

Immigrants and Minorities, Politics and Policy

Bryan Roberts
Cecilia Menjívar
Néstor P. Rodríguez *Editors*

Deportation and Return in a Border- Restricted World

Experiences in Mexico, El Salvador,
Guatemala, and Honduras

 Springer

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Over the last fifty years, immigrant and minority population growth has transformed much of the global north, particularly the United States, Canada, and Europe. Understanding the political and policy consequences of such demographic change is essential to scholars and practitioners alike. On topics ranging from elections to policymaking, immigrants and minorities are—or should be—increasingly important parts of the discussion. Scholars also need to know more about migration itself, including migrant incorporation, return migration, internal migration, the implications of migration for sending nations, and the forces that structure migration. This interdisciplinary series is designed to address these interrelated topics. If you would like to propose a book or edited volume, please contact the series editor or Springer's Economics and Political Science editor.

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Immigrants and Minorities, Politics and Policy

ISBN 978-3-319-49777-8

ISBN 978-3-319-49778-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-49778-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016960191

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

In memory of the many men, women, and children who have perished migrating to other lands or trying to return home. May the stories of migrants always be remembered as a testament to the enduring human spirit to go beyond.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of many people, organizations, and committees made the research reported in this volume possible in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. In the United States, The University of Texas at Austin, Arizona State University, and the University of Kansas provided resources to support the research and the completion of this volume.

The research reported in this volume resulted from a project planned in 2011 at the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) and the Department of Sociology at The University of Texas at Austin. We thank the authors of the chapters for their contributions, for their diligence and responsiveness to our requests during the preparation of the chapter manuscripts, for their insights concerning the experiences of return migration, and especially for their sense of camaraderie and collegiality during the work of the project. We also thank Roxana Jaquelyn Rojas and Daniela Jiménez for sharing their research insights while working on the project in Jalisco.

Among the persons, organizations, committees, and funding sources that supported the research of the project, Bryan Roberts acknowledges the following for the research component in Mexico: the C.B. Smith Sr. Chair #1 at The University of Texas at Austin for supporting research in Jalisco, and the collaboration of CIESAS and its members, including Agustin Escobar, Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha, Magdalena Villarreal. Cecilia Menjivar acknowledges research support through the Cowden Distinguished Professorship at Arizona State University when this project started and toward the end of the project from the Foundation Distinguished Professorship at the University of Kansas. She also would like to thank Dulce Medina, doctoral student at Arizona State University, for collaborations during the time this project took place. Néstor Rodríguez acknowledges Charles Hale and Paloma Díaz for support and assistance given through LLILAS, and to the Population Research Center and the Department of Sociology at The University of Texas at Austin. Finally, we express our gratitude to David Leal, Series Editor of Springer Press, for making available resources for the preparation of the volume for publication.

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Part I
Introduction

Voluntary and Involuntary Return Migration

Bryan Roberts, Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor P. Rodríguez

Abstract Mexican migration to the United States long exhibited a strong circular pattern, as Mexican migrants returned annually to Mexico after working in US agriculture or other industries. With increased enforcement, undocumented migration from Mexico increasingly took on a permanent character. In addition, Central American migrants could not return to the areas of conflict they fled, and the long distances from their nations of origin made seasonal migration impractical. In recent years, return migration for Mexicans and Central Americans has changed, both in nature and in composition. The renewed significance of return migration is not due to its becoming once again a normal part of the migration process, but to its increasingly involuntary nature as a growing proportion of return migration is taking place in the context of U.S. enforcement practices. Voluntary return involves planning and preparation, but deportation or quasi-involuntary return gives migrants little opportunity to arrange their affairs. The potential difficulties of adjustment that this implies for returnees have become, as we show in this volume, challenging issues not only for returnees, but for their communities and for public policy. The chapters in this book place return migration experiences within the context of the economic, social, and political forces that have determined international migration, return to countries of destination, and settlement in countries of origin. Although there are important differences in the nature of Mexican return migration as compared to Central America, the contributions to this volume demonstrate significant similarities, including poverty in those countries and lack of employment opportunities and of government or institutional policies to receive the returnees.

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This volume focuses on the recent experiences of return from the United States of migrants from Mexico and Central America. For most of the twentieth century, return migration to the US, particularly from Mexico, was a normal part of a predominantly temporary movement of rural males seeking to complement subsistence in their home villages through labor migration to the US. By the end of the twentieth century, this circular movement had become more permanent as whole families moved to the US, coming not only from villages and small towns but also from cities. In this context, the literature on migration concentrated on the economic and social processes through which an essentially temporary migration system was converted into the settlement in the US of documented and undocumented migrants. With important exceptions (e.g., Gmelch 1980; Lindstrom 1996; Guarnizo 1997; Pessar 1997), return migration was until recently a relatively neglected theme. This theme has gained importance in the past decade or so (Bustamante 2009; Cassarino 2004; Moran-Taylor and Menjívar 2005; Razum et al. 2005; Şenyürekli and Menjívar 2012; Tannenbaum 2007), though at times it is subsumed under the general rubric of transnational migration (Guarnizo 1997).

