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BINATIONAL RESEARCH PAPER

DEVELOPING THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER REGION
FOR A PROSPEROUS AND SECURE RELATIONSHIP:
MEXICAN BORDER CITIES AND MIGRATION FLOWS

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Mexican Border Cities and Migration Flows

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this work is to present and analyze some of the social challenges found in border cities, and to analyze various migration flows to these locations. First, we consider the social context of border cities in recent years, presenting issues such as the lack of public infrastructure, housing shortages, public health problems, security concerns, and general urban poverty. We then analyze population growth in the border area and in major border towns on the Mexican side. Also considered are migration flows to the border, their origin, and the sociodemographic characteristics of the migrants. Other subjects covered in this work are the insertion of migrants into local border labor markets, transmigration in the cities, deportation of international migrants in border cities, and unaccompanied migrant children. The information and data used for this work come primarily from the Northern Border International Migration Survey¹ and the Mexican Population Census.² The analyses show that cities on the Mexican border are in a permanent state of change. Continuous and heavy migrant flows have spurred economic growth in border towns, but in the last few years, their influence on growth and development has begun to diminish.

Introduction

In the last few decades, the northern border of Mexico has been a region that represents great development opportunities, as well as great challenges, for the country. Northern Mexico has experienced significant changes, including the emergence of a dynamic economy, rapid demographic growth, uncontrolled urban development, environmental problems, and public safety issues. As a result of an economic development model that has become increasingly inefficient, social processes in this geographic area occur in a disorderly and inharmonious manner.

¹ The Northern Border International Migration Survey is prepared and conducted by the Secretaría de Gobernación, Consejo Nacional de Población, Instituto Nacional de Migración, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Colef).

² The Mexican Population Census is prepared and conducted by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI).

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The U.S.–Mexico border is an area where social groups converge with great heterogeneity. It is, above all, a place where people search for better living opportunities. The border is very dynamic and intense; persons on both sides are involved economic and social processes such as commerce, tourism, bidirectional labor, doctor visits, and product purchasing. Every year approximately 13 million border crossings occur.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, cities and communities on the Mexican side of the border had some economic growth, but by the 1990s, they had experienced accelerated development in the manufacturing sector. The maquiladora export industry in particular has marked the development of border cities.

The demographic growth of cities on the border has been the highest in all of Mexico; however, these cities suffer major deficiencies in urban infrastructure. Migrants from southern Mexico bound for the border or the United States perhaps represent the most important social factor that permeates the social and economic structures of border cities.

The primary purpose of this paper is to present and analyze the various migration streams to border cities and the principal social problems they produce. To achieve this, we will first analyze the social context of border cities in recent years. We will then analyze in greater detail the migration flows to the border and their characteristics. The primary source of information and data for this flow analysis will be the Mexican Population Census and the Northern Border International Migration Survey (EMIF).

Social challenges of Mexican border cities

For many years, border cities in northern Mexico have been considered a “land of opportunity,” or at least a place where “you can find work.” At the very least, they symbolized the opportunity to enter the United States. Around 1993, the U.S. government began to strongly increase security controls on its side of the border. However, migrants from the south continued to arrive on the Mexican side, creating great social pressure.

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Today, border cities in Northern Mexico have a number of serious social problems, and their development contradictions are very evident. On the one hand, border communities have one of the highest per capita incomes in the country. On the other hand, urban development is inferior to other cities in Mexico with less economic growth. The lack of public utilities and housing in border cities is highly visible.

The demand for schools, hospitals, and other social services has increased very rapidly. Local and state governments have not been able to provide the basic social infrastructure for the entire border population and for the new arrivals as well. Poor urban and infrastructure development, health issues, water shortages, and, in recent years, violence and a lack of public security—problems that are closely related to drug trafficking—mark these border cities.

Compared to housing at the national level, or even in other cities located in northern border states, the housing market in border cities is seriously underdeveloped, and the quality of homes is poor. In 2000, approximately 14 percent of all homes along the border used inferior materials for floors, roofing, and walls.³

The 2005 census shows that in major Mexican border cities such as Reynosa, 40 percent of the houses were overcrowded and 21.6 percent had no connection to public sewage. In Matamoros, 40.8 percent of homes were overcrowded and 18 percent had no sewer connection; and in Tijuana, one-third of the homes were overcrowded and 17 percent had no connection to a public sewage network.

As a result of accelerated population growth, urban development has been disorderly in Mexican border towns. There are many poverty zones, often in areas where it is difficult and costly to provide utilities (water, sewer, pavement, cleaning, and electricity, etc.); marginal areas are largely populated with migrants from southern Mexico. Industrial parks that mainly serve the maquiladora export industry tend to locate near these poor, outlying areas. This gives companies access to a migrant population willing to work for low wages, and allows businesses to avoid building urban infrastructure support.

³ INEGI, Mexican Population Census, 2000.

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Border cities have been the scene of brutal, drug-related power and turf wars. From January to June 2008, 235 deaths in Tijuana were related to drug violence, according to the Baja California State Department of Public Security. Corruption has now substantially permeated the public security structure, causing concern and fear among citizens. This fear can be seen in the decision of hundreds of border citizens to relocate to the U.S. side of the border. This, of course, is done only by those who have the necessary resources and documents to make the move.

Urban poverty also presents major public health problems in border communities. In 2005, 12.8 percent of the female population between 12 and 49 years of age had no access to health services in Tijuana; in Reynosa and Matamoros, 9.1 percent and 9.2 percent of females, respectively, were without health care, according to the Secretaría de Salud Pública, or Mexico's Ministry of Health.

Tuberculosis (TB) is a growing public health problem in Mexican border cities, where the death rate for the disease is higher than the national average (6.8 vs. 4.7 for every 100,000 inhabitants). The incidence rate for TB in border cities is 25 cases for every 100,000 inhabitants, much higher than the national average of 15.6 cases.⁴ Part of the problem is related to overcrowding in drug rehabilitation centers and border prisons.

The highest rates of HIV/AIDS in Mexican border states are found in Baja California, where Tijuana tops the list with 107 cases per 100,000 inhabitants; Ciudad Juarez is second, with 83 cases. The national rate for HIV/AIDS was 25.2 cases per 100,000.⁵ Some studies have shown that one of the reasons for the increase of HIV/AIDS on the border is the increased use of intravenous drugs, which also cause other diseases, such as Hepatitis C.

An important public health debate on the border concerns the relationship between diseases such as TB and HIV/AIDS, and migration to the border. Some experts have indicated that the high incidence of these diseases is closely related to the intense migration streams arriving at these

⁴ Border cities statistics are from the Pan American Health Organization, 2004.

⁵ Centro Nacional de Prevención y Control de SIDA, CENSIDA, National Registration of AIDS cases, 2005.

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cities; however, there has not as yet been a detailed study that clearly demonstrates such a relationship, and most treat this as a hypothesis.

In addition to these and other social problems, migration has been a major characteristic of northern Mexico border cities for several decades. Thousands arrive each year, and the local residents view it as natural and common. Yet it is these migration flows that shape the various aspects of everyday life on the Mexican border.

For several decades, migration to the border was related to the intent to cross the international line in order to work and reside in the United States. However, more recently, a significant number of migrants arrive at these cities with the intention of staying to live and work. Later we will analyze the migration flows that arrive at border cities and provide information and data about this behavior.

