

The Precarious Position of Latino Immigrants in the United States: A Comparative Analysis of Ethnosurvey Data

By
DOUGLAS S. MASSEY,
JORGE DURAND,
and
KAREN A. PREN

A majority of Mexican and Central Americans living in the United States today are undocumented or living in a marginal, temporary legal status. This article is a comparative analysis of how Mexican and non-Mexican Latino immigrants fare in the U.S. labor market. We show that despite higher levels of human capital and a higher class background among non-Mexican migrants, neither they nor Mexican migrants have fared very well in the United States. Over the past four decades, the real value of their wages has fallen across the board, and both Mexican and non-Mexican migrant workers experience wage penalties because they are in liminal legal categories. With Latinos now composing 17 percent of the U.S. population and 25 percent of births, the precariousness of their labor market position should be a great concern among those attending to the nation's future.

Keywords: immigration; undocumented migrants; liminal legality; wages; Mexicans; Central Americans

From 1970 through 2010, some 11.7 million legal Latin American immigrants arrived in the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015); and over the same period, the undocumented population rose from around a half million to around 11 million,

Douglas S. Massey is the Henry G. Bryant Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University, where he directs the Office of Population Research in addition to serving as codirector of the Mexican Migration Project.

Jorge Durand is a senior research professor in the Department for the Study of Social Movements at the University of Guadalajara and codirector of the Mexican Migration Project. He is a member of the Mexican Academy of Sciences and a foreign associate of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences.

Karen A. Pren is the manager of the Mexican Migration Project and the Latin American Migration Project at Princeton University and the University of Guadalajara.

Correspondence: dmassey@princeton.edu

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about 80 percent of whom are from Latin America (Wasem 2011; Passel and Cohn 2011). Whereas in 1970 the U.S. population was just 4.7 percent Hispanic, by 2010 the figure had risen to 17.3 percent, making Latinos by far the nation's largest minority group. In addition to being a relatively small share of the population in the 1970s, Hispanics were also regionally isolated and divided into very distinct subgroups. Mexicans were the largest population, composing 59 percent of all Latinos at the time, and they were concentrated in the Southwest and were overwhelmingly native-born (Grebler, Moore, and Guzman 1970; Jaffe, Cullen, and Boswell 1980).

Hispanics in the Northeast consisted overwhelmingly of Puerto Rican migrants and their children, who had settled in and around New York City in the 25 years between 1945 and 1970, when mass migration effectively ended (Bean and Tienda 1987; Acosta-Belén and Santiago 2006). These migrants had come from the lower echelons of the island's socioeconomic distribution to take unskilled jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors. African ancestry was common among Puerto Rican migrants, making them subject to high levels of discrimination and exclusion (Massey and Bitterman 1985).

Cubans made up the last regional concentration of Hispanics present in the 1970s. They had arrived after 1959 as refugees from the left-wing regime of Fidel Castro (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 2014). Although Cubans arrived as refugees, asylum seekers, or in various irregular statuses, during the Cold War they were welcomed as exiles from Communism and quickly granted legal permanent residence. Whereas only 73,000 Cubans arrived from 1950 to 1959, the number increased to 202,000 in the 1960s and 256,000 in the 1970s (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015). The vast majority settled in the Miami metropolitan area, though smaller concentrations could be found in and around metropolitan New York (Bean and Tienda 1987). Unlike Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, however, Cuban migration to the United States began among socioeconomic elites, and African and mixed racial origins were not well represented in the early waves of arrivals (Portes and Bach 1985).

This status quo was upset by the emergence of new patterns of immigration that began in the 1970s but unfolded primarily after the 1980s. As we noted, the mass migration of Puerto Ricans ended around 1970 (Acosta-Belén and Santiago 2006). Cubans, however, continued to arrive in successive waves: 133,000 in the 1980s, 159,000 during the 1990s, and 305,000 from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015). These new migrants contained more persons of African origin, but like earlier arrivals, they settled overwhelmingly in South Florida. Beginning in 1965, Caribbean migrants from Cuba and Puerto Rico were joined by new flows from the Dominican Republic. Following the assassination of Rafael Trujillo in 1961, the Dominican Republic descended into political chaos, and in 1965, U.S. troops invaded to occupy the capital Santo Domingo.

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To defuse political tensions, the U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic was instructed to make U.S. resident visas freely available to qualified applicants, mostly middle-class students and intellectuals who had been agitating against the regime, thereby initiating a predominantly legal outflow that continues to the current day (Martin 1966; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). Whereas only 10,000 Dominican immigrants entered the United States during the 1950s, the outflow of legal immigrants increased to 84,000 during the 1960s and expanded to 139,000 during the 1970s, 222,000 during the 1980s, and reached 360,000 during the 1990s before moderating slightly to 345,000 from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015). As of 2010, 78 percent of Dominicans lived in the northeastern United States, mainly in the Greater New York Area (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011).

