

# **Selection in times of crisis: Exploring selectivity of Mexican return migration in 2005-2010**

Claudia Masferrer<sup>1</sup>, Jeffrey Passel<sup>2</sup> and Carla Pederzini<sup>3</sup>

## ***Abstract***

Recently released data from the 2010 Mexican Census shows a large increase of return-migrants from the United States. This paper intends to measure age, gender and educational selectivity of Mexican return-migrants from the US during the period 2005-2010. Focusing on the differences in return before and after 2008, we aim to contribute to the understanding of the impacts of the adverse environment of late 2000s. We address three main research questions: Are Mexican returnees living in 2010 in Mexico selected by sex, age and education? Can we observe a particular selectivity pattern during the 2008-2009 recession? How do selectivity patterns differ by gender? Using recent data from both countries (the Mexican and US censuses of 2010, and the ACS) we estimate emigration rates to Mexico of Mexican-born in the United States by sex, age and educational level. We pay special attention to educational level in order to make appropriate comparisons.

## ***Extended abstract***

### ***Introduction***

The decision to return depends not only on the migratory experience itself but on the economic, social and political conditions both in Mexico and the United States (Lindstrom, 1996; Reyes, 1997; Reyes & Mameesh, 2002; Riosmena, 2004). Much has been speculated about the impacts of the late 2000s financial crisis and economic recession on migration (Orozco, 2009; Rendall, Brownell & Kups, 2011) as well as the anti-immigrant environment characterized by border and interior enforcement and recent legislation changes, for example Arizona's SB1070 law, (Cornelius & Lewis, 2006; Massey, 2005; París Pombo, 2010). Researchers agree on the substantial reduction of immigration flows from Mexico to the United States; however, regarding return-migration flows to Mexico, opposing findings have been reached (Rendall, Brownell & Kups, 2011).

Return migration is embedded in two interrelated selection processes: emigration and return. It is well known that migrants are not randomly selected (Borjas, 1987; Lindstrom & López Ramírez, 2010; McKenzie & Rapoport, 2010). Selectivity of return migrants has received much less attention in the

---

<sup>1</sup> McGill University

<sup>2</sup> Pew Hispanic Center

<sup>3</sup> Universidad Iberoamericana

literature and some evidence shows that the selectivity of the return is inversely related to the selection of the arrival (Borjas & Bratsberg, 1996). A recently published article shows that selection of Mexican emigrants from the US differs from that of non-Mexicans in terms of economic integration, age and gender (Van Hook & Zhang, 2011). Using data from 1996 to 2009, the authors do not find a strong association between education and return; economic factors such as employment, poverty and welfare were unrelated to return migration.

Data from the recently released 2010 Mexican Census shows a large increase in the number of returnees, compared with previous trends. Return migration showed a decreasing trend until 2005. In absolute numbers, return migration defined by residence five years ago decreased from 290 thousand people in 1995, to 267 thousand people in 2000 and to 242 thousand returnees in 2005. However, in 2010, the Mexican census showed a sharp increase on return migration with 994 thousand returnees that were living in the US in 2005. Whether this constitutes a significant change in the Mexico-US migration patterns or a temporary change in the trend merely due to period effects is still to be understood.

In this paper we study age, gender and educational selectivity of return migrants during the period 2005-2010. Focusing on the differences in return before and after 2008, we aim to contribute to the understanding of the impacts on selection processes of the adverse environment during those times. An innovation of this study is its use of the most recent data sources from both countries, not only the Mexican and United States censuses of 2010, but data, like the American Community Survey, with numbers that are consistent to the 2010 US census. Special considerations will be addressed in order to allow for the appropriate comparability between data sources from both countries.

### ***Selection and return***

The research questions that we will address are the following:

*Q1. Are Mexican returnees living in 2010 in Mexico selected by sex, age and education?*

*Q2. Are these selection patterns different for those returnees that arrived to Mexico before and after the 2008 crisis?*

*Q3. How do selectivity patterns differ by gender?*

In the case of Mexican-US migration, previous historical flows have been characterized by the temporary or circular migration of male workers. As time passed, these seasonal patterns transformed into immigration and settlement. Women and children joined family members through chain migration, either undocumented or through family reunification procedures. These processes, along with immigration policy, affected the settlement of undocumented migrants (Riosmena, 2004). Settlement and return migration patterns have historically differed by gender, being women less likely to engage in circular migration and more likely to settle (Lowell, Pederzini & Passel, 2008; Van Hook & Zhang, 2011). Also, an analysis using data from the 2005 Mexican Population Count find that returnees are selected by sex and age (Masferrer & Roberts, 2009).

