

Push and Pull Factors of Mexican Migration to the US

Andrew Schlewitz, Latin American Studies, 331-8158, schlewia@gvsu.edu

People in the US tend to attribute Mexican immigration (and Central American migration, often through Mexico to the US) to economic factors, focusing on the push factor of lack of economic opportunity, or on the pull factor of lax or ineffective border control policies. Actually, there is a complicated array of intertwined push and pull factors driving immigration flows.

You might think of the push-pull factor as flip sides of various coins, each coin representing a different kind of factor—economic, cultural, sociological, political, and geographic. Students can think about these various push-pull factors when examining different kinds of data—qualitative and quantitative—on immigration (news reports, fiction, memoirs, collections of immigrant correspondence, statistics, etc.). Keep in mind that push-pull factors regard the causes of migration flows, not their impact on sending and receiving countries. That’s a whole other controversial kettle of fish.

<i>Push</i>	<i>Pull</i>
Lack of economic opportunity -debt & currency crises -neoliberal reforms -border industrialization -NAFTA	US economic development -expansion of service labor market -corporate restructuring and moves -recruitment -lowering costs of financial transactions (remittances)
Quickening communication and transportation	Social networks and chain migration
Globalization of Western image	Educational opportunities
Proximity	Intertwined histories of Mexico and US
Mexican Citizenship and Migration Policies -lax emigration regime -Central American immigration -encouraging Mexican émigré political participation	US volunteer immigration policy -porous door -family reunification -IRCA amnesty (1986) -citizenship by birth
Political and Public Violence -From revolution to one-party state in Mexico (1910-2000) -Civil wars in Central America (1970s-1990s) -US “war on drugs” -US Cold War interventions in Central America	US refugee policy -US bilateral relations with Mexico and neighboring Central American countries

One of many examples of graphic representations of immigration data that can provide context for *The Distance Between Us*

In-Flows Increase Since 1960s; Relatively Larger in 19th Century

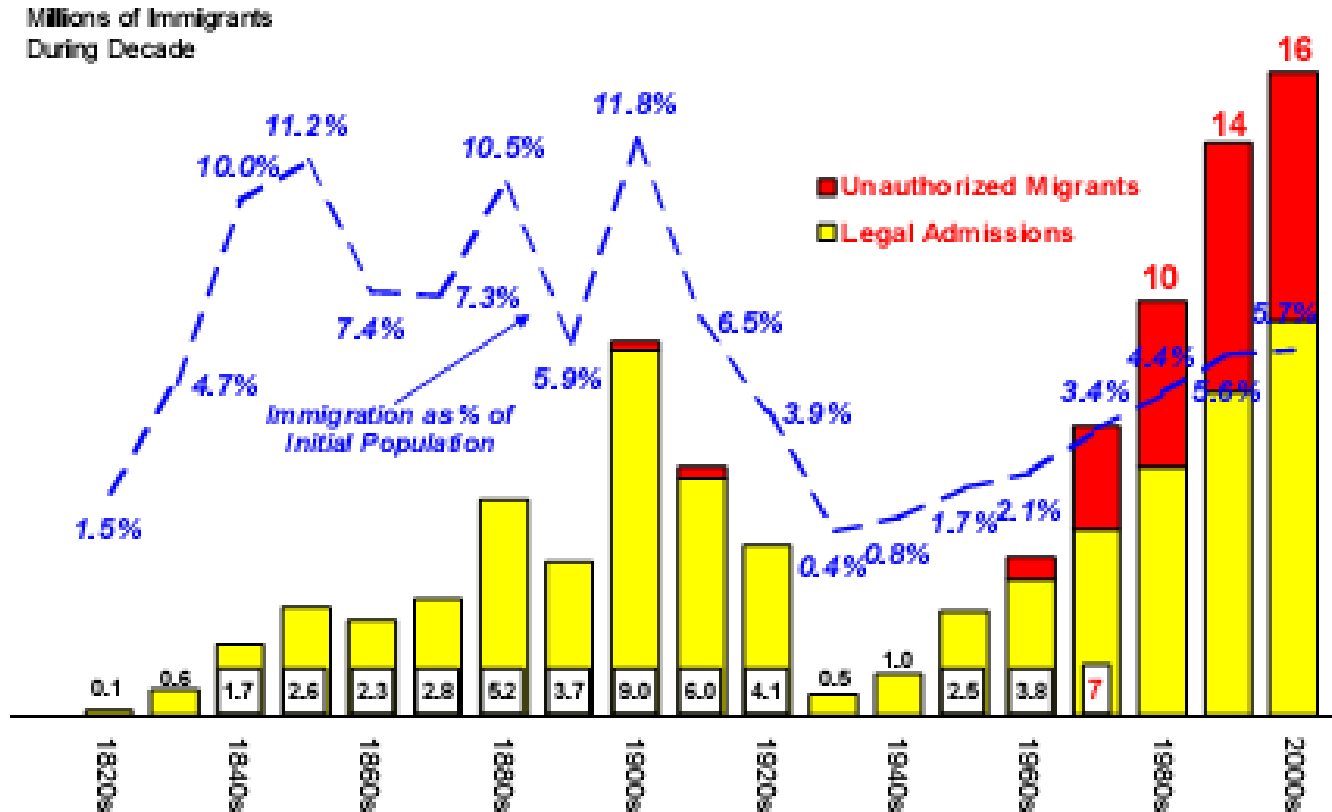


Figure 8. Immigration by Decade—Number Levels and Percent of U.S. Population: 1821–1830 to 2001–2010

Source: Detailed Table 4.