Immigration from Central America began in the 1980s in response to a Cold War military and political intervention in the region by the United States. The success of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979 and the rise of left-wing insurgencies in Guatemala and Honduras prompted the Reagan administration to finance and train a covert military force known as the Contras, which operated from Honduras, in an effort to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, all while supporting right-wing regimes and paramilitary militias in El Salvador and Guatemala (Lundquist and Massey 2005). As a result, during the 1980s, waves of violence swept through these four “frontline” nations and their economies shrank, sending streams of migrants northward to the United States (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2014).

From 1970 through 1979 only 78,000 legal immigrants had entered from these countries, but during the 1980s the number ballooned to 274,000. Although a regional peace accord was signed in 1987, the economies of the frontline states had been devastated, and civil violence continued for some time as gang violence increased. These factors led to an expansion of legal immigration from frontline nations during the 1990s (559,000) and from 2000 to 2010 (603,000; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015). As in the case of Cuba, Nicaraguans were welcomed as refugees from Communist tyranny and granted an easy path to permanent resident status, but those fleeing El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were labeled as “economic” rather than “political” refugees and given few opportunities for legal entry, channeling these migrants into unauthorized migration. From 1980 to 2010, therefore, the number of undocumented migrants from these three nations rose from 93,000 to 1.5 million (Wasem 2011; Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker 2011).

Although emigration from South America can be tied to civil violence and political turmoil (beginning with Colombia during the 1960s and including Argentina and Chile in the 1970s, Peru in the 1980s and 1990s, and Venezuela in the 2000s), as import substitution industrialization gave way to neoliberalism Latin American economies were transformed, which in turn promoted emigration during the 1980s and 1990s (Massey, Behrman, and Sanchez 2006). Under the aegis of the “Washington Consensus” and in the wake of the 1982 debt crisis, structural adjustment packages were imposed on nations throughout Latin America, resulting in the privatization of state-owned companies, the downsizing of government bureaucracies, the termination of subsidies, the constriction of state transfers, and the opening of domestic markets to foreign investment.

These actions displaced a large number of workers who increasingly sought opportunities internationally (Donato et al. 2010). Whereas the number of legal immigrants entering the United States from South America was 246,000 and 235,000 during the 1960s and 1970s, it grew to 313,000 during the 1980s, 494,000 during the 1990s, and reached 863,000 from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015). Although the Ecuadorian undocumented population grew from 25,000 in 1980 to 180,000 in 2010, most immigrants from South America were legal. Rather than migrating to the United States without authorization, most undocumented migrants went to Spain or other countries in the European Union (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón 2015).

Despite the continuation of immigration from Cuba, and the addition of new flows from the Dominican Republic, Central America, and South America, by far the biggest influence on the size and structure of the Hispanic population in the United States was the resurgence of Mexican migration after 1965. This dramatically changed the size and composition of the Mexican-origin population, increasing it from 5.4 million in 1970 to 33.7 million in 2010 and raising the share of foreign-born among Hispanics from 14 percent to 35 percent while increasing the Mexican share among Hispanics from 59 percent to 63 percent (cf. Acosta and de la Cruz 2011; Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011).

As of 2010, more than two-thirds of all people of Mexican origin in the United States were immigrants or the children of immigrants, and much of the growth in this population stemmed from unauthorized migration as the number of undocumented Mexicans in the United States swelled from around 225,000 to 6.4 million between 1970 and 2010 (cf. Warren and Passel 1987; Wasem 2011). As of 2010, nearly 60 percent of all Mexican immigrants in the United States lacked legal status and comprised more than a fifth of all persons of Mexican origin (cf. Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker 2011; Acosta and de la Cruz 2011; Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011).

In addition, beginning in the 1980s and accelerating through the 1990s, Mexican immigration shifted from being a regional to a national phenomenon. Whereas 84 percent of all Mexican immigrants who arrived between 1965 and 1970 went to the border states of California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000), among those who arrived between 1995 and 2000 the figure was 54 percent (Massey and Capoferro 2008). During the 1990s and 2000s, rapid Mexican population growth shifted into states of the South, Northeast, and Midwest (Durand and Massey 2003), a shift largely attributable to the militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border, which decreased rates of return migration among undocumented migrants and channeled Mexican migrants away from traditional crossing points and destinations, particularly in California (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016).