To better plan for the development of border cities, an understanding of migration flows is indispensable. In the following section, we will deal with the topic of demographic growth along the Mexican border, and analyze the various migration streams to the region.

Mexican border population growth and migrant attraction

The U.S.–Mexico border is made up of 24 counties on the U.S. side and 38 municipalities on the Mexican side. In 1970, the border region had a population of about 5.2 million, with 54 percent located in U.S. counties. In 2000, the population increased to 12.3 million, with 51 percent living on the U.S. side.⁶

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov>; and the Mexican Census.

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Map 1: Municipalities and counties on U.S.–Mexico Border



In general, Northern Mexico border states have grown markedly in the last 80 years. In 1930, the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, and Baja California had a total of 2 million inhabitants. By 2005, the resident population of these states reached 18 million. In other words, the population multiplied nine times in a span of 75 years. The northern states grew at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent between 1930 and 1960; between 2000 and 2006, they grew at a rate of 1.5 percent. Demographic growth rates in northern Mexico have always been higher than in other Mexican states.

In the same period, Baja California experienced the greatest population increase among states on the Northern Mexico border. This state had an annual average increase of 4.5 percent between 1930 and 1960, and a 2.3 percent increase between 2000 and 2006. The demographic growth in Baja California can be explained mainly by the fact that it has the highest incoming migration rates among northern Mexico states.

Not all border communities have grown at the same pace. Some have even had negative population growth. Municipalities such as Anahuac, Nuevo León (-13 percent); Manuel Benavides, Chihuahua (-4.7 percent); Guerrero, Coahuila (-1.5 percent); Gustavo Díaz Ordaz,

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Tamaulipas (-0.9 percent); Janos, Chihuahua (-0.6 percent); and Guerrero, Tamaulipas (-0.3 percent) had negative growth during the 1990s. Most of these areas are rural and sparsely populated.

However, municipalities with larger populations, such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, have had the highest growth. On the Mexican side of the border, around 88 percent of the population lives in just ten municipalities. Table 1 shows the population growth of large border cities between 1950 and 2000.

Table 1

TOTAL POPULATION OF THE MAIN NORTHERN MEXICAN BORDER MUNICIPALITIES, 1950-2000						
MUNICIPIOS	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
TIJUANA	63,364	165,690	340,583	461,257	747,381	1,275,781
CD. JUAREZ	131,308	276,995	424,135	567,365	798,499	1,217,818
MEXICALI	124,362	281,333	396,324	510,664	601,938	764,902
MATAMOROS	128,347	143,043	186,146	238,840	303,293	416,428
REYNOSA	69,428	134,869	150,786	211,412	282,667	419,776
ENSENADA	31,077	64,934	115,423	175,425	259,979	369,573
NUEVO LAREDO	59,496	96,043	151,253	203,286	219,468	310,277
NOGALES	26,016	39,812	53,494	68,076	107,936	159,103
San Luis Río COLORADO	13,593	42,134	63,604	92,790	110,530	145,276
PIEDRAS NEGRAS	31,665	48,408	46,698	80,290	98,185	127,898
TOTAL	680,656	1,293,261	1,928,446	2,609,405	3,529,876	5,206,832

Source: INEGI, Mexican Population Census, 1950-2000

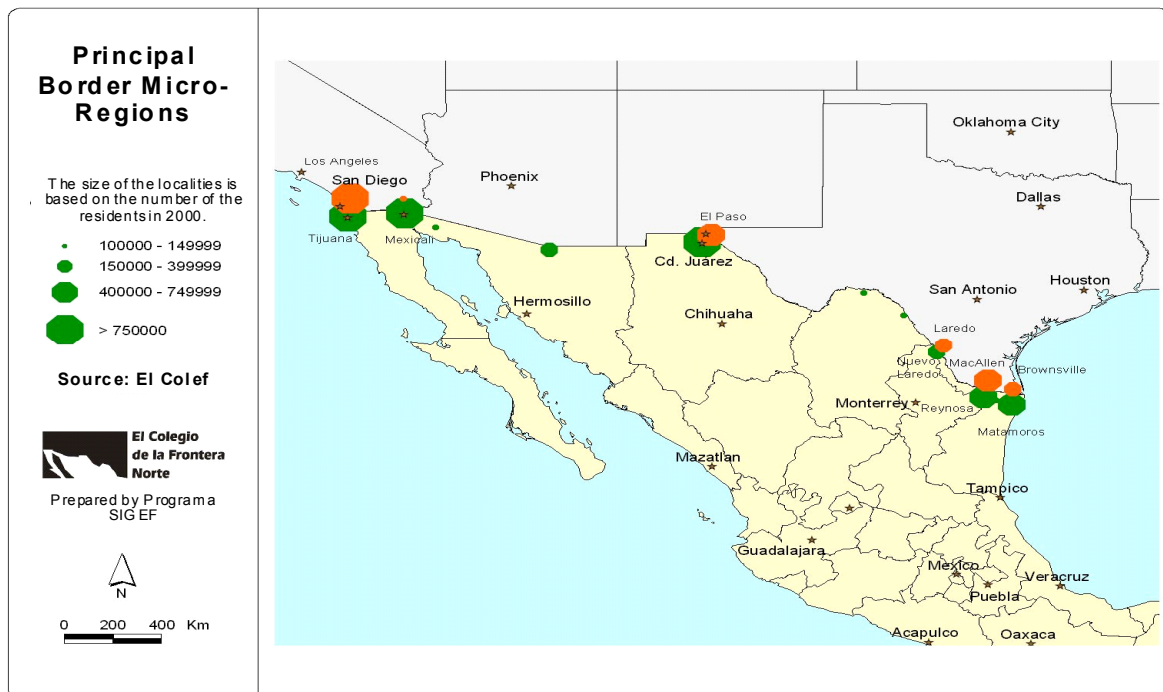
Of the cities in Baja California, Tijuana experienced the most intense population growth. Tijuana went from 11,271 inhabitants in 1930 to 1.4 million inhabitants in 2005. Between 1990 and 2000, the city's population grew 4.4 percent; between 2000 and 2005, its population grew 2.7 percent. The intense migration flow from south of the country is the main cause of rapid growth in Tijuana.

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Migration, as a social process, has permeated the social, cultural, and economic structures of Mexico. Year after year, thousands of migrants from Central and South America arrive in Mexico, bringing their traditions, customs, food, and music. In Tijuana, for instance, one can find an enormous variety of restaurants and food from other countries and regions of Mexico—from the West, such as Jalisco and Michoacán, or from nearby regions, such as Sinaloa. From an economic standpoint, migrants arrive in large cities with a will to work, usually accepting low wages and occupying a lower rung of society.

Although the U.S.–Mexico border is very long, with a great number of communities on either side of the border, the population concentration, as well as personal mobility between countries, is most intense in six major areas or urban micro-regions: Brownsville–Matamoros, McAllen–Reynosa, Laredo–Nuevo Laredo, El Paso–Ciudad Juarez, Calexico–Mexicali, and San Diego–Tijuana. Map 2 shows their geographical locations.

