to 125,825 people). Three hundred and forty two companies were reported in 2007; 299 in 2009. By 2007, the textile branch dominated Honduras' foreign trade and the value of garments and knit exports totaled 2.5 million dollars, equivalent to 44.1% of the total export of goods. In El Salvador, between 1995 and 2000, the number of companies remained the same. *Maquilas* contributed to the development of the manufacturing industry, and went from 1.7% in 1990 to 13.3% in 2001. During that same period, their contribution to the GDP increased from 0.4 to 3.1%.

The fact that these economies are highly dependent on the U.S. market explains the strong impact of the crisis. Despite a decrease in the relative participation of *maquila* exports to the United States, in 2008, already in the midst of the crisis, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua registered high percentages, ranging from 69 to 55%; Guatemala had the most reduced one with little more than 40%. In general, the *maquiladora* industry plays a significant role in the total exports of the region's nations; 55% in Honduras, over 40% in Nicaragua, and over 35% of the value of exported goods in El Salvador and Guatemala. In the case of Honduras, the crisis significantly impacted employment in the *maquiladora* industry; 27,312 jobs were lost between 2007 and 2009.

The economic crisis in Central America increased the rates of unemployment, underemployment and job insecurity. The biggest drops in the number of jobs took place in 2008 and 2009. Between 2007 and 2009, unemployment grew by 38% in Nicaragua. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reports that, in 2006, poverty in Guatemala encompassed 54.6% of the population, while destitution reached 29.1% that year. The situation is more serious in rural areas: 70.5% in 2006. In the case of Honduras, ECLAC reported a poverty incidence of 68.9%, and 45.6% of destitution during 2007. In El Salvador in 2009, poverty affected the 47.9% of the population and destitution 17.3%, slightly less than in Honduras.

In short, the economic crisis in the United States had a considerable effect on Central American economies. Transmigration was the way

of confronting the crisis; old and new problems involving travel to the United States (more insecurity on the road, higher costs, increased difficulties obtaining employment, and reduced chances of finding decent wages) were the other side of the coin. The worst thing was to sit and wait: for how long? Running the risks of migration was a better option, for the marginalized already live in constant risk as it is.

The INM and its internal problems

There is no doubt that migration policy, its implementation and the type of leadership espoused by the authorities will translate into statistical records, such as the total number of detained undocumented foreigners. From that perspective, there are processes and decisions that affect the numerical reduction of migratory flows reported by the INM. Let us analyze this matter.

If we assume that the figures regarding undocumented detainees are true, they can be analyzed in the context in which the records are made. As shown in Table 2, during 2001, the Vicente Fox Administration reported 150,530 events of undocumented migrants arrested by the INM. By 2005, the figure had reached 240,269. In 2006 it decreased to 182,705, went lower in 2008 with 39,436, and rose again during 2009 and 2010 with slightly more than 69,000 per year. The arguments intended to explain the reduction lack historical accuracy, even if this is not the distant past we are dealing with. They refer to what happened between 2006 and the present in the following terms: 1) a combination of successful border control and deportation policy on the part of the United States, and 2) discouragement among potential migrants given the economic crisis in that country. Virtually nothing is said of Mexican migration policy; by default, it seems that this is unequivocally right during times in which the physical integrity of Central American migrants, in particular, is highly threatened.

Firstly, we must discuss appointments, the conduct of immigration authorities, and internal administrative provisions. Policies and the way legal provisions are enforced will depend on whether the authorities have any knowledge of migration issues.

Four directors were appointed to the INM between August 2005 and December 2006.⁵ Except for one who had previously held an intermediate position in INM command posts, all others lacked experience in immigration policy. One of them was working in government for the first time. These changes were followed by departmental changes (the level below the head administration), including new delegates in the states, and shuffling of positions. This instability, incipient federal handling of migration, and personnel changes are more likely to explain the fall in government statistics than are macroeconomic causes. It was, in fact, in 2006, during constant administrative changes, that the fall in the total number of undocumented detainees began; it would reach its lowest point in 2008. Those who know how Mexican government institutions operate and, moreover, are aware of the complexity of the INM, will know that institutional competence regarding data collection and processing played a significant role in those three years of “free fall.”

