

The Ongoing Immigration Debate in North America



Joshua Roberts/Reuters

Migration from Mexico to the United States has been happening and, of course, evolving in many ways for over 150 years. However, it seems that migration policy has not been able to keep up with and adapt to all the changes in this process. The U.S. labor market usually sends out strong signals about the demand for foreign-born workers of various types; however, policies are often inflexible and unresponsive to these needs.

Even though the U.S. recognizes itself as a nation of immigrants, the recent economic crisis brought to light and accentuated underlying anti-immigrant sentiments that continue to prevail within certain segments of the population and that have generated a climate of hostility toward many Latin American labor migrants, especially undocumented Mexicans. Public opinion is sharply divided over what should be done about the more than 11 million undocumented immigrants estimated to be currently living in the U.S.

The articles in this special section address various aspects of the ongoing immigration policy debate. The first refers to characteristics of and recent changes in the number of Mexican immigrants in the U.S.; the second explores NAFTA's specific impact on migration. The third article discusses the media's role in informing and shaping public opinion about immigrants and the costs and benefits of immigration. Another text explores the difficulties immigrants face, particularly those who are undocumented, when trying to access health care in the U.S.

The subsequent article offers some explanations about why recent attempts to reform immigration policy in the U.S. have failed; and the last article maintains that conservative Canadian politicians' discourse about the excessive benefits of their country's asylum system are being used to justify more restrictive policies currently aimed at Mexicans.

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