Map 2

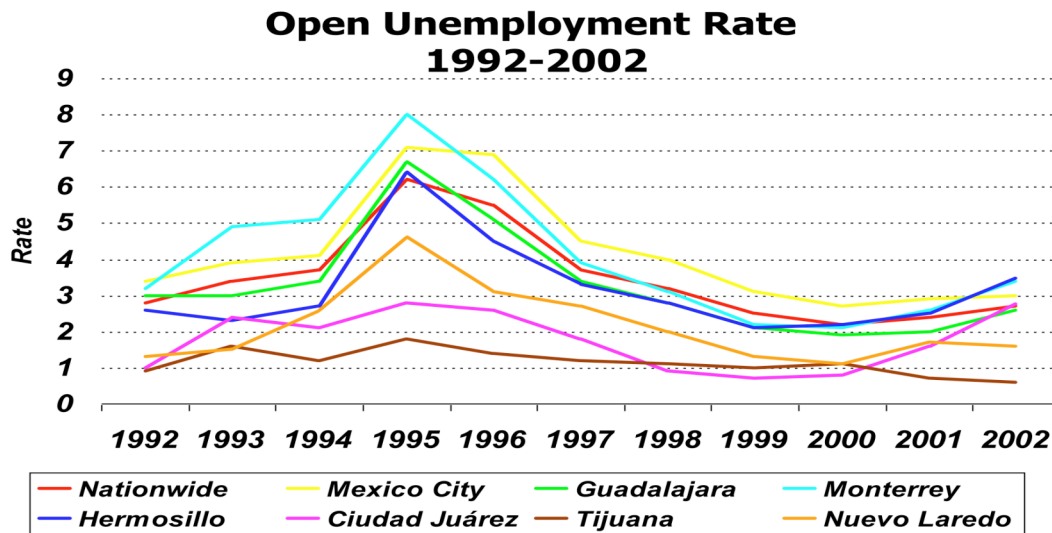


Source: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

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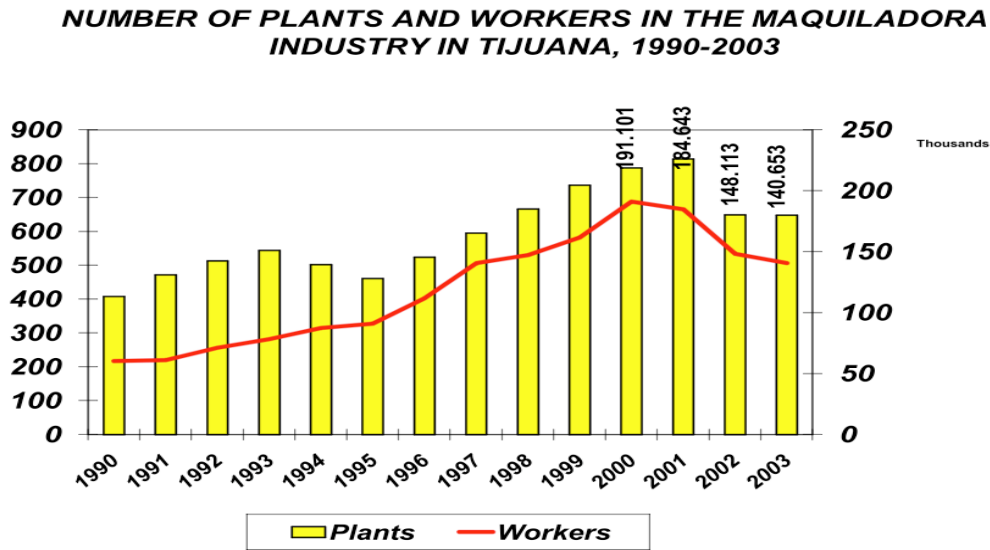
Two main factors drive thousands of Mexicans and migrants from other countries to these cities. First, border cities serve as a springboard to the United States. The second reason is the intense economic growth of border cities in the last two decades, which translates to jobs. For example, from the late 1980s through the 1990s, Tijuana experienced vigorous economic growth, and had the lowest open unemployment rates in Mexico's border region (Chart 1).

Chart 1



One reason for Tijuana's economic growth is its geographic location; the neighboring state of California has been an important driver of an economic boom. The establishment and development of maquiladora export industry has also spurred economic growth. Tijuana in the mid-1980s had around 100 maquiladora industries that employed 7,800 workers. By 2000, the city had over 770 plants employing 179,000 workers. The statistics reflect the industrial growth of the city, and show that the maquiladora industry has drawn thousands of workers to Tijuana.

Chart 2



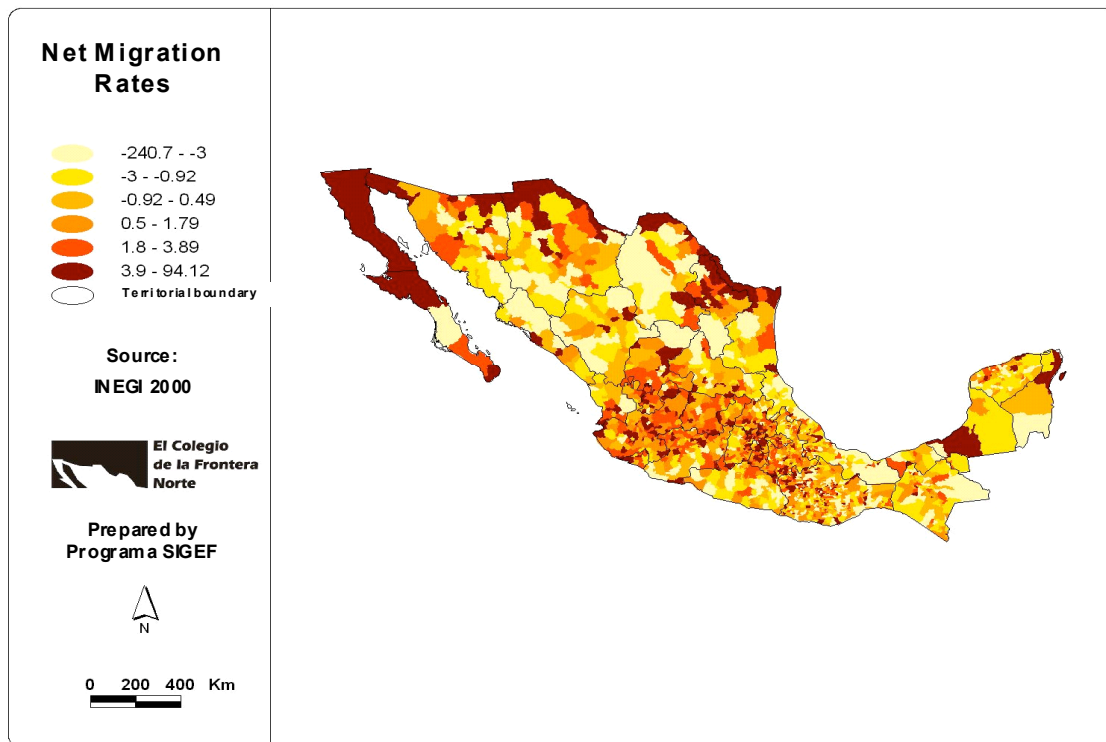
As Chart 2 shows, the maquiladora export industry in Tijuana peaked in 2000, and has declined in the first few years of this decade. However, since 2004, this economic sector has stabilized, and has not shown major drops or gains in growth.

The major border cities are, above all, a zone of intense population mobility. In the following section we will analyze the main migration flows to these border cities using information from the Northern Border International Migration Survey (EMIF) and the Mexican Population Census.