The economic crisis began in the second half of 2008 and synchronicity between that event and reduced migrant flow would be astounding. By 2009 and 2010, a rising trend in arrests made by the INM almost doubled the 2008 figure even though, at this time, the alleged discouragement of migration due to the crisis would have been observable. And yet, this new increase in the total number of undocumented detainees would seem to respond to the effects of the U.S. economic crisis in Central America, encouraging transmigration. This rise could even mark a resurgence (assuming increased detentions reflect an increased flow), and not the start of a decrease in Central American transmigration.

Natural disasters affected South-Southeastern Mexico during 2005 and 2006: overflowing rivers and floods altered migration routes, among other things. The INM temporarily suspended undocumented detention operations. In 2005, the train station in Tapachula literally disappeared under a flood, and this was where most transmigrants traveling by train began the Mexican leg of their journey. Since then, the city of Arriaga,

5. Lauro López Sánchez Acevedo (August 1, 2005 to November 29, 2005); Pablo Enrique Torres Salmerón (November 30, 2005 to April 16, 2006); Hipólito Treviño Lecea (April 17, 2006 to December 7, 2006); Cecilia Romero Castillo (December 8, 2006 to September 14, 2010).

in northern Chiapas, located approximately 300 km from Tapachula, became the new point of departure. The INM did not open offices in Arriaga, nor did it allocate more staff or carry out operations in there; it merely sent some staff from Tapachula to the new site. It is undeniable that this situation resulted in at least two things: 1) there was a readjustment in migratory routes and this was exploited by migrant smugglers as well as criminal networks that were already targeting migrants as a new niche of their market, though this was unbeknownst to Mexican authorities; and 2) the INM delegation in Oaxaca received the increased flow. As the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) would later document, this led to a boom in the mass kidnapping of migrants (CNDH, 2009) and confrontations between authorities, particularly in Oaxaca, and humanitarian groups (Brito, 2011).⁶

In 2009, as a result of the emergence of the H1N1 virus, the INM again temporarily suspended detentions during the second quarter of the year give possible contagion risks in migrant holding centers, just when the reputedly adverse effects of the 2008 crisis (i.e., according to the INM) would have been more visible among the undocumented; otherwise, the number of arrests would have been greater.

To this we must add the authorities' withdrawal from the social spaces of migration with extremely serious consequences, since their absence from the dynamic spaces for undocumented migration facilitated (and left unpunished) mass kidnappings, in addition to a cease in the detention of transiting undocumented migrants.

Internal INM provisions and a refusal for inter-agency collaboration limited or barred the participation of other public agencies, which resulted in an increase of discretionary powers for INM officials and in

6. Conflicts between immigration officials and the Catholic Church, however, were not limited to Oaxaca. Archbishop Rafael Romo, head of the Pastoral Dimension of Human Mobility (DPMH) of the Mexican episcopate, which is the ecclesiastical body that deals with migration, noted in a press conference at the Mexican Senate: "the lack of timely attention to violence and insecurity has meant that the number of attacks increased from 18 risky incidents in five years (2004 to 2009) to 46 in year and a half (29 in 2010 and 17 in 2011). The main aggressor has been the State itself via public servants across all three levels of government who try to intimidate us so we do not denounce the abuses and human rights violations committed against migrants."

the freeing of individuals institutionally related to migration (even if illegally). Institutional participation was restricted, but public servants who remained in the migration field continued with their interpersonal relationships at work, now away from any possible institutional control. Additionally and instructed by the INM high command, the staff stopped operating in shelters and migrant houses, which they had been legally able to do since 2007. In fact, all this facilitated the smuggling of undocumented as well as documented migrants (the so-called *pollos empapelados*), in addition to creating favorable conditions for the collaboration between different smuggling networks with negative consequences such as those in San Fernando (Casillas, 2010). The specific measures taken were:

- 1) INM staff could approve the entry and stay of foreigners in Mexico, and even reject a visa refusal by Mexican consulates. This was a recurrent case that caused discomfort among Foreign Service staff and concern among national security bodies, but was carried out due to the INM Commissioner's bonds with high-level federal officials.
- 2) The INM stopped operations in trains and highways, which facilitated smuggling. This decision also came from the INM high command, particularly the former Commissioner. It is important to note that the Office of Verification and Immigration Control has had, for several years now, a register of the daily, weekly or monthly operations carried out in roads and railway networks, as well as inspection in buildings and places where mobile operations are performed. Put another way, an analysis of this internal source could provide the INM with data regarding the implications of reducing the number of operations, as well as deciding to carry them out in strategic or non-strategic transit locations. This analysis has not been carried out though, as long as that source exists, it could.