To a lesser but still significant degree, the same geographic diversification occurred for Central Americans and, to a lesser extent, to South Americans. Whereas in 1980, 18 percent of Hispanics lived in the Northeast and 43 percent in the West, by 2010 these percentages fell to 14 percent and 41 percent, respectively; and while the share living in the Midwest remained roughly constant at around 9 percent, the share living in the South rose from 31 percent to 36

percent, putting Latinos in contact with people and regions with little or no prior experience of immigration (Massey 2008; Stepler and Brown 2015).

To a great extent, the Latino population boom occurred despite rather than because of shifts in U.S. immigration policies, which, starting in 1965, moved steadily to be more restrictive. In 1965, Congress canceled a long-standing temporary worker agreement with Mexico and imposed the first-ever numerical limits on immigration from the Americas. These limits were lowered even further to twenty thousand annual residence visas per country in 1976, accompanied by major expansions in immigration and border patrol policies, which took effect in 1986, 1990, 1996, and 2001 (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). These policies led to the expansion of undocumented migration (see Massey and Pren 2012; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2014).

Over time, undocumented status has increasingly come to predict negative labor market outcomes. The criminalization of undocumented hiring by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), when combined with the massive increase in the number of undocumented migrants during the 1990s and 2000s, acted to put substantial downward pressure on immigrant wages throughout the nation. Whereas undocumented status had no effect on earnings prior to the IRCA, afterward it carried a 21 percent wage penalty (Phillips and Massey 1999). More recent work by Hall, Greenman, and Farkas (2010) estimated a 17 percent wage disparity between documented and undocumented Mexican immigrant men and a 9 percent wage disparity by legal status among Mexican immigrant women. Pena (2010b) found that undocumented migrants were also more likely to be paid piece rate than other workers and that they worked fewer hours and earned lower wages as a result. Undocumented agricultural workers experienced an average wage penalty of 5 to 6 percent (Pena 2010a).

The rising share of undocumented workers and the criminalization of undocumented hiring have undermined the wages not just of undocumented migrants but of all workers employed in the same labor markets (Massey and Gelatt 2010; Massey and Gentsch 2014). In their 2008 survey of low-wage workers in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, Bernhardt, Spiller, and Polson (2013, 725) found that “violations of employment and labor laws are pervasive across low-wage labor industries and occupations.” According to their estimates, 31 percent of immigrant workers experienced a minimum wage violation compared with only 16 percent among native workers; and among those without documents, the figure was 37 percent compared with 21 percent among those with legal papers (Bernhardt et al. 2008). Another survey of immigrant workers in New Orleans found that 41 percent had experienced wage theft (Fussell 2011). Using data from the Current Population Survey, Orrenius and Zavodny (2009) documented a pronounced decline in employment, hours worked, and earnings among recent male Latin American immigrants that they attributed to harsher enforcement in the post-9/11 period. Hall and Greenman’s (2014) research demonstrates that undocumented workers also face greater exposure to occupational hazards, such as physical strain, exposure to heights, and repetitive motions and that they are rewarded less for employment in hazardous settings.

Most prior work on legal status and wages has focused on Mexican immigrants; but as suggested above, the prevalence of undocumented migrants varies

widely by region of origin. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens by birth, whether they are born on the island or the mainland; and virtually all Cubans in the United States are U.S. citizens or legal resident aliens, as are the large majority of Dominicans and South Americans present in the United States. In contrast, large shares of both Mexicans and Central Americans lack legal status. Among Mexican immigrants living in the United States in 2010, for example, 57 percent were undocumented, compared to 63 percent of both Guatemalans and Hondurans. Although the figure is only 52 percent for Salvadorans, when those in the legal limbo of Temporary Protected Status are added in, the percentage lacking a fully legal status probably approaches that of Guatemalans and Hondurans (cf. Acosta and de la Cruz 2011; Hoefler, Rytina, and Baker 2011).

In this article, we undertake a comparative analysis of how legal status affects wages among Mexicans and other Latin Americans, using data from the Mexican Migration Project together with comparable data collected under the aegis of the Latin American Migration Project. After describing our data and methods, we contrast the position of Mexican and non-Mexican Latin Americans in the U.S. labor market and move on to estimate wage regressions that assess the earnings penalties associated with undocumented and temporary legal statuses within each group. We conclude with an assessment of how precarious legal status undermines the economic status of Latino immigrants and constitutes a serious threat to the future of the United States.

Data and Methods

Given the success of the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), in 1998 the first two authors launched the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) with a round of surveys in Puerto Rico. Their goal was to apply the ethnosurvey methods developed earlier by the MMP to gather data from successive rounds of surveys conducted in other countries of Latin America. The intention was to broaden the empirical base for testing theories and generalizing about patterns and processes of international migration. Since then, the LAMP investigators have collaborated with local researchers throughout the region to administer ethnosurveys in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. In the current analysis, we draw upon these data to undertake a comparative examination of legal status and wages among Mexican and other Latin American immigrants.