The renewed significance of return migration is not due to its becoming once again a normal part of the migration process from Mexico and Central America, but to its increasingly involuntary nature as a growing proportion of return migration is taking place through formal orders of deportation. For instance, up until 2005, Mexican census data showed a steady decline in the numbers of returnees from the US, and analysts attributed this in part to stricter border enforcement, which paradoxically, ‘caged in’ undocumented migrants fearful of returning to their home countries because of the risks and costs of reentry (Massey et al. 2015). By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, return migration had increased, partly in response to the US economic recession of 2008, but also through substantial increases in enforcement and deportation. Whereas voluntary return involves planning and preparation, deportation gives migrants little opportunity to arrange their affairs in the US or to plan where they will go or what they will do when they return to their home country. The potential difficulties of adjustment that this implies for involuntary returnees have become, as we will see, challenging issues not only for returnees, but for their communities and for public policy. And there is a third category of return migration that has resulted from U.S. enforcement practices, that is, those individuals who conceptually constitute an in-between category. They do not return through deportation but because they or their family members risk deportation or the conditions in which they live in the United States have deteriorated to such an extent that they see themselves as forced to return (Medina and Menjívar 2015). The chapter by Wheatly in this volume expands on this category.

Given these gray areas in these categories of return today, we need to clarify the use of concepts throughout this volume. Even though we use the terms “voluntary” and “involuntary” as conceptual tools to capture return migration, in today’s U.S. context of enforcement it has become difficult to neatly separate returns into these categories (Medina and Menjívar 2015). With this in mind, we offer the following definitions used in this volume. Voluntary means that the return is not linked

directly to a deportation; migrants classified as voluntary decide to return whether under pressure or compelled to return, or not. Deportee returns (or forced return) means that the U.S. government returns migrants under removal orders. Lastly, the term compelled or compulsory return means that the migrants decide to return but do so under pressure, such as due to family separation or to unbearable or unsustainable living conditions in the United States.

US migration policy is not the only factor making return migration a more problematic experience than in the past. We need also to take account of changes in the economies of Mexico and Central America, particularly in the rural sector, that make even voluntary return a difficult experience. For many, if not most returning migrants, there are no good jobs awaiting them nor can they establish viable farming or small-business enterprises in face of the poverty of the areas from which they come. In Mexico, this change has been based on the declining capacity of subsistence agriculture and crafts to provide a livelihood for a demographically expanding rural population; at the same time recurring economic crises reduced the capacity of Mexican cities to provide stable work for the rapidly growing urban populations. In the Central American countries, their rapidly growing populations have also been unable to gain adequate livelihoods in the countryside and their cities have less economic dynamism than those of Mexico. Also, Central America has been plagued by internal conflict to a much greater degree than Mexico, with civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. And even though Honduras did not have a civil war, it was profoundly affected by the wars in its three neighboring countries. These political conflicts exacerbated already weakened economies; the large numbers of migrants who came from these countries to the US in the late 1980 s and 1990 s were political *and* economic refugees (Menjívar 1993).

The differences in the nature of Mexican migration to the US as compared to that from Central America are consequential for the experience of return. In Mexico, returning migrants face bureaucratic hurdles in returning, particularly when attempting to place their children in school (Medina and Menjívar 2015); but generally they are not stereotyped as undesirable by their communities nor negatively targeted by police or employers. Since return migration has been a normal pattern in Mexico, involuntary return often merges into voluntary return in terms of reception by the local community. Although deportation does carry a stigma, whether or not the migrant has been deported is not a matter of enquiry, as Wheatley shows in her chapter. What matters is whether returning migrants bring resources to the community.

In Central America, the distances involved in migration, the difficulties encountered in making the journey north, and the inhospitable reception that those who fled political violence faced in the 1980s mean that historically migration to the US has not normally been temporary. Return is exceptional, and deportation is publicly visible and controlled by police and immigration authorities since involuntary returns are made by air to the major airports in Central America. The majority of the deported have no criminal record; 59 percent of deported in fiscal year 2013 had no criminal record, and the crimes of those with records tend to be either non-violent offenses or immigration infractions that in recent years have been

elevated to felonious crimes (TRAC).¹ However, lines and definitions are blurred, and as we will see in the chapter by Gutierrez, returnees are likely to be stereotyped as involuntary and stigmatized as criminal.