The closeness of the former INM head to the Catholic Church did not only prevent migrant houses (most of them Catholic) from being

searched by Immigration; it also led to pastoral agents actively participating in the processes of caring for and interviewing some of the likely victims of INM abuse (Casillas, 2011). This began a pragmatic policy of collaboration with religious bodies that, as far as transparency of public management goes, is acceptable. However, from a legal standpoint, it was highly inappropriate, not to say illegal. A beneficial collaboration between government agencies and civil actors could have been established, but there was a lack of creativity. Instead, the law was disrupted to create a private arrangement with a particular church—though it should be pointed out that this private agreement was not made with the shelter managers, whether secular or clergy, but with the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

These measures, along with others to cease collaboration between the INM and public security bodies such as the Army and Navy given evidence of abuses and violations on their part, should have presumably decreased damages to migrants, but the exact opposite happened. What was needed was not the authorities' withdrawal from the dynamic spaces of migration, but to refine their presence and mechanisms of collaboration with humanitarian agencies. These initiatives, illegal as they were, were presumably taken in good faith in an environment in which the emergence and actions of criminal organizations have been characterized, precisely, by an absence of good faith. The result was increase in crimes against transmigrants and a decrease in the number of INM arrests.

Exempted from the presence (however distant) of INM agents or of any other legal authority (however occasional), shelters and migrant houses became privileged niches for any person or organization seeking to infiltrate them according to their interests⁷: from local security agents (natural persons) with dubious intent to smugglers seeking clients or getting lodging for “their” migrants, as well as kidnappers. The most the shelter staff can do is throw the suspicious party out, which means that impunity has been guaranteed since then. This also helps explain why

7. The new Migration Act of May 2011 does not prevent these problems, since it expressly forbids the entry of immigration authorities into migrant homes and shelters. Indeed, the only change in this regard is an increase in the prize and length of the penalties for those who commit these crimes, which is clearly insufficient given the complexity of the criminal processes involved (which, moreover, are not even considered).

there has been a decrease in the number of migrants in shelters: fear of being detected and kidnapped.

The INM, on the other hand, made some important modifications in the granting of visas or work permits in the southern border. This is commendable not only because it nourishes administrative records but also because it extends legal cover to various workers, as well as territorial space and the number of entries. In order to do this and during the required time, the offices involved, particularly Chiapas', used all their regular staff; this means that personnel usually assigned to other activities, such as mobile operations, was employed in data collection. As you can be seen in the following figures, this situation coincides with the decline in detentions. However, it is important to consider that, in turn, the number of documented migrants increased.

Figure 2
Number of issued Local Visitor immigration permits

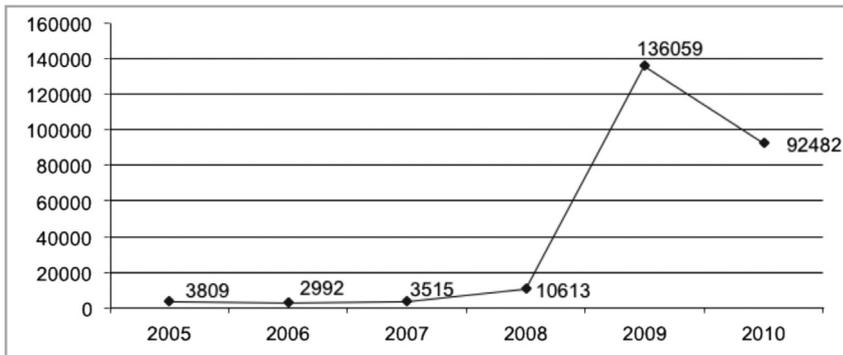


Image taken from Leonir M. Chiarello (Coord.) (2011).

