

**Disentangling the Political and Economic Determinants of Migration: Interstate  
Mobility Patterns of Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States, 2004-2013**

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**ABSTRACT**

There is an increasing literature on the impact of restrictive public and migration policies on the lives of undocumented immigrants and their families across US. Less research has been conducted on the mobility patterns—specially internal migration—as a possible strategy to face a more restrictive environment. In this research we estimate multi-level discrete time logistic models with data from the American Community Survey to analyze the residential mobility patterns of Mexican and Central American immigrants in US between 2004 and 2013. During this time period there are two major events that could have led to different mobility patterns: the increase on restrictive migration policies in different states and the economic crises. We expect to find differences on the decisions to move to another state by period, by state of residence and by sociodemographic and family characteristics of the migrants.

# **Disentangling the Political and Economic Determinants of Migration: Interstate Mobility Patterns of Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States, 2004-2013**

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## **Introduction**

During the first decade of XXI century and the beginning of the next, several states designed and implemented public policies targeted to the undocumented migrant population. These actions restricted their access to certain public benefits and social services, resulted in a more vulnerable and unstable access to the labor market, facilitated deportations and imposed penalties and punishments against undocumented migrants. Returning to the countries of origin or moving to another state with a less restrictive environment have been considered as possible strategies undertaken by migrants and their families to face the difficulties resulting from the implementation of such policies.

Today, the research on the recent mobility patterns of undocumented migrants has focused mainly on assessing whether the flows and the characteristics of incoming migrants have changed (Bohn, Losfrom and Raphael, 2014; Amuedo-Dorantes and Lozano, 2011; Good, 2013). Some of this research has focused primarily on the Mexican immigrant population (Villarreal, 2014). In spite of the differential effect of the Great Recession on the migrant labor market at the state level and the growth in the state anti-immigrant policies, less

research has been conducted to explore how internal mobility patterns of immigrants have shifted as a possible response to the changes in the economic and political conditions at the state level.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the interstate mobility patterns of immigrants in the United States between 2004 and 2013, when the anti-immigrant policies multiplied. This period also includes the years of the large economic crises, which could have interacted with the restrictive political environment in different states. We focused on a specific population, Mexican and Central American migrants. These two groups share similar characteristics (a long-time and continuous migration to the US, the consolidation of social networks and migrants communities in the states of destinations and a large component of undocumented migration).

Based on previous work on internal migration of undocumented immigrants in the United States, we expect to find that the interstate residential mobility of Mexican and Central American immigrants will be higher when they reside in states where laws against undocumented immigrants were passed. Although we do not have direct information on the documentation status of individuals, we expect to find differences in the migration patterns of immigrants who are citizens and non-citizens.

Aside from the variables capturing the implementation of migration policies at the state level, we also include in our analysis other economic and social factors that may be influencing mobility decisions. Macroeconomic variables such as state labor indicators and unemployment rates and state GDP growth may be associated with higher propensity for mobility, specially where the sectors that employ Mexican and Central American migrants were more affected by the economic crises. In addition, we expect to find less mobility in

states with a larger prevalence of Mexican and Central American immigrants, where more robust social networks may have been developed and, therefore, where the social capital available may translate into better alternatives for the integration of migrants or to cope with adverse economic and political environments.

## **Backgrounds**

The literature on the internal migration of the foreign born population in the United States has debated on whether immigrants from different national origins have been dispersing or concentrating over American territory (Newbold, 1999, Frey and Liaw, 1999; Kritz, Gurak and Lee, 2012; Gooswin-Ellis and White, 2006). There is also an interest on studying the determinants of interstate migration; Kritz and Gurak (2000) analyzed three groups of determinants: human capital, social capital and economic conditions in the state of residence in their analysis of the internal migration of 24 national groups. Kritz, Gurak and Lee (2012) discuss the determinants of mobility of immigrants from 24 nationalities taking into account economical, demographic and social networks variables in the 741 labor markets in which they divide the United States between 1995 and 2000. These articles use different kind of statistical methods and most of them use microdata from population censuses of the United States as a source to calculate the migration flows and their determinants.<sup>1</sup>

There is another literature on the mobility of the foreign-born population in the United States that is not necessarily focused on internal migration but is more concerned about the