Migration to border cities and the main characteristics of migrants

During the last two decades, the northern Mexico border region has been a zone of intense attraction for migrants from southern Mexico. The border has been a place where thousands of migrants look for opportunities—primarily a job that will allow them to earn an income to cover basic living expenses. With the information from the 2000 census, we can see that in terms of migration within the country, the net migration rates in the border area are the highest in Mexico.

Map 3

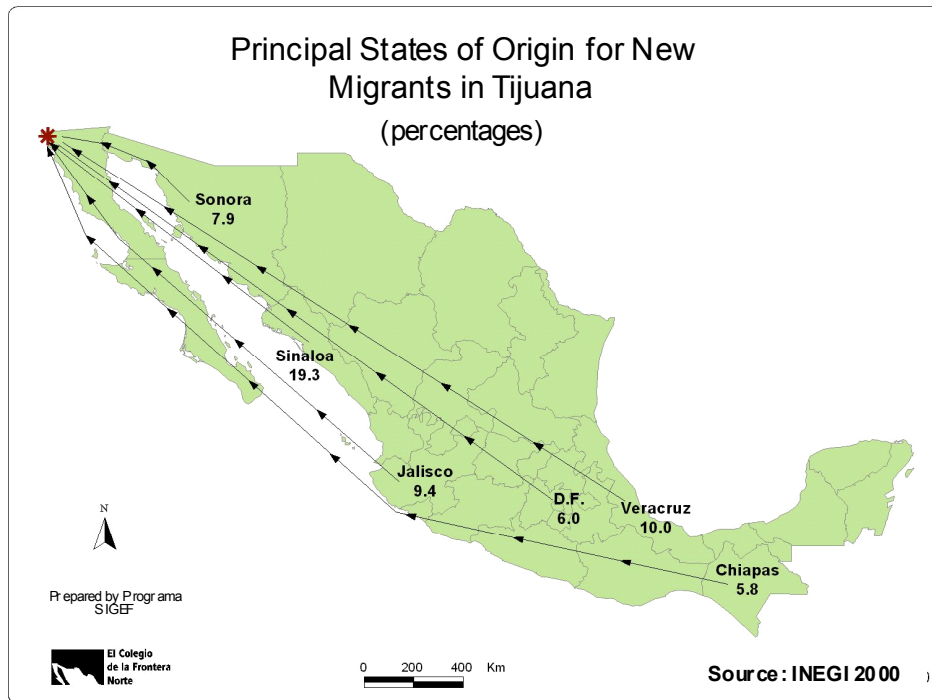


Source: INEGI, Mexican Population Census, 2000

Migration to border cities occurred very rapidly beginning in the 1990s. By 2000, border cities were receiving migrants from neighboring as well as distant states. For example, the states that made the greatest contributions to the migration flow to Nuevo Laredo were Veracruz, Nuevo León, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Chiapas. In Matamoros, migrants arrived mainly from Veracruz, Nuevo León, San Luis Potosí, and Tabasco. In Ciudad Juarez, the states most responsible for migration were again Veracruz, Durango, Coahuila, Zacatecas, and Oaxaca. In Tijuana, migrants came primarily from Veracruz, Jalisco, Sonora, and Chiapas.

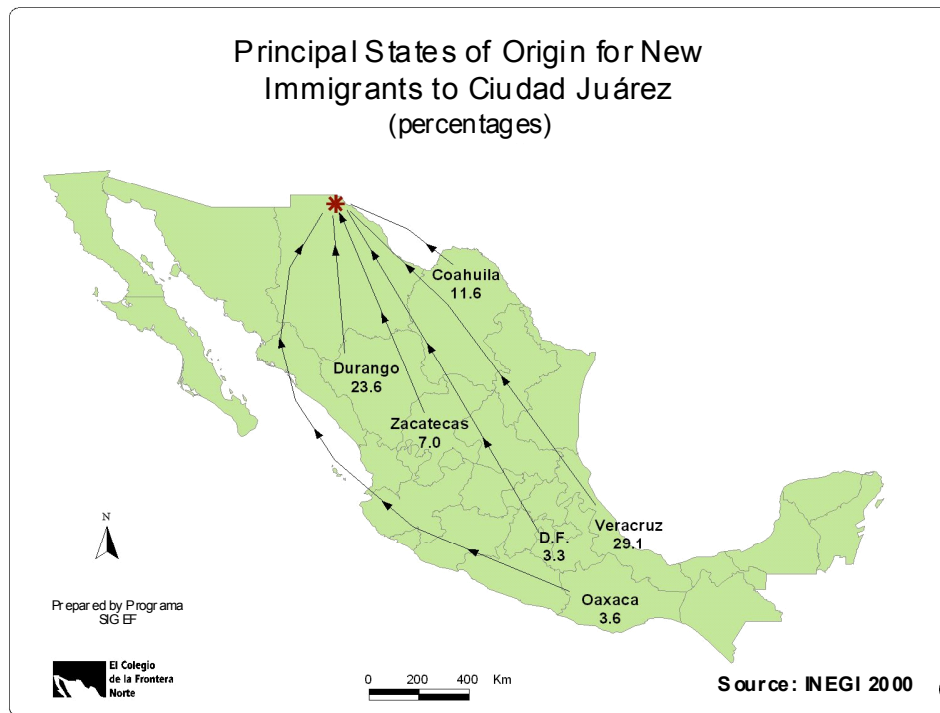
The 2000 census shows that the states of Veracruz and Chiapas, which are located far from the border, are new areas of out-migration in Mexico, and are among the states with the highest poverty levels in the country. However, in the last few years, border cities have received migrants from a greater number and variety of regions and cities of Mexico.

Map 4



Source: INEGI, Mexican Population Census, 2000

Map 5



Source: INEGI, Mexican Population Census, 2000

Map 6



Source: INEGI, Mexican Population Census, 2000

Some northern border governments have formally requested of the Mexican federal government, through the National Conference of Governors, more funding to help cope with the expanding migrant population. Unfortunately for these governments, the talks have not resulted in any new federal programs or policies.

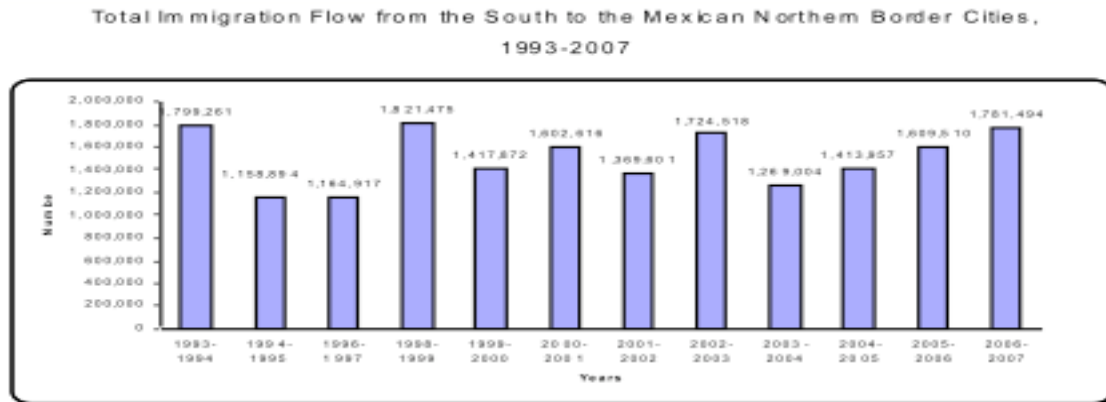
In order to have a clearer and more complete picture of migrant flows arriving at border cities, information from the Northern Border International Migration Survey (EMIF) will be used. This survey is funded by the Mexican government through the Department of the Interior, the National Population Council, the National Migration Institute, the Labor Department, and the Foreign Relations Department, and is coordinated and conducted by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Colef).

