

MEXICO'S COUNT OF MIGRANTS IN U.S. IS LOWER THAN OTHERS

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Body

A three-year Mexican Government study of migration has calculated the number of Mexicans living illegally in the **United States** to be far fewer than previously estimated.

The study puts the figure at 480,000 to 1.22 million, depending on the season. This contrasts sharply with the Nixon Administration's frequent talk of six million to 12 million "illegals" and the Carter Administration's more cautious estimate of three million to six million.

The study, which involved four separate surveys and almost 150,000 interviews, also found that most undocumented **migrants** cross the **United States** border with the intention of returning to **Mexico** within a few months.

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The Mexican findings seem certain to be disputed as self-serving by the **United States** labor movement and other groups that maintain that illegal **migrants** are partly responsible for high unemployment in the **United States**. Some one million Mexicans were detained and returned to **Mexico** last year, although many were "repeaters" - **migrants** arrested several times before finally making it beyond the border region.

Earlier Estimates Disputed

United States census experts, however, have apparently endorsed the method used by the Mexican study. A **United States** select committee on migration, which must present policy recommendations to the Carter Administration early in January, has also taken note of the Mexican results in some of its preliminary reports.

"Earlier estimates were based either on tiny samples or on political prejudices," a Mexican demographer said. "This is the first time a massive household survey has been carried out."

After President Carter dropped his migration package, sent to Congress in August 1977 but never taken up in committee, the **United States** and **Mexico** agreed to exchange detailed studies of the migration phenomenon before analysis of a mutually acceptable policy.

But while the **United States** select committee concentrated on ways of preventing undocumented aliens from finding employment, such as the institution of a national labor identification card and sanctions against employers of "illegals," **Mexico's** Labor Ministry study focused on the **migrants** themselves.

Interviews in Households

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The first survey, in November 1977, involved the interviewing of some 10,000 Mexicans at United States-Mexican border crossings as they were returned here by the United States Border Patrol. Two similar surveys - in August 1978 and in May 1979 - covered 75,000 more Mexicans being "voluntarily returned" from the United States.

The principal study, however, consisted of detailed interviews in 58,000 households in scientifically selected rural and urban municipalities around the country. Information was collected on a total of 350,000 people.

Some of the results merely confirmed the findings of earlier studies. For example, more than half the Mexican migrants come from just four northern and central states - Guanajuato, Jalisco, Chihuahua and Zacatecas - while more than 50 percent head for California and some 20 percent for Texas.

Taken in December 1978 and January 1979, during a holiday season in Mexico, the household survey found only 405,000 Mexicans in the United States at the time, though analysts allowed that this was perhaps a conservative figure. The survey nevertheless confirmed the cyclical nature of the migration, particularly since only 28 percent of those absent had been away for more than a year.

Most Migrants Are Men

The overwhelming majority of migrants are men (only one in seven is a woman) and young (71 percent are between the ages of 15 and 34) although at least half the men and women are married and, as a group, leave an average of 3.29 people in Mexico dependent on their earnings in the United States.

Some United States studies have suggested that as much as \$3 billion is sent or brought home by migrants each year, but the household survey questioned this figure. For those in the United States at the time of the interviews, it estimated annual remittances to Mexico of some \$310 million.

One of the most interesting findings was that the migrants are not among the poorest and least educated of Mexicans. Although 78 percent come from rural areas, three out of four had a job before deciding to gamble on higher earnings north of the border.

Further, the migrants had a median education higher than the Mexican average - four years' schooling rather than the national average of 3.1 years. Some 14.4 percent had seven or more years' education. But because this fell far below the average education even of United States minorities, the Mexican analysts argued that the migrants were not competing for jobs with Americans.

Migrants Called Scapegoats

Although the final Mexican report is not due until next year, the preliminary findings hint clearly at the arguments Mexican officials will use in future negotiations on the subject with the United States.

"Illegal migrants are always used as a scapegoat when unemployment rises in the United States," a Mexican expert said, "but we hope to show that there aren't as many migrants as people thought, that they generally don't want to stay in the U.S. and they don't take jobs from Americans."

If President Carter is re-elected, the migration issue is expected to become a major topic of relation with the United States. If he is not, however, Mexican officials are hopeful that elaboration of a new United States migration policy will be indefinitely postponed.

Graphic

MEXICO'S COUNT OF MIGRANTS IN U.S. IS LOWER THAN OTHERS

Illustrations: map of Mexico

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