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<sup>1</sup> Nogle, 1997; Newbold, 1999; Frey and Liaw, 1999; Kritz and Gurak, 2000; Ellis and Gooswin-White, 2006; Kritz, Gurak and Lee, 2011, 2012.

implications of state migration policies on the mobility patterns of the migrant population—specially of undocumented immigrants. Some studies focus on the effects of only one policy (Bohn, Lofstrom and Raphael, 2014: Legal Arizona Worker Act in Arizona in force since January 1, 2008; Amuedo-Dorantes and Lozano, 2011: Senate Bill 1070 in Arizona, partially enforced since 2010); while others referred to them in sets of one or more states (Servicio de Estudios Económicos, de México y Fundación BBVA Bancomer, 2012; Good, 2013). In these cases, the more common methodological strategy used is difference in differences and the analysis is based on data from the Current Population Survey.

In recent years, there are at least two phenomena that may be changing significantly the geographical mobility patterns of Mexicans and Central Americans in the United State: the economic crisis and the policies regarding undocumented immigrants. There is evidence linking the Great Recession with the fall of the flows of migrants to the United States (for example, see Villarreal, 2014), but the effects of the economic crises on interstate migration are more uncertain among immigrants. According to Kritz and Gurak, (2000), an increase in the unemployment rate in a state in 1985 was related with greater mobility out of the state, however, this variable did not show statistical significance. In contrast, the growth of the labor market between 1980 and 1990 was linked to a decrease in internal migration.

In this paper we considered that while the impact of the economic crisis in 2008 increased unemployment, generating some incentives to move out from the states with higher unemployment rates, the chances for immigrants of finding jobs in other states which were also experiencing the adverse conditions of the recessions might have discouraged internal migration. Conversely, better job conditions in some states might have provided an incentive to stay. In the paper we also take into account that, for the immigrant population,

the analysis between mobility and changes in the labor market has to consider the trends in the economic sectors where undocumented migrants are mostly employed—such as construction.

Regarding the political factor, from 2005 until 2011, fifty of the states that form the United States approved and adopted 1,418 laws and resolutions related to immigration out of a total of more than 8,200 legislative initiatives. Since 2007, the number of initiatives was maintained at 1,500 proposals annually, while the number of approved laws remained above 200, reaching its peak in 2010. Among all this legal set, there are some that may have had the greatest impact on the lives of undocumented immigrants and their families, the omnibus (those containing various provisions) and the hardest laws: SB1070 in Arizona (2010), HB497 in Utah (2011), HB87 in Georgia (2011), to name some of them. Based on prior research (Good, 2013), it is possible to sort out the states depending on the harshness of their policies regarding undocumented immigrants. Good (2013) notes that in the eleven states that approved omnibus provisions there has been a decrease in their immigrant populations.

Not all the policies have the same impact on the internal mobility of undocumented immigrants and their families. According to Lofstrom (YEAR), there is a wide set of policies that does not have an impact on mobility decisions. In this paper we group the anti-immigrant policies in three. In the first group we have those policies that restrict the access to public benefits and social services for undocumented immigrants. The second group includes a set of policies that keep undocumented migrants out of certain labor market options. Among these policies we find the “universal” use of E-verify, which imposes sanctions to the employers that do not comply with the use of this system.

According to Bohn, Lofstrom and Raphael (2014), legislations such as the Legal Arizona Worker Act may have a direct impact on the arrival of new immigrants. In their research, Amuedo-Dorantes and Lozano (YEAR) found that this kind of policies does not have a significant effect on the immigration flows at the state level. Finally, the third group includes those policies that collaborate with the enforcement of federal laws, such as Senate Bill 1070, and facilitate the deportation and punishment of undocumented migrants. We expect to find different links between the set of policies implemented and the patterns of internal migration. It is also possible that the impact on internal mobility is seen not the year or one year after the initiatives are issued but later as the consequences of their implementation among undocumented migrants are more visible, thus, in our estimates we also control by the timing since the set of policies were first implemented.

The impact of the policies on the internal mobility of immigrants is seen either specifically among undocumented migrants or it can also extend to the mobility of others (Glick; O'Leary, year). Prior work has pointed out to the fact that the implementation of the abovementioned policies also affect documented migrants and citizens living in families with mixed migratory statuses.