The International Migration Survey provides official figures from the Mexican government on Mexican migration to the country's northern states, and to the United States. This survey has

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been conducted since 1993 in the major border areas. Its primary aim is to measure the volume, and determine the characteristics, of migrant flows from southern Mexico, border cities, the United States, and border city deportation sites.

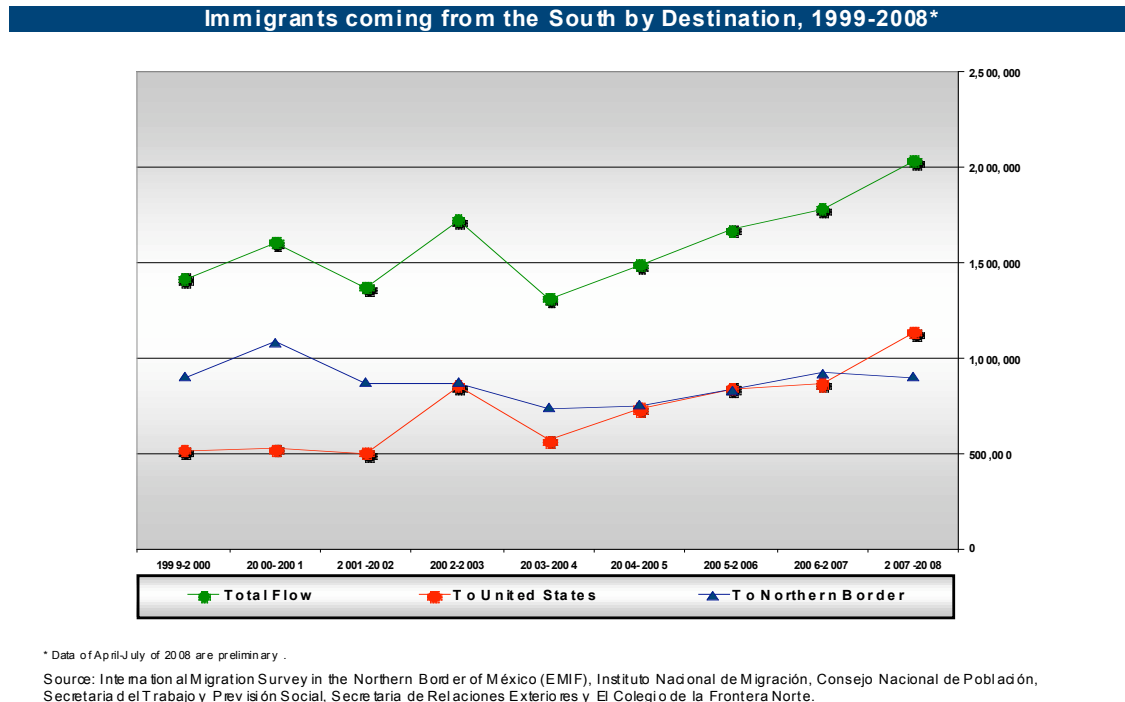
Chart 3



Source: International Migration Survey in the Northern Border of Mexico (EMIF), Instituto Nacional de Migración, Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

As can be seen from Chart 3, migrant flows from the south to border cities have fluctuated over the years, though they have always remained higher than one million immigrants per year. Between 2000 and 2001, 1.6 million migrants came from the south; from 2001 to 2002, the number decreased to 1.36 million. Even though migrant flows again increased to 1.7 million between 2002 and 2003, they fell the next year (2003 to 2004) to 1.3 million. However, since that time, migrant flows to border cities have been increasing, reaching an estimated 2.03 million between 2007 and 2008.

Chart 4



The International Migration Survey also shows whether the migrant intends to settle in the border city or cross the border to the United States. In the first phase of the survey, between 1993 and 1994, 55 percent of migrants indicated their final destination was a Mexican border city; the rest intended to cross the border into the United States. Between 2001 and 2002, 63.5 percent of migrants said they intended to remain in one of the Mexican border cities and only 36.5 percent wanted to cross into the United States. However, between 2002 and 2003, the share of migrants wishing to cross the border had grown to 50 percent, a level that remained constant from 2004 to 2007. Between 2007 and 2008, 55.6 percent of migrants said they intended to enter the United States. These statistics are notable, considering that 2002—one year after the terrorist attacks of September 11—marked the beginning of increased efforts by American authorities to control their borders with more border agents and the construction of border fences. This is precisely when we can observe again an important number of migrants arriving at the border with the intention of entering the United States.

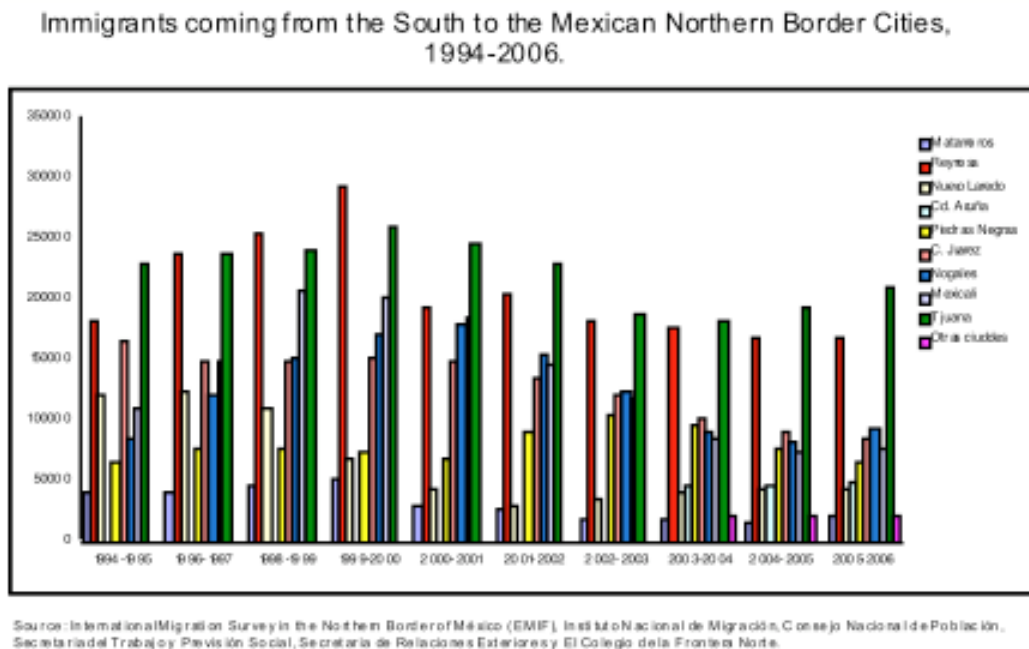
The increase in migrants deciding to remain on the border creates a constant burden for border cities. Some migrants will be “lucky” and obtain employment in the maquiladora industry or in some other economic activity, but migrants traveling with their families may have difficulty

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finding a decent place to live. If traveling alone, migrants may find a place to stay for a period of time with relatives or friends. Due to the high and constant demand created by migrants in these cities, the government has had difficulty addressing the housing shortage in a timely and orderly fashion.