Although ethnosurveys were also fielded in Haiti and Paraguay as part of the LAMP, we do not use those data here and instead rely on data gathered from samples of seven communities in Costa Rica, fourteen in Colombia, seven in the Dominican Republic, four in Ecuador, four in El Salvador, three in Guatemala, nine in Nicaragua, five in Peru, and five in Puerto Rico. Although the vast majority of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans go to the United States, many and sometimes most international migrants from the other countries move elsewhere. A significant percentage of Dominican migrants go to Spain, for

example, as do a large number of Ecuadorans and Colombians. Data collected in Peru revealed that its immigrants went to some twenty-five different nations around the world, including Japan, Australia, Canada, and many nations in Europe and Latin America, as well as the United States.

Rather than using a standard single semistructured interview schedule as is used in the MMP, LAMP interview schedules are adapted to reflect different social and cultural circumstances across nations. As in Mexico, the LAMP surveys enumerate the household head, spouse, and all children of the head in addition to any others present in the household; and in addition to compiling basic socioeconomic and demographic information on each individual, interviewers also gather data on the first and most recent international trips, including location, occupation, hours worked, wages earned, and legal status. Household heads were also asked a detailed series of questions about their most recent international trip, which provides the bulk of the data for our analysis.

With 154 communities in the MMP dataset in contrast to 54 in the LAMP datafile, the Mexican sample size is necessarily much larger than that for non-Mexican nations. The Latin American sample size is also smaller because far more international migrants go to nations other than the United States. Thus the Mexican sample includes 4,250 observations once cases with missing data are excluded, whereas the Latin American sample has only 545 cases, yielding a large difference in the precision of our sample estimates. The LAMP-based estimates thus carry a greater risk of Type II errors compared to those based on MMP data, which makes it more difficult to identify true substantive relationships as statistically significant.

We follow the standard method in labor force studies of estimating an earnings regression that expresses the natural log of the real hourly wage (in 2010 dollars) as a function of variables hypothesized to influence wage rates. Our leading variable is *legal status*, which is defined in terms of three categories. *Legal immigrants* include U.S. permanent residents and naturalized citizens, *temporary migrants* hold legal visas authorizing temporary, term-limited periods of work or residence in the United States, and *undocumented migrants* include those who crossed the border without authorization or who entered on a tourist visa and then violated its terms by working for pay.

In assessing the effect of legal status on wages, we include controls for demographic background (gender, age, marital status), human capital (education, U.S. experience, English ability, and occupational skill), social capital (whether parents or siblings had prior U.S. experience), how the job was obtained (by oneself or through a relative, acquaintance, or contractor), and degree of integration in the United States (whether the migrant had social relationships with Anglo Americans and whether he or she had a U.S. bank account). Both Mexican and non-Mexican models also control for period (in five-year intervals extending from 1970 to 2010); we also control for country fixed effects in the Latin American models. Unfortunately the questions necessary to measure sector of employment were not asked in all countries of the LAMP, so this variable is excluded from the analysis.

Mexicans and Latin Americans in the U.S. Labor Market

Table 1 presents summary statistics for all variables in our wage regressions to contrast the labor market position of Mexicans and other Latin Americans in the United States. On average, non-Mexican Latin Americans earn about 23 percent more than Mexicans (\$12.55 versus \$10.21). This differential in earnings likely reflects the much more vulnerable status of Mexicans, owing to a variety of factors. First, whereas nearly three-quarters of Mexicans are undocumented (74 percent), the figure is less than half for Latin Americans (just 43 percent). Second, compared with Mexicans other Latin Americans have 3.4 more years of schooling (9.6 versus 6.2), are less likely to come from an agricultural occupational background (2 percent versus 25 percent among Mexicans), and are more likely to come from a skilled background (17 percent versus 4 percent). Finally, whereas 42 percent of Latin Americans reported that they spoke and understood much English, only 27 percent of Mexicans did so; and while Mexicans report more total trips to the United States (2.5 versus 0.5), they have less cumulative U.S. experience (77 months compared with 104 months), implying that their labor market experience was not only less but more fragmented across trips.