The chapters that follow bring out these differences, covering return migration to Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. The stories that they tell have, however, many things in common. The first is the difficulties that most contemporary returnees face, whether voluntary or involuntary, given the poverty and lack of opportunities in the communities from which they come. Another is the lack of government policies or institutional responses in the four countries that seek to help returnees to obtain work, training, or shelter. Remember that all these countries have gained by the migration of their citizens, since the remittances sent by documented and undocumented migrants have been a substantial part of the country's revenues, particularly for the smaller Central American economies, and the skills learnt abroad are potential assets for economic development (Hagan et al. 2015).

In the next section, we place the migration experiences examined in this volume within the context of the economic, social, and political forces that have shaped international migration, return, and settlement in countries of origin. We also provide a statistical overview of the trends in deportations and return migration to Mexico and Central America. In the final sections, we enlarge upon some of the key differences in contemporary migration and return that are only touched upon in the chapters; the changing role of women is perhaps the most important, but so is the age distribution of migrants and deportees.

International Migration and Return

International migration has always included both permanent and temporary flows. Permanent migration movements characterized the populating of the Americas by Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. European migrations to the US in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century were mainly permanent, but they also varied in the propensity of different nationalities to stay or return. The history of immigration to the United States illustrates the conditions that produce these different types of migration flow. The earliest historical example of a permanent migration system is that of the Irish. In the period, 1899–1924, only Jewish immigrants surpassed the Irish in their low propensity to return to their country of origin from the United States. Thus, only 4.3% of Jewish immigrants in the period, 1899–1924, and 8.9% of Irish immigrants had returned by 1924 (Archdeacon 1983, Table V-3.). Faced by poverty, political, religious and economic persecution at home, the Irish aimed at starting a new life in the United States.

In contrast, lower transport costs and reductions in journey time led other Europeans to come to the Americas as temporary labor migrants. The Italian

¹<http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/260/>.

“golondrinas” who seasonally came to the wheat harvests of Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century are one example of long-distance circular migration (Baily 1967). The urbanization and industrialization of Europe undermined existing agrarian structures, making subsistence more difficult and stimulating migration. But since there were enough resources in the place of origin to sustain at least part of a family or the wider kinship group, migration was often temporary. New investment opportunities were also created locally or in the nearby cities acting as a magnet to bring the migrant back.

By 1924, return migrants amounted to 45.6% of the Italians and 33.0% of the Poles who had immigrated from 1899 to 1924 (Archdeacon, 1983, Table V-3). Only part of Polish and Italian migration was a temporary migration system since ties with the home community were weak for many migrants. The loosening of community bonds contributed to permanent migration by making the emigrant more ready to enter long-term commitments in the destination. In Poland, for instance, farm inheritance usually passed to only one child, so that the other children had no opportunities in their place of origin, reducing their commitments there (Archdeacon 1983, 122).

As the above examples show, whether migration is permanent or temporary depends on economic conditions in both the place of origin and destination as well as immigration and emigration regulations. A temporary migration system is sustained by limited subsistence opportunities at home, which can only be sustained by the labor migration of their adult members. This situation is complemented in the place of destination by the availability of short-term work opportunities that pay higher wages than in the place of origin but are heavily subsidized because the subsistence costs of the workers’ families are borne by the place of origin. Official programs in the US, such as the Bracero program (1940–64), institutionalized temporary migration (of men); but with or without official tolerance temporary migration flourishes because it serves the subsistence strategies of mainly rural families in the origin and the demands for low cost labor by employers in the destination. This system prevailed in the migration between Mexico and the US for much of the twentieth century.

In contrast, a permanent system comes into being when the host country needs year-round labor to develop its economy in manufacturing and the services as well as in agriculture; in the sending country, rural subsistence possibilities disappear and when cities cannot absorb the rural surplus, international migration becomes the only option for the whole family. Immigration policies can encourage or deter permanent migration, but migration is difficult to control when sending and receiving countries share land borders and contrast sharply in wages and economic opportunities.

Temporary and permanent systems of migration do not exist in pure forms. The transition from one to another is often slow. Also, as Roberts argues in this volume, migration is an expected duration, which can obscure changing economic realities in both the place of origin and the place of destination. Staying or returning is ultimately a matter of individual decision, except in the cases of deportation or when laws create temporary statuses that make it difficult for migrants to return as in the case of Salvadorans and Honduras who have held Temporary Protected

Status for over a decade and a half. This is also the case when the enforcement of laws creates inhospitable contexts that migrants then feel forced to leave. Importantly, even when conceptualized as an individual decision, it is a decision that the expectations of family, friends, and the community of origin heavily influence, and it does not always fall neatly into voluntary or involuntary categories.