Some Mexican border cities receive more migrants from the south than other cities. Chart 5 shows migrant flows to various cities in the different periods considered by the Northern Border International Migration Survey.

Chart 5



In most of the survey periods, it can be seen that the border city receiving the most migrants from the south is Tijuana. Reynosa, though not a border city with a higher population, nonetheless receives a high percentage of migrants.

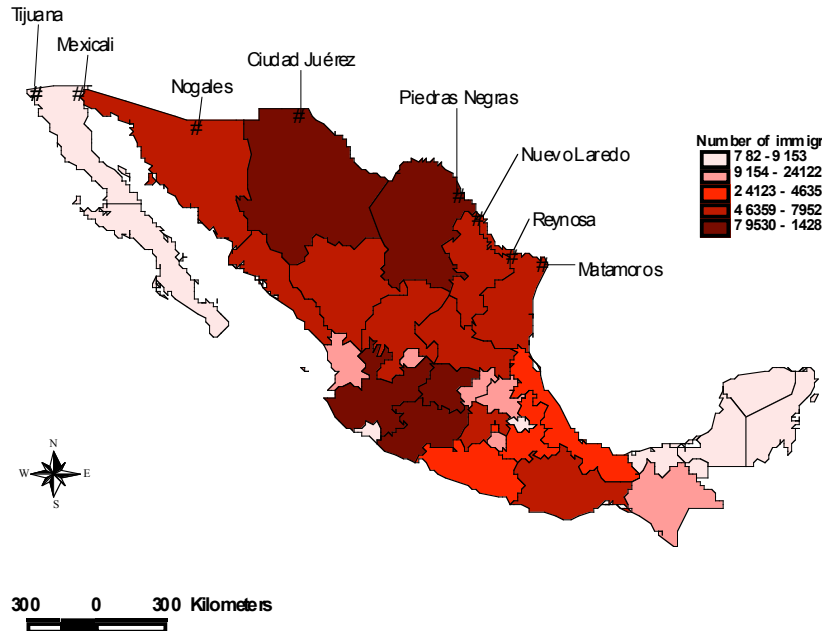
Maps 7 and 8 show where migrants lived before heading to border cities. Map 7 shows the migrant flow by state for the survey period 1994–1995. The greatest number of migrants come from the traditional migratory regions of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato; and the northern states of Chihuahua and Coahuila.

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The pattern changes between 2005 and 2006. Map 8 shows that, in addition to the continued high number of migrants from Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato, the states that are increasingly adding to migratory flows are Chiapas and Veracruz in the south, and Sonora, in the north. This fact is related to a major migratory process that is being observed in the interior of Mexico. In recent years, several regions of states with higher poverty levels have experienced a significant decline in population. This reduction is primarily seen in large rural areas of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Veracruz. Thousands of migrants have left their home states looking for better opportunities, not only in northern Mexico or in the United States, but also in medium-size cities or regions where better labor and salary opportunities may be found. Mexico in general has experienced important movements in population that have led to the depopulation of some rural, high poverty areas.

Map 7

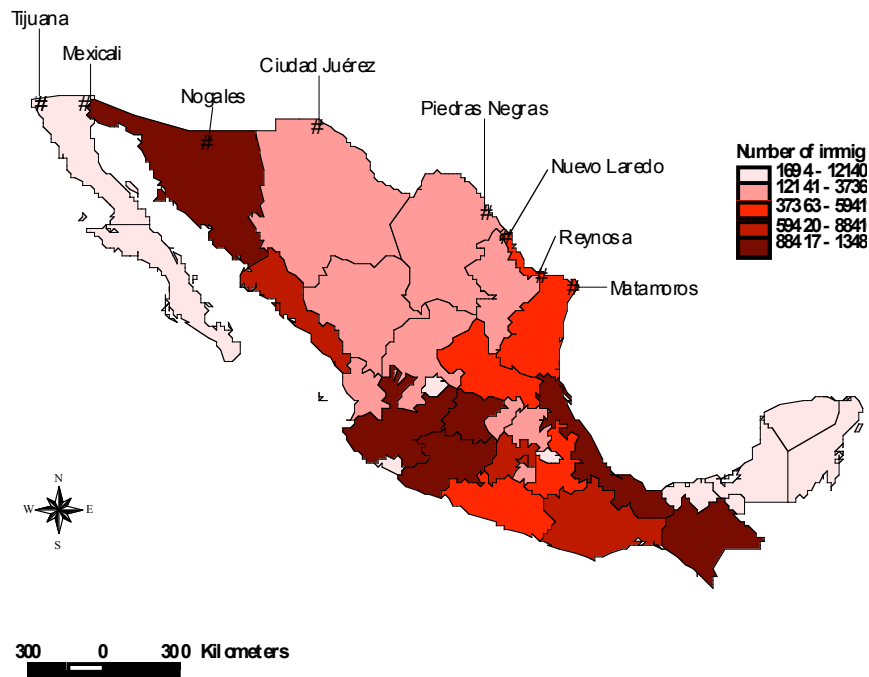
Immigrants coming from the South to the Mexican Northern Border Cities by
State of Residence, 1994-1995



Source: International Migration Survey in the Northern Border of México (EMIF), Instituto Nacional de Migración, Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

Map 8

Immigrants coming from the South to the Mexican Northern Border Cities by State of Residence, 2005-2006.

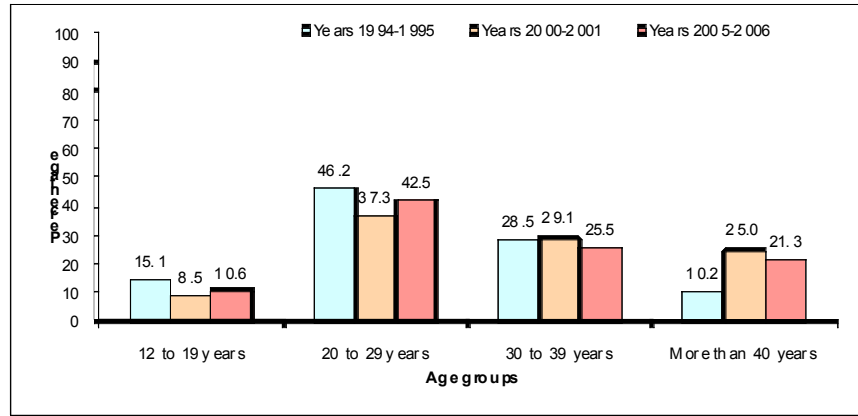


Source: International Migration Survey in the Northern Border of México (EMIF), Instituto Nacional de Migración, Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

The general characteristics of migrants coming from the south to the border cities are shown in the following charts. Although the age and gender of migrants are very similar to the data from other information sources, the EMIF information shows the evolution of these characteristics. The immigrants are primarily 20 to 29 years old; between 2000 and 2001, their age decreased slightly. At the same time, with this information it is possible to see an aging of the migratory flow in border cities. The number of immigrants 40 years of age and older increases over time.

Chart 6

Immigrants coming from the South to the Mexican Northern Border Cities by Age Group, 1994-2006.