Although Guatemalans and Salvadorans share many of the characteristics of Mexicans, they make up a small share of the total Latin American sample. In general, then, non-Mexican Latin American migrants appear to come from a higher class background than Mexicans, have greater access to permanent resident visas, and bring more human capital to the labor market, thus enhancing their bargaining position. Indeed, whereas 34 percent of Latin Americans have bank accounts, only 16 percent of Mexicans do, suggesting that Latin American migration consists more of middle-class migration than unskilled worker migration. It also indicates a higher level of formal connection to U.S. social and economic institutions. Despite this difference in economic integration, Mexicans and non-Mexicans appear to be comparably integrated socially, with 35 percent of Mexicans reporting that they have social relationships with Anglo Americans compared to 36 percent among Latin Americans.

The costs of migrating to the United States are much greater for Central and South American migrants, who were mostly displaced from steady nonagrarian jobs by civil violence and economic restructuring and usually possessed the class resources to secure legal resident visas. Or, if that were not possible, they could more easily acquire a tourist visa to enter legally and only later lapse into illegal status rather than undertaking a clandestine border crossing from the start. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, of course, and migration from the Dominican Republic from the outset was urban, middle class, and predominantly legal (see Riosmena 2010). In contrast, Mexicans generally fit the profile of unskilled labor migrants.

Mexican migrants, for example, are overwhelmingly male (95 percent compared to 76 percent for other Latin Americans), unmarried (with just 36 percent married compared with 58 percent of Latin Americans), heavily concentrated in

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Variables Used in the Analysis of Wages
Earned by Mexicans and Other Latin Americans

Variable	Mexicans		Other Latin Americans	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Earnings				
Hourly wage (2010 dollars)	10.21	5.62	12.55	7.18
Documentation				
Legal	0.207	0.405	0.505	0.500
Temporary	0.034	0.181	0.025	0.157
Undocumented	0.740	0.439	0.433	0.495
Demographic background				
Female	0.052	0.223	0.243	0.429
Age	33.17	11.95	33.61	11.89
Married or in union	0.362	0.481	0.581	0.494
Education				
School years completed	6.175	3.958	9.611	4.576
Occupation				
Agriculture	0.248	0.432	0.018	0.132
Unskilled	0.653	0.476	0.591	0.492
Skilled	0.041	0.198	0.169	0.375
U.S. experience				
Number of prior U.S. trips	2.491	4.902	0.531	1.721
Total months of U.S. experience	77.05	86.73	105.05	95.21
English ability				
Does not speak or understand English	0.335	0.472	0.119	0.324
Speaks and understands some English	0.368	0.482	0.298	0.458
Speaks and understands much English	0.271	0.445	0.423	0.494
Social capital				
Parent a migrant	0.192	0.394	0.120	0.325
Sibling a migrant	0.386	0.487	0.065	0.246
Community migration prevalence	22.45	15.54	14.41	12.81
How job obtained				
By oneself	0.260	0.439	0.236	0.425
Relative	0.311	0.463	0.192	0.394
Acquaintance	0.284	0.451	0.292	0.455
Contractor	0.009	0.092	0.010	0.101
Integration				
Relations with Anglos	0.349	0.477	0.362	0.481
Bank account	0.159	0.366	0.338	0.473

(continued)

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Variable	Mexicans		Other Latin Americans	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Period				
1970–1974	0.061	0.240	0.052	0.221
1975–1979	0.094	0.292	0.062	0.241
1980–1984	0.106	0.308	0.097	0.295
1985–1989	0.175	0.380	0.166	0.372
1990–1994	0.222	0.416	0.158	0.365
1995–1999	0.177	0.382	0.164	0.370
2000–2004	0.114	0.317	0.144	0.352
2005–2010	0.051	0.219	0.022	0.148

the secondary or enclave sectors of the labor market (see Durand, Massey, and Pren, this volume), and are more embedded within migrant networks than non-Mexican migrants. Some 19 percent of Mexicans report having U.S. migrant parents and 39 percent report having migrant siblings, and Mexican migrants report that they come from a community where an average of 22 percent of all adult residents have been to the United States, compared with respective figures of 12 percent, 7 percent, and 14 percent for non-Mexican Latin Americans.

Legal Status and Wages among Mexicans and Latin Americans

Table 2 presents separate wage regressions estimated for Mexican migrants surveyed by the MMP and non-Mexican Latin Americans surveyed by the LAMP. As noted earlier, the Latin American model was estimated using country fixed effects. Although not shown in the table, these estimates generally revealed the earnings of Caribbean and Central American migrants to lie below those from South America, with the sole exception of those from Costa Rica, which is a relatively prosperous egalitarian nation that was spared turmoil and violence during the U.S. Contra intervention. According to the fixed effects coefficients, wages were 33 percent greater for Costa Ricans, 26 percent greater for Colombians, 27 percent greater for Ecuadorians, and 30 percent greater for Peruvians, compared with migrants from the Caribbean and Central America generally.

