

Understanding Mexico-US Migration

Migration from Mexico to the United States has become much more frequent recently, largely believed to be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and new policies for illegal immigrants being put into place by the Trump administration¹. Migration is also a hot-button political issue, leading many Americans to having polarized opinions on the issue. At its core, though, there are many aspects of political institutions, political culture, and political economy which have affected migration rates.

Political Institutions

Political institutions can be defined as the formal and informal rules which structure the relationship amongst individuals and are resistant to change. Firstly, this resistance to change may be an important factor in migration. Because political institutions take an extremely long time to change, it may be easier for those dissatisfied with the status quo political institutions of their state to simply move to another state. This aforementioned dissatisfaction may be compounded by limited social and legal forces held by political institutions in Mexico. With corruption running rampant amongst elected officials in Mexico² and the lack of subsidies by the Mexican government to help the agricultural sector, trust in the social and legal forces in Mexican political institutions is low. Importantly, the opposite holds true for the perception many Mexicans have of American institutions. American institutions seem to allow for significant mobility, opportunity, and money - all of which is critical for the social and legal forces of political institutions. As a result, it stands to reason that the nature of political institutions in both Mexico and the US drive migration.

Political Culture

Political culture, while more difficult to concretely define than political institutions, play a critical role in understanding migration from the US to Mexico. *"The Other Side of Immigration"* explains that political culture in Mexico stems from a significant distrust in both Mexican political institutions and elected Mexican officials. Indeed, a bleak view on government and the economy is commonplace in Mexico, contributing to lasting feelings of hopelessness³. It makes sense, then, that with a political culture ingrained in mistrust and unreliance, Mexican migration to the United States has increased, especially amidst a pandemic that many believe the Mexican government is incapable of handling properly.

Political Economy

Political Economy, the study of the relationship between economics and politics, is critical to understanding migration between Mexico and the US. Specifically, *"The Other Side of Immigration"* notes the effect NAFTA specifically has had on migration patterns. Because NAFTA establishes free trade between the US and Mexico, and because the US government is more effective with providing agricultural subsidies as needed, it is no longer a rational economic decision for farmers to produce crops. As a result of this, many have little choice but to sell their land and migrate to the United States. This, combined with a poor view of the Mexican economy in general by many Mexican citizens⁴ creates a problematic situation. This is further compounded by the political culture aforementioned and ultimately leads many to seeing migration to the United States as the only option to make a living for themselves and their families. Indeed, *"The Other Side of Immigration"* notes the impact of Mexican migrants on the Mexican economies they send money back to. Specifically, money sent back by Mexican migrants fuels some Mexican economies, perpetuating the idea that it is necessary to migrate to the US to secure an opportunity for wealth.

¹<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/world/americas/mexico-immigration-usa.html>

²<https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/mexico>

³<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/09/14/mexicans-are-downbeat-about-their-countrys-direction/>

⁴ibid.