In terms of age, the return for retirement of workers in older ages and the phenomenon of the 'salmon-bias' effect in mortality differentials has been well documented in the health and migration literature, for example (Aguilera, 2004; Wong, Palloni & Soldo, 2007). Besides age, life course and family components such as marital status and presence of kin in either country, have shown to affect the decisions to return and selectivity (Van Hook & Zhang, 2011).

Thus, our first hypothesis is that there are gender differences in the overall patterns of return migration selectivity. We expect an interaction of age and gender as well. For example, we expect older men to be more likely to return than older women due to different family and economic responsibilities. In terms of age, we expect emigrants to be selected showing larger numbers of returnees in working ages or ages where migrants are overrepresented. In terms of educational selection of returned migrants, we do not expect to find a clear pattern, since other familiar and context factors seem to play such an important role (Van Hook & Zhang, 2011).

However, once we consider year of return, we expect differences in selection patterns before and after 2008. Thus, our second overall hypothesis is that we expect age and gender differences in selectivity in these time periods, but no change in education selectivity. This is partially supported by the idea that the financial crisis and economic recession affected mainly employment, income and poverty rates, but did not change the returns of education in the labor market. Additionally, Van Hook and Zhang (2011) find weak effects of economic integration on the selectivity of return.

In absolute numbers, return migration to Mexico from the United States has increased in the 2010 data. However, previous research found declining return in previous years (Alarcón, Cruz, Díaz-Bautista et al., 2008; Masferrer & Roberts, 2009; Passel & Cohn, 2009). It is possible that the sharp increase in the absolute numbers of emigrants during the period does not imply a change in the selectivity patterns of returnees. A recent publication shows declining return by age and education (Rendall, Brownell & Kups, 2011). Using data from the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE), the authors find a notorious decline in return in male migrants in working ages with less than college education and a decline in total return migration immediately after the triggering of the global financial crisis (fourth quarter of 2008). This could partially be explained by the fact that working migrants were aware of the fact that the economic situation in Mexico was also stressed by the impacts of the US recession.

We are interested in understanding the types of migrants that decided to sit the crisis in the United States instead of leaving it. This could be partially explained by the adverse legal and political environment characterized by enforcement, deportations, and anti-immigrant legislation that has had the impact of locking people in the US that would have otherwise returned home (Massey, 2005). Therefore, even if the economic context is adverse, we expect that the migrants that decided to sit the crisis are those with relatively better economic positions. We expect human capital to deter emigration in times affected by the economic recession. We expect a strong role of social networks in supporting migrants during the crisis, just like they do in other stages of the migration process, like in self-selection (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2010). Ironically, those in better economic conditions are also more likely to hold documents that would allow them to go back to the US while the economic situation ameliorates.

## Data and methods

The nature of the problem of studying selection processes of Mexican return migration from the US makes the use of data from both countries imperative. In this paper, we use the ten percent sample of the 2010 Mexican census, as well as the United States 2005 and 2010 American Community Survey. The 2010 American Community Survey is the first US dataset to be weighted to the new results from the 2010 US Census. Comparisons of 2010 Census counts with previous population estimates suggest that there are notable differences in the number and geographic distribution of the Hispanic population (Passel & Cohn, 2011) and sizable differences in some age cohorts. As such, the 2010 ACS may yield somewhat different results than previous analyses. We also plan to incorporate new weights on previous surveys, including the 2005 ACS that will increase consistency with the 2010 census results.

In order to explore our research questions we estimate emigration rates to Mexico of Mexican-born population by educational level for women and men separately. Where sample size allows, we will calculate emigration rates by age group as well. We will restrict our analysis to civilian non-institutionalized population. Special considerations will be addressed in order to have comparable data for educational levels in both countries. Specifically, we will focus on the following comparisons.