The coefficient for undocumented status suggests that other Latin Americans lacking legal papers earn around 7 percent less than legal immigrants, compared with a 12 percent deficit among Mexicans. Although the former coefficient is not

TABLE 2
 Regression of Logged U.S. Hourly Wages on Legal Status and Selected Other
 Variables for Mexican and Latin American Migrants to the United States

Variable	Mexicans		Other Latin Americans	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Documentation				
Legal	—	—	—	—
Temporary	-.115**	.045	-.452**	.151
Undocumented	-.123***	.021	-.069	.064
Demographic background				
Female	-.214***	.035	-.139**	.046
Age	.010**	.0003	-.009**	.001
Age squared	-.0002***	.0001	.000	.001
Married or in union				
Education				
School years completed	.012***	.0021	.021***	.005
Occupation				
Agriculture	—	—	—	—
Unskilled	.101***	.017	.127	.094
Skilled	.224***	.037	.414***	.102
U.S. experience				
Number of prior U.S. trips	.006***	.002	-.005	.012
Total months of U.S. experience	.001	.001	.000	.000
English ability				
Does not speak or understand English	—	—	—	—
Speaks and understands some English	.046**	.018	-.080	.069
Speaks and understands much English	.093***	.021	-.071	.073
Social capital				
Parent a migrant	.023	.018	.028	.055
Sibling a migrant	-.116***	.021	.335	.453
Community migration prevalence	.002**	.001	.001	.002
How job obtained				
By oneself	—	—	—	—
Relative	-.011	.017	-.053	.054
Acquaintance	-.008	.017	-.107**	.046
Contractor	.032	.074	.110	.164
Integration				
Relations with Anglos	.003	.015	.053	.042
Bank account	.200***	.021	.113**	.048
Period				
1970–1974	—	—	—	—
1975–1979	-.230***	.036	-.199*	.107

(continued)

TABLE 2 (CONTINUED)

Variable	Mexicans		Other Latin Americans	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
1980–1984	-.219***	.035	-.449***	.103
1985–1989	-.309***	.033	-.456***	.098
1990–1994	-.355***	.033	-.405***	.103
1995–1999	-.378***	.035	-.483***	.108
2000–2004	-.310***	.039	-.433***	.119
2005–2010	-.342***	.048	-.346*	.199
Intercept	2.236***	0.073	2.555***	0.230
Adjusted <i>R</i> -squared	.171***		.276***	
Number of observations	4,250		545	

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

statistically significant, this likely owes to the fact that the smaller number of undocumented migrants in the non-Mexican sample yields a much less precise estimate. If the Latin American coefficient were measured with the same precision as the Mexican coefficient, it would be statistically significant. At the very least, we can state that the penalty for undocumented status is not as severe for non-Mexican Latin Americans as it is for Mexicans, but it is difficult to state with any accuracy the size of the gap or its significance.

When it comes to temporary legal status, however, the penalty is far more severe among the non-Mexicans than Mexicans. In the Latin American sample, those holding temporary visas earned a remarkable 45 percent lower wage than legal immigrants; whereas in the Mexican sample, the gap was only 11.5 percent. This huge gap between legal and temporary Latin American workers probably reflects the better bargaining position of legal immigrants in the non-Mexican sample, who, as we have already seen, boast relatively high educations, strong English abilities, and greater occupational skills than Mexicans and thus are better able to benefit from competition in open labor markets compared to migrants whose visas restrict job mobility. The gap probably also reflects the fact that other Latin Americans hold different kinds of temporary visas than Mexicans. Whereas the latter generally hold H-visas for temporary work in agriculture, food processing, and construction, many Central Americans, and to a lesser extent South Americans, languish in a category known as temporary protected status (TPS), one of the liminal legal statuses identified by Menjívar (2006).

Under the 1997 Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act, Nicaraguans were authorized to apply for legal permanent residence if they had been in the United States since December 1, 1995, irrespective of any prior lack of documentation. In contrast, Salvadorans and Guatemalans were only authorized to apply for a suspension of deportation or cancellation of removal, relief

that was only temporary and never made permanent. TPS could be terminated at any time by Congress; and since its inception it has had to be renewed regularly, at a fee currently set at \$380. Stranded in an uncertain legal limbo placed many Central Americans, especially Salvadorans, in a precarious position. That precariousness strained interpersonal relationships and fragmented social ties, which undermined the employment benefits of social capital enjoyed by Mexicans, thus undermining the position of TPS recipients in the labor force and American society generally (Menjívar 2000).