Map 1:
Territorial coverage of the Local Visitor immigration permit



Figure 3:
Number of Border Worker immigration permits issues, 2005-2010

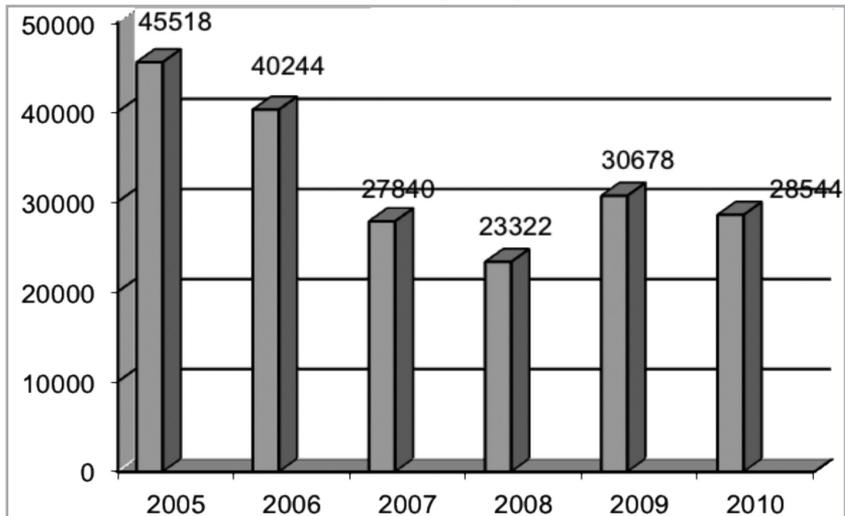


Image taken from Leonir M. Chiarello (coord.) (2011).

In short, the drop in the number of migrants registered by the INM and shelters could well be real, but the reasons behind it are different and, in a sense, complementary. It has not been proven, however, that this overall decrease in government and humanitarian agency records is due to a decrease in transmigration for the reasons posited by the INM. A much more careful analysis that takes into account the internal elements left out of the official analysis and further investigates the reduction in the figures is desirable. Said analysis would require, for example, that the INM made its statistical methodology public, along with information regarding mobile operations, administrative and operations personnel, and so on.⁸ Otherwise, we have deeply partial and incomplete official data in the face of the evidence that has been presented in this paper, which is absolutely verifiable and which, for some unspecified reason, the INM omits from its analysis and explanation of the transmigration process.

Shall we continue like this or change?

For the reasons explained above, there are serious and well-founded doubts regarding the veracity of INM data indicating a decrease of transmigration flow as presumably accurately reflected in the arrests carried out by Mexican authorities. There is certainly a decrease in the governmental registry, but the reasons are very different to those espoused by the INM. It is clear that the INM *is not able to estimate the real reduction in its records* because, to do so, it would need to collect, analyze and assess several aspects of migration policy it has so far left out. Hopefully it

8. Arguably, the INM cannot provide such information for security reasons, given it would inform criminal networks of the institutional *modus operandi*. It is possible that criminal organizations, which include administrative staff, would consult documents and prepare ahead of time as they have, until now, done in the case of the *pollos empapelados*. However, according to years of fieldwork experience on my part, much of that empirical information is easily accessed by criminal networks anyway and without consulting systematic public sources. Put another way, those who currently have access to this information (without being held accountable for it) are involved government personnel and those who commit crimes against migrants. Thus and accidentally, imbalances that undermine individuals and institutions are nurtured while the sound participation of analysts, humanitarian agencies and all those who seek to contribute to a better national migration policy and, ultimately, a better society, are left out.

will, for reasons of institutional health and because it would help better understand the serious damage being caused to migrants, institutional life and specific social networks linked to migration processes in the country. In order to create a new migration policy, so urgently needed in Mexico, and to retrieve whatever is currently useful, we need an introspective and deep analysis without distortions or cover-ups. In addition to capability, technical resources and an open analysis, a vigorous and sustained political will is needed. It seems that is also dwindling among Mexican governmental bodies.

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