- (Mexicans living in US in 2005 and in Mexico in 2010) / (Mexican born population living in US in 2005) by age, sex and educational level.
- (Mexicans living in US in 2005 that returned to Mexico in 2005-2007) / (Mexican born population living in US in 2005) *versus* (Mexicans living in US in 2005 that returned to Mexico in 2008-2010) / (Mexican born population living in US in 2005) by age, sex and educational level.

## References (of extended abstract)

- Aguilera, M. B. (2004). Deciding Where to Retire: Intended Retirement Location Choices of Formerly Undocumented Mexican Migrants. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(2), 340-360. doi: 10.1111/j.0038-4941.2004.08502008.x
- Alarcón, R., Cruz, R., Díaz-Bautista, A., González-König, G., Izquierdo, A., Yrizar, G. (2008). *La Crisis Financiera en Estados Unidos y su Impacto en la Migración Mexicana*. Tijuana, Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. <http://www.colef.mx/coyuntura/crisisfinanciera.pdf>.
- Borjas, G. J. (1987). Self-Selection and the Earnings of Immigrants. *The American Economic Review*, 77(4), 531-553.
- Borjas, G. J., & Bratsberg, B. (1996). Who Leaves? the Outmigration of the Foreign-Born. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 78(1), 165-176.
- Cornelius, W. A., & Lewis, J. M. (2006). *Impacts of Border Enforcement on Mexican Migration: the View from Sending Communities*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner.
- Lindstrom, D. (1996). Economic Opportunity in Mexico and Return Migration from the United States. *Demography*, 33(3), 357-374.
- Lindstrom, D., & López Ramírez, A. (2010). Pioneers and Followers: Migrant Selectivity and the Development of US Migration Streams in Latin America. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 630(1), 53.

- Lowell, L., Pederzini, C., & Passel, J. S. (2008). The Demography of Mexico-U.S. Migration. In A. Escobar & S. Martin (Eds.), *Mexico-U.S. Migration Management: A Binational Approach*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Masferrer, C., & Roberts, B. (2009). *Individual and Household Characteristics of Mexican Return Migration by Community of Return in 2005*. Paper presented at the 2009 Annual Meeting Population Association of America, Detroit, MI. <http://paa2009.princeton.edu/abstractViewer.aspx?submissionId=90657>
- Massey, D. (2005). Backfire at the Border. Why Enforcement Without Legalization Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration. Washington, D.C.: Center for Trade Policy Studies.
- McKenzie, D., & Rapoport, H. (2010). Self-Selection Patterns in Mexico-U.S. Migration: The Role of Migration Networks. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 92(4), 811-821.
- Orozco, M. (2009). *Understanding the Continuing Effect of the Economic Crisis on Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Inter-American Dialogue, Inter-American Development Bank.
- París Pombo, M. D. (2010). *Procesos de repatriación. Experiencias de las personas devueltas a México por las autoridades estadounidenses*. Washington, D.C.: Documento de trabajo. Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
- Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. V. (2009). *Mexican Immigrants: How Many Come? How Many Leave?* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. V. (2011). *How Many Hispanics? Comparing New Census Counts with the Latest Census Estimates*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.
- Rendall, M., Brownell, P., & Kups, S. (2011). Declining Return Migration From the United States to Mexico in the Late-2000s Recession: A Research Note. *Demography*, 48(3), 1049-1058. doi: 10.1007/s13524-011-0049-9
- Reyes, B. (1997). *Dynamics of immigration: Return Migration to Western Mexico*. San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California.
- Reyes, B., & Mameesh, L. (2002). Why Does Immigrant Trip Duration Vary Across U.S. Destinations? *Social Sciences Quarterly*, 83(2), 580-593.
- Riosmena, F. (2004). Return versus Settlement Among Undocumented Mexican Migrants, 1980 to 1996. In J. Durand & D. Massey (Eds.), *Crossing the Border. Research from the Mexican Migration Project* (pp. 265-280). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Van Hook, J., & Zhang, W. (2011). Who Stays? Who Goes? Selective Emigration Among the Foreign-Born. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 30(1), 1-24. doi: 10.1007/s11113-010-9183-0
- Wong, R., Palloni, A., & Soldo, B. J. (2007). Wealth in Middle and Old Age in Mexico: The Role of International Migration. *International Migration Review*, 41(1), 127-151.