As shown in the right-hand columns of Table 2, social capital connections have no effect on earnings, getting a job through an acquaintance is associated with 11 percent lower wages, and there are no earnings returns to English language ability or U.S. experience for non-Mexicans. Only years of schooling and occupational skill have the expected positive effects. As can be seen at the bottom of the table, the intercepts of the wage regressions were quite similar, suggesting that the gap in average wages observed between Mexicans and non-Mexicans in Table 1 are largely explained by variables in the model.

A powerful pattern common to both groups of migrants, and one indicating the deteriorating labor market position of Latino immigrants generally in the United States, is the steady erosion of the real value wages over time. Compared to earnings during the early 1970s, the real value was 13 percent lower in the late 1970s and 22 percent lower in the early 1980s. Thereafter the gap increased, averaging 30 to 38 percent lower, reflecting the criminalization of undocumented hiring in 1986 and the growing share of undocumented migrants in the workforce thereafter (Massey and Gentsch 2014). Among Central Americans, wages were 20 percent lower in the late 1970s than during the early 1970s; and from 1980 onward wages were 40 to 48 percent lower, except for 2005 to 2010, when the negative differential dropped to 35 percent, matching the deficit of Mexicans. Although migrants with education and skills may be able to overcome depressed wages to some degree, it is very clear that the labor market has deteriorated markedly for all Latino immigrants since the 1970s and that they are now in very precarious circumstances economically.

Conclusion

Since 1970 the Hispanic population of the United States has grown from a small and regionally isolated population to become the nation's largest minority group with members dispersed widely throughout the nation. The boom in Latino immigration was led by Mexicans, who constituted the largest number among both documented and undocumented migrants from 1970 to 2010. The undocumented population grew slowly between 1965 and 1985, even as opportunities for legal entry were sharply reduced because cross-border movements were overwhelmingly circular and produced small annual net gains. The 1986 IRCA legalized around 2 million Mexicans, and these beneficiaries quickly began using the family reunification provisions of U.S. immigration law to sponsor the entry of relatives, without numerical limits on spouses, minor children, and parents of

citizens (but subject to limitation if they were older children or siblings of citizens), thereby boosting the inflow of legal Mexican immigrants and sustaining it to the present day (Massey and Pren 2012). The most important effect of IRCA, however, was that it initiated a massive, decades-long militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border. The intensity of border enforcement dramatically increased the costs and risks of border crossing, prompting migrants to stop circulating back and forth and instead remain in the United States once they had achieved a successful crossing. The end result of the sharp drop in return migration by Mexican migrants was an increased net rate of undocumented migration and accelerated unauthorized population growth (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016).

The growth of the Hispanic population was also bolstered by new immigration streams from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. In the former two regions, the upsurge stemmed from Cold War policies that privileged persons fleeing left-wing regimes (which produced legal outflows from Cuba and Nicaragua) and stemmed from anti-leftist military interventions that produced a predominantly legal outflow in the Dominican Republic and generated even larger outflows of unwelcomed (undocumented) migrants from right-wing regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Although international migration was generated by civil violence in Colombia (Silva and Massey 2014) and a few other countries, in most South American nations it was more strongly associated with economic displacements stemming from the imposition of structural adjustment policies during the 1980s (Massey and Capoferro 2006).

Despite large increases in legal and temporary worker migration from Latin America, in the end a rather large share of Latino population growth over the past several decades has occurred through unauthorized migration. Undocumented migrants now constitute around 40 percent of the Latino immigrant population generally and 60 percent or more among Mexican and Central American immigrants. Mass illegality has thus come to be a prominent structural feature of America's Latino population and the most serious barrier to the integration of Latin American immigrants and their children (Waters and Pineau 2015).

Hence our current analysis of legal status and earnings among Latino immigrants is both timely and important. Our study drew upon data from the MMP (Durand and Massey 2004) and the LAMP (Donato et al. 2010), sibling projects directed by Jorge Durand and Douglas Massey designed to broaden the base of generalization about international migration by applying ethnosurvey methods developed in Mexico to other nations in Latin America. Using these data, we undertook a systematic comparison of Mexican and non-Mexican Latin American migrants to the United States to assess the wage penalties associated with undocumented and temporary legal status.

A descriptive analysis revealed that non-Mexican immigrants were more likely to be middle class than Mexican immigrants, with more schooling, greater occupational skills, and better English language abilities. These differences led to a larger relative number of documented as opposed to undocumented migrants, as well as more women and families as opposed to the single, unmarried men with low levels of education and poor English language skills who typified migrants from Mexico. Despite these advantages, however, Latin American immigrants

have generally experienced a sharp decline in real wages over the past several decades, which has left them in precarious labor market circumstances. Real wages for both groups (Mexican and non-Mexican migrants) during 2005 to 2010 was around 35 percent below what they were in the early 1970s.