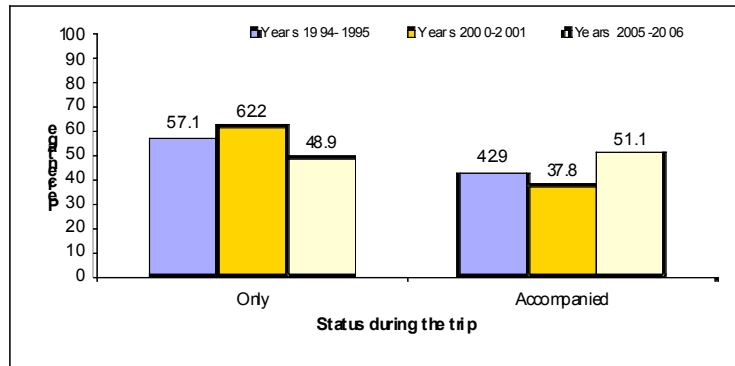
Source: Internal Migration Survey in the Northern Border of Mexico (EMIF), Instituto Nacional de Migración, Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

Furthermore, the migrant flow toward the northern Mexico border continues to be primarily comprised of men. However, female participation is growing in absolute numbers. The increase in female migration is reflected in the percentage of women in the migratory flow between 1994 and 1995 (9.8 percent) and 2000 to 2001 (20.5 percent).

By the mid-1990s, most migrants stated they were traveling alone. However, by the middle of this decade it can be seen that approximately half came with relatives or friends. Chart 7 shows that the number of migrants traveling alone decreased considerably from 2000 to 2006.

Chart 7

Immigrants coming from the South to the Northern border cities by travel companion

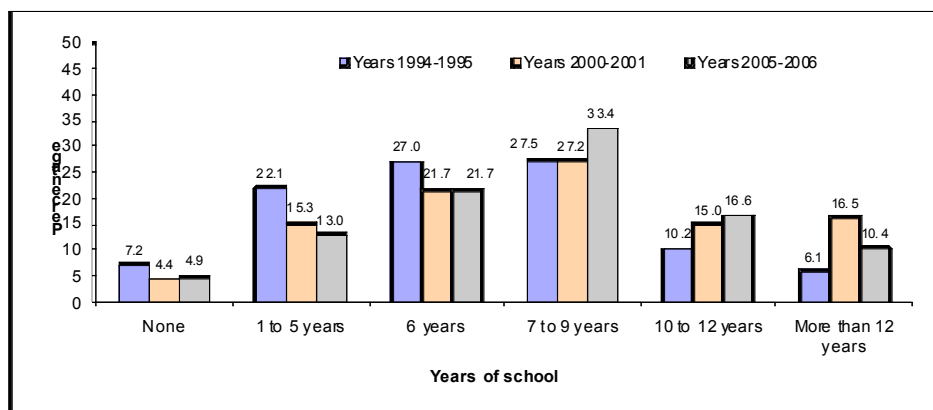


Source: International Migration Survey in the Northern Border of México (EMIF), Instituto Nacional de Migración, Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

The educational level of migrants moving to border cities, and to the north in general, has increased over time. This could be the result of a general increase in the level of education in Mexico in the last two decades. Thus, in Chart 8, it can be observed that educational levels for migrants aged one to five have decreased, while the educational levels for migrants aged seven to nine, and ten to twelve, have increased over time.

Chart 8

Immigrants coming from the South to the Mexican Northern Border Cities by Years of School, 1994-2006.



Source: International Migration Survey in the Northern Border of México (EMIF), Instituto Nacional de Migración, Consejo Nacional de Población, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

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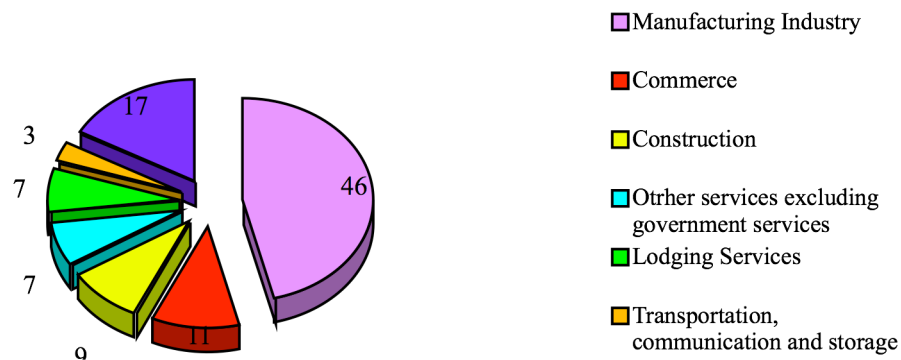
In summary, the migrant population arriving at border cities is predominantly young, mostly male; though educational levels have improved, they are still low. The main reason for their relocation is to obtain better jobs and wages.

Occupational Assimilation of Migrants in Border Cities

The migratory phenomenon is a social process that has an important impact on the occupational structures of northern Mexico border communities. The share of migrants in the economically-active population of border cities is significant. In Tijuana, migrants make up 70 percent of the employed labor force. The migrant work force in other border cities is as follows: Ciudad Juarez, 42 percent; Nuevo Laredo, 47 percent; and Matamoros, 36 percent.

Since the establishment of the maquiladora export industry in several northern Mexico border cities, more labor has been directed to the industrial and manufacturing sector of the border economies. During the last few years, most of the labor force increase has been absorbed by the manufacturing industry.

Chart 9: Employment of Migrants by Economic Sector, Tijuana 2000



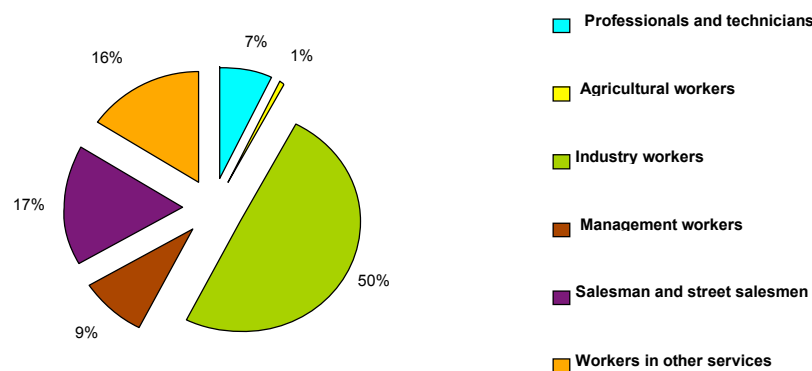
Source: INEGI, General Population and Housing Census, 2000

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Chart 9 shows that in 2000, the manufacturing industry—that is, the maquiladora industry—employed 46 percent of the migrant population in Tijuana. The commerce sector is the second largest economic sector for migrants in Tijuana.

A survey conducted near the end of 2007⁷ shows that migrants who arrived in Baja California between 2002 and 2007 continue to be primarily employed by maquiladoras. However, the number of merchants and street vendors has increased, as has the number of migrants working in personal services.

Chart 10: Economically-Active, New* Migrants by Occupation



Source: Migratory Process Observation Survey – Baja California, 2007

*moved to Baja California in the last five years

Border city migrants are employed by maquiladoras for several reasons, but primarily because they are accessible and readily available for work. Requirements for employment in maquiladora plants are minimal; most plants require only the completion of a certain grade of elementary school, and some plants are very flexible about official entry documents. For immigrants, working in a maquiladora means not only formal employment, but benefits such as medical services, Christmas bonuses, and profit sharing. However, real wages have decreased in recent years. Some qualitative research has shown that employment in the maquiladora industry is also seen as way to become a “border citizen” who can obtain a tourist visa and enter the United States.⁸

⁷ Colef, House, *Migratory Process Observation Survey – Baja California, 2007*

⁸ El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, “Frontera Norte. La urgencia de un desarrollo integral,” Tijuana, 2006.