The period under study for this paper (2004-2013) includes drastic changes in both the economic and in the political sphere. We expect to find three different stages related to specific mobility patterns that we grouped in “pre-crisis”, “economic crisis”, “more restrictive political environment”. The first stage, precrisis, covers from 2004 to 2007. In these years, the economy was thriving, recovering from the 2001 crisis and most of the policies approved and implemented were of the type one. The second stage, “economic crises”, covers 2008 and 2009; the changes in the mobility in these two years will probably

be related to the immediate effects of the economic crises on the internal migration of Mexican and Central American migrants. During this stage the first more restrictive policies are implemented and we may not see yet their effects. Finally, the years between 2010 and 2012 see a boom in the development and implementation of harsh migration policies at the local level; it is in these years where we expect to find a larger internal mobility of migrants as a response to the political environment.

## **Data**

The data used in this paper comes from the American Community Survey (ACS) from 2004 to 2014.<sup>2</sup> The ACS collects annually sociodemographical and economical information related to households through questionnaires administered by mail, telephone interviews and visits from representatives of the Census Bureau to about three million households residing in the United States (since 2005, previously the sample size was approximately one third the size of the last rounds). The sample size and the regularity of the annual survey allow to follow and to study some of the sociodemographic and economic processes of households and individuals in the country, including their internal geographical mobility.

Prior authors have pointed out the limitations of the ACS when studying the migrant population (Carriquiry y Majmundar, 2012; Genoni, Rubalcava, Teruel y Thomas, 2012). Underreport, specially among the undocumented population and in areas with a harsher political environment, may bias the results. Nonetheless, the ACS remains as the largest and most reliable dataset to analyze changes and characteristics of the immigrant population across several years.

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<sup>2</sup> We obtained the information of the ACS from the IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series), <http://www.ipums.org>.

## Methods

To achieve the goals of this research, we first conduct a descriptive analysis of the probability of changing place of residence between t-1 and t for Mexico and Central America migrants.<sup>3</sup> We analyze the mobility of the population between 15 and 64 years by type of local policies in the state of residence (depending on the type of policies and the time since their implementation), and separating the patterns in three stages of migration ("pre-crisis", 2002-2007, "economic crisis", 2008-2009; and "period of more restrictive political environment", 2010-2011). Interstate migration probabilities are simulated controlling by age, sex, occupation, length of residence and education to finish this first descriptive analysis.

In a second part of the paper, we estimate logistic multilevel discrete-time models for the interstate mobility of Mexicans and Central Americans in the US. The dependent variable is divided into two categories: those who remain in the state between t-1 and t and those who move to another state in the same period. In the model we test the effects of living in a state with the toughest policies on illegal immigration (RES), the stages of migration (STAGES, pre-crisis: 2002-2007, economic crisis: 2008-2009; tougher policies: 2010-2011) and their interaction with being or not a citizen (CITIZEN). We also include various state-level economic variables in our analysis using the information on the state of residence in t-1: growth rates between t-1 and t of the occupations that employ most of the

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<sup>3</sup> The probability of migrating internally is measured by the probability of changing the state of residence between t-1 and t. We add the number of migrants who lived in state j in t-1 and have moved to another state in the year t and divided it by the total population in the state in t-1. A source of bias is that we do not have the information on those who returned and those who did not survive between year t-1 and t.

Mexican and Central American (OCU), unemployment rates and GDP growth rates (GGDP).<sup>4</sup>

The individual level variables used are: age (AGE, in years and years squared<sup>5</sup>), sex (SEX), education (EDU, at least one year of college or not), marital status (CIVIL, married or unmarried), level of English (ING, it is able to speak English), years since arrival to the United States (RES in years), and the number of children at home (CHILD). To control for the availability of social networks and other labor characteristics, we also include other state-level variables for the state of residence in year t-1: percentage of Mexicans in the state (PERMEX) and percentage of white collar workers (PERCB).

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<sup>4</sup> All independent and control variables are lagged one year to avoid potential endogeneity problem when this is possible.

<sup>5</sup> The literature agrees that the relationship between age and the probability of migration should be modeled quadratically (among others, Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Massey, Durand and Riosmena, 2006).

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