Beyond the overall erosion of wages over the past 40 years, migrants in liminal legal statuses generally experienced an additional wage penalty, with undocumented Mexicans earning about 12 percent less than legal immigrants and undocumented non-Mexicans possibly earning around 7 percent less. Likewise, temporary legal Mexican workers earned 11 percent lower wages, but temporary non-Mexican workers earned an impressive 45 percent less. Moreover, migrants in the Latin American sample experienced no wage returns to U.S. experience, English language ability, or social capital. In the end, while migrants in marginal legal status categories fared the worst, no Latin American migrants have fared well in U.S. labor markets since the passage of the 1986 IRCA, which simultaneously criminalized undocumented hiring and perversely accelerated undocumented population growth to put downward pressure on wages in markets where immigrants concentrated.

In 1994 the United States joined with Canada and Mexico to enact the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which sought to create markets for capital, commodities, goods, land, and services but block the integration of markets for labor and human capital. Ironically, during the same year that NAFTA went into effect, the United States launched Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego to block the flow of Mexican migrants through the border's busiest corridor, which ultimately helped to transform what had been a circular flow of male undocumented workers traveling to three states into a settled population of undocumented families living in fifty states. This transformation produced mass illegality and precarious circumstances for workers in labor markets throughout the nation.

Widespread illegality has implications for the well-being of Latino immigrants beyond their position in the labor market. Greenman and Hall (2013) demonstrate, for example, that undocumented students are less likely than those with documents to graduate from high school and enroll in college. Hall and Stringfield (2014) show that Hispanic-white segregation rises as the estimated prevalence of undocumented migrants in the population increases, whereas Rugh and Massey (2014) document a strong connection between hostility toward illegal immigrants and higher levels of Hispanic segregation. Hall and Greenman (2013) find that undocumented householders are far less likely to be homeowners than documented migrants and non-Hispanic whites; and they also live in more crowded homes, report greater structural deficiencies with their dwellings, and express greater concern about the quality of public services and environmental conditions in their neighborhoods.

Given these findings, it is not surprising that studies have also documented the negative health effects of illegality. Although Mexican migrants are positively selected for good health when they leave for the United States, they display worse health than otherwise similar nonmigrants when they return (Ullmann, Goldman, and Massey 2011; Goldman et al. 2014). Illegal status not only undermines the

well-being of undocumented migrants, but it also has negative consequences for the families and communities to which they belong. Undocumented immigrant children have limited access to health insurance and a consistent source of health-care, children with immigrant parents have poorer health than children with native parents, and children with undocumented parents have less access to a diagnosis from a doctor for common childhood ailments (Gelatt 2016).

The manifold negative consequences of mass illegality were created by U.S. policy actions, and U.S. policy actions are required to undo them. The two most critical actions are clearly the suspension of deportations for long-term undocumented residents and the authorization of a pathway to legal status for the 11 million such persons who currently reside in the United States. Undocumented migration rates have been zero or negative since 2008, and the population is no longer growing (Passel et al. 2014). As a result, most undocumented residents of the United States have been present for many years: 85 percent for five years or more, 63 percent for 10 years or more, and 35 percent for 15 years or more (Taylor et al. 2011). Moreover, around half now have U.S.-born children, thus tying the welfare of millions in the next generation of Americans to the fate of their undocumented parents (Center for Migration Studies 2015).

Unfortunately, no legalization program is likely to be enacted given the current composition of the U.S. House of Representatives, in which the Republican caucus to date has systematically blocked all attempts to consider immigration reform legislation. All 2016 Republican presidential candidates called for increased border enforcement and more deportations from the U.S. interior, despite the fact that undocumented migration rates have been at zero or negative for six years at the time of this writing. Barring a Republican loss of the House in the next three elections, reform legislation that creates a pathway to legal status for undocumented migrants is unlikely to get very far until after 2022.

A new census will be taken in 2020 and provide the basis for reapportioning a new House of Representatives in 2022, by which time the core Republican constituency (older white Americans) will have fallen to a much smaller share of the total population. According to Census Bureau projections, non-Hispanic whites will compose only 50 percent of the population in 2020, and older white Americans (aged 55+) will constitute just 21 percent, paving the way for a shift in the political control of Congress and thus opening up the possibility of significant movement toward immigration reform. Much will depend, however, on who controls the state legislatures in 2022 and the degree to which partisanship prevails. What is certain is that the longer a legalization program is postponed, the lower the earnings, the less the schooling, the poorer the health, and the more disadvantaged the neighborhoods of undocumented migrants and their children, and the higher the cost the United States will ultimately pay as a nation and a society.

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