The temporary migration system between the US and Mexico, and to a greater extent between Central American countries and the United States, has been sustained by the beliefs of migrants and their family members that their move is only temporary. And these beliefs can be held by long-term immigrants in the US as well as recent arrivals. As we will see in the chapters to follow, the insertion of returned migrants into their home communities depends on how family, friends, and neighbors see their return. To return with resources, either in capital or skills, is what is appropriate for a returnee, just as sending remittances was appropriate when they were residents in the US. Return without resources can amount to a betrayal of the norms of a temporary migration system. Staying in the US and becoming permanent migrants is likely to have greater acceptance than an impoverished return, particularly when remittances and back and forth visits continue, or in the case of Central Americans, mostly remittances.

In the Mexican case, the family reunification provisions of the IRCA legislation of 1986 and the provision of legal visas to skilled immigrants consolidated a permanent migration system. However, in both the Mexican and Central American cases, most legal immigrants to the US come through family reunification. Of the approximately one million immigrants from all countries that were admitted each year as legal residents to the US from 2011 to 2013, some 675,000 were family sponsored immigrants. In these years, some 140,000 Mexican immigrants a year were admitted to legal residency, as were 42,000 a year from Central America (US DHS 2013).

These figures can be put in perspective by the Passel et al. (2012) estimate that yearly immigration to the US from Mexico as reported by US censuses and surveys dropped to less than 150,000 after 2009. Though approximately 60% of newly admitted legal residents already reside in the US as temporary residents (Jasso 2011), it is likely that in contrast with previous years, most new arrivals are now legal immigrants who come in as temporary workers as H-visa holders (Massey 2012) and though with increasing challenges through family reunification visas (Enchautegui and Menjívar 2015). The drop in undocumented migration may be less sharp for the Central American countries, even during the Great Recession (Massey 2012), as indicated by the 2014 Border apprehension report, which reports that for the first time, the numbers of Central American undocumented migrants apprehended exceeded those from Mexico (USCBP 2014).

As immigration from Mexico becomes increasingly a legal process, so too voluntary returns, as reported by the Mexican Migration Project, become increasingly those of Mexicans with legal residence in the US, visiting friends and family or returning to settle. In this context, contemporary return migration is no longer a 'natural' part of a temporary migration system, but one with a marked duality. It is either involuntary, through deportation (or those who face deportation and prefer to return than to live in fear), or the movement of Mexican migrants who are legally

entitled to work in the US, some of whom return voluntarily but others are deported. In any case, adjustment to the economic and social life of communities of origin will not be easy. In the first case, because of lack of preparation for return and, in the second case, because many returnees with legal residency in the US are not aiming to become economically active in Mexico and, at the most, return to retire.

Deportation and Return

Mexico has contributed the major share of migrants to the United States, accounting for some 12 million people enumerated by censuses and surveys who were born in Mexico and living in the US in 2010 (Passel et al. 2012, Fig. 1.1). The Central American countries accounted for some 3 million immigrants, mainly from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Stoney and Batalova 2013) in the characteristics of those migrating and often in the places from which they came; but it became a stepping stone for migration north and provided destinations other than their village homes for those returning from the US (Lozano et al. 1998). Emigrants left from and returnees came back to different places than they had earlier left. The traditional sending areas in the center-west of Mexico and rural areas of less than 2500 people that once had provided the majority of emigrants to the US and received the majority of returnees now ceased to do so.

Intercensal return migrants to Mexico decreased between 1995 and 2005, but by 2010 return migration had increased absolutely. The 2010 Mexican Census recorded some 1,300,000 migrants as having returned to Mexico who had been in the US in 2005 or between 2005 and 2010 (Masferrer and Roberts 2012). There was also a decline in emigration to the US so that by 2010 returnees balanced new entries resulting in zero net migration for the first time in at least 50 years (Passel et al. 2012). The composition of return migration also changed. In the 15 years from 1995 to 2010, formal deportations from the US increased, reaching over a million in the 2005–2009 periods. Because many deportees are likely to re-enter the US despite deportation, not all deportees will be counted in the census enumeration of returnees; but it is likely that deportations have become a significant proportion of returns in the new century. Passel et al. (2012, 11), using US and Mexican government sources, estimate that deportations are now between 5 and 35% of all returns.

Data availability makes it difficult to compare Central America return migration with the level of detail of that of Mexico, particularly in the relative proportions of voluntary and involuntary return. In light of the violence and the poverty in the three main Central American senders of migrants (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), it is unlikely that voluntary return is substantial and probable that most returns are involuntary.

In both Mexico and Central America, data from the Yearbooks of Immigration Statistics of the Department of Homeland Security show a sharp rise in formal deportations from 1995 to 2013 (Table 1).