Commuter Migrants

A considerable number of migrants live on one side of the border and are employed on the other. The National Survey of Urban Employment shows that in border cities such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros, the number of commuter migrants crossing the international border every day or week has increased in absolute terms during the last two decades.⁹ The border city with the greatest number of immigrant commuter workers is Tijuana. In the last several years, commuter workers have made up 6 to 8 percent of Tijuana's economically-active population.

Immigrant commuters are primarily blue-collar, hourly workers employed by factories or as machine operators. Of course, their income is higher than that of workers on the Mexican side; however, the commuters work fewer hours per week than workers in Mexico. It has been observed that the number of commuter migrant workers increases when there is an economic crisis in Mexico. Most commuter workers are employed legally; a considerable number are U. S. citizens, and others are Mexican citizens with permits to work and live in the United States.

Deportation of Immigrants

Another serious issue in border cities in recent years has been the deportation by the border patrol of a large number of immigrants without documents. Many of the immigrants are returned to their country at different places along Mexico–U.S. border. More immigrants than not stated they would try to cross the border again illegally; a very small proportion of deportees said they would return to their home states, and 7 to 8 percent informed authorities they would stay to look for a job and a place to live in border cities.¹⁰

Between 1999 and 2000, the border patrol returned about 787,100 immigrants to their home countries, according to the survey on International Migration on the Northern Border. The

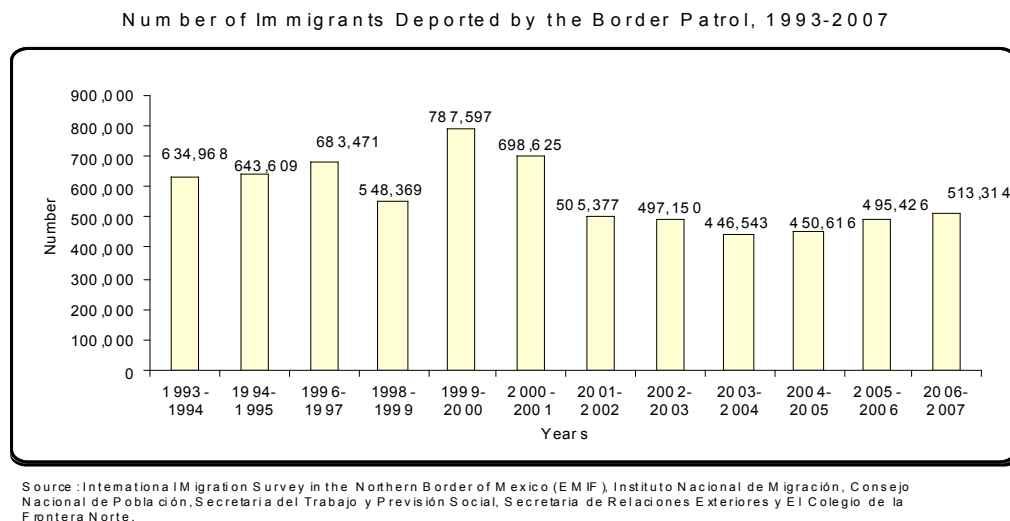
⁹ INEGI, National Survey on Urban Employment.

¹⁰ EMIF, Survey on International Migration on the Northern Border, 2000-2007.

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number of returned or deported persons decreased between 2003 and 2004 to about 446,000. The number of deported persons increased again to 613,000 between 2006 and 2007.

Chart 11



In late 2007, there was talk in Mexico of a possible economic recession in the United States and that, as a consequence, the U.S. government would round up workers at sites where hundreds of Mexican immigrants were employed. It was expected that in 2008, there would be a considerable increase in the number of immigrants returned to border cities.

For this reason, President Felipe Calderon in December 2007 announced the establishment of the Humane Repatriation program. The main purpose of the program is to offer Mexican immigrants information and financial support for a “humane” return to their places of origin, and assistance in obtaining temporary employment. This program was tested in Tijuana in March 2008; in September and October 2008, the program was implemented permanently in other border cities. However, as was the case with the “voluntary repatriation” program, the Human Repatriation program has not had great success. Very few immigrants have availed themselves of these programs, primarily because they prefer to make another attempt to enter the United States without documents. The option of going back to their places of origin is not very attractive, as they will face the same problems of unemployment or very low wages. The Humane

Repatriation program is still being developed and coordinated between participating government agencies.

Unaccompanied Immigrant Children at the Border

Another problem in recent years has been the greater presence of unaccompanied migrant children and teenagers in border cities. As a result, there is an urgent need for programs to support this vulnerable group.

Although precise information about the extent of child and teen migration is not available, data from some sources can be used to make estimates. For instance, the Mexican Migration Institute (INM) has information about U.S. repatriations to Mexico. Additionally, the Transit Hostels Network for Border Minors,¹¹ headed by the National System for Total Development of the Family, has in recent years collected information on the care and protection services offered to these migrants.

The INM recorded 252,865 repatriations of child and teenage immigrants, accompanied or unaccompanied, from January 2002 to December 2007. Of the 16,125 repatriation events between January and May 2008, more than half (9,143 cases) involved minors traveling alone.

Information on the child and teenage populations served by the Transit Hostels Network for Border Minors in Northern Mexico has been collected since 2001.¹¹ In 2002, this network cared for 6,708 repatriated underage immigrants; the number of repatriated underage immigrants rose to 10,920 in 2004; to 18,315 in 2005; and to 20,130 in 2006.

Immigrants who are children or teenagers are often exposed to a number of social risks from birth. The risks include high rates of poverty in their home communities, lack of support for basic needs, lack of public policies to protect them, absences from school, and family dispersion.

¹¹ Transit Hostels Network for Border Minors is a group of hostels sponsored by social and public sector organizations, providing specialized and differentiated attention to border boys, girls, and teenagers (Mexican and foreign) considering age, sex, ethnic origin, handicaps, etc. The activities include social evaluation, psychological, legal, and medical services. They also provide basic food services, lodging, hygiene, and clothing.

They are also exposed to the risks involved in migration, including crossing the border in high-danger zones under extreme weather conditions, traveling alone, discrimination, violence, and drug abuse.

Conclusion

Migration in border cities affects many different sectors of society. Historically, border communities have been shaped by migrants who work there and spur economic growth. However, at present these cities show a slowdown in development that is beginning to have a high cost to northern Mexico border communities. Although for many years border cities have offered employment to thousands of Mexicans, they are now facing a softening labor market, and a number of migrants are not able to find jobs. The maquiladora industry is no longer sufficient to drive the economy of border cities. It would seem that the development model in place during the 1980s and 1990s (mainly maquiladoras) is stagnant and totally exhausted.

The steady flow of migrants, the weakness of the border economic development model, and the containment, control, and security policies of the United States are putting more social pressure on border cities. Local border governments are overwhelmed in their attempts to create better life conditions for the border population.

Border management is complex and represents a strong challenge for Mexican authorities. There are many areas in which the border cities have fallen behind in development: the environment, housing, health services, and education. Above all, there has been a very high degree of violence and lack of security in the last couple of years. It would seem that the government of Mexico has forgotten the strategic importance of the northern Mexico border, the place where bilateral relationships are carried out with its primary commercial partner.

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