

Immigration's decline means it should stay out of election

Mario T. García | May. 3, 2012 NCR Today

Although the economy will still be the major issue in this year's presidential election, some of the so-called wedge issues will still play a role in the mind of some voters. This includes the volatile and emotional response to immigration.

But, let's be clear, it isn't just the issue of immigration: It is Latino immigration. It is the reaction to the idea that we are been "invaded" by "hordes" of undocumented Latino, and specifically Mexican, immigrants who are and have been driving this issue since the 1970s, when the issue of undocumented or so-called "illegal immigration" first hit the national spotlight.

However, recent research suggests that perhaps this issue should not even be an issue at all. Why? Undocumented immigration has significantly declined, a secret well-kept by anti-immigrant groups.

The [Los Angeles Times reports](#) [1] that net migration from Mexico has come, to use its term, "to a statistical standstill." The number of migrants, both legal and not, have dropped sharply and, at the same time, the number of Mexican immigrants, both legal and not, returning to Mexico has also sharply increased. This information is based on recent research by the Pew Hispanic Center.

According to the Pew research and as reported in the *Times*, between 2005 and 2010, 1.4 million Mexicans immigrated to the U.S., less than half the number that did so between 1995 and 2000. At the same time, the number of Mexican immigrants who returned to Mexico in the same five-year period increased to 1.4 million, about double the number that returned between 1995 and 2000. The Pew research also notes that the number of undocumented Mexicans in the United States is also down from a little more than 7 million to about 6 million. Legal immigration from Mexico is actually slightly up.

It is hard to pinpoint the specific cause or causes for these changes, but they seem to be a combination of factors. One is that despite the heated rhetoric, we seem to actually be controlling our border and not losing control. With more Border Patrol personnel put in place by both Republican and Democrat administrations in addition to greater apprehension of undocumented immigrants and their deportations, we seem to be doing a pretty good job of stemming undocumented immigrants. In fact, the Obama administration, in deporting more than a million undocumented in three years, has deported more than the previous Bush administration.

The Great Recession and high unemployment on this side of the border is another factor. The economic problems have affected so-called "immigrant jobs" in construction and services, thus drying up a key incentive for migration. Still another cause is the profound demographic changes in Mexico, where the birth rate has significantly declined from a high of seven children per family to about two per family. The decline in Mexico's population means less demographic pressure to migrate for jobs, since there is less job competition in Mexico.

For these reasons and others, the specter of the undocumented assault on U.S. society in real terms is becoming less and less a reality, and this should hopefully also lead to a calming of the hysteria over "illegal aliens." I'm not sure it will, since so much of this "debate" has been unfortunately been characterized more by emotion

rather than reason. But if we are to be a truly democratic society, we need to base our public discourse on facts and reason, and the issue of Mexican undocumented immigration should be less and less of a major issue for us, since it is in decline, not ascendance.

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[1] <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/04/historic-wave-of-mexican-migration-comes-to-a-standstill-report-says.html>