

# Illegal Migration Flows at the United States-Mexico Border



USAL  
UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL SALVADOR

Steven M. LEE  
(Supervisor: Mariano Bartolomé)  
Masters in International Relations  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Universidad del Salvador  
Buenos Aires, May of 2011

## Dedication and Gratitude

This work was written while I was a Rotary Fellow at the University del Salvador; therefore, I would like to thank Rotary International for their affiliation and support throughout the process. I would also like to thank my supervisor for his comments and suggestions, which proved very helpful. Additionally, I show gratitude to Rotary member and University Professor Rick Davis who offered critiques of this work. In addition, I think my beloved sister Melina who edited the drafts. Finally, I express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to my wife, Liliana Mendoza, who throughout the investigation continually supported me with enormous patience and without whom would have made the task more challenging.

## Abstract

The investigation delves into the approaches and consequences of U.S. border policy and security from a U.S. perspective that intended to stem illegal migration flows crossing into its territory at its southern border with Mexico from 2001 to 2008. Their border security strategy interacted with other actors in the border space, which affected its efficiency. The U.S. interacted with Mexico, border communities and smugglers often achieving unexpected results. The U.S. border policy contributed to decreased public security at the border and an insignificant reduction in illegal immigration flows. Early on it decreased bilateral cooperation between Mexico and the U.S., which is essential to combat illegal migrant flows. It divided border communities that transcend the boundary creating community opposition to national policies: wait times deterred business and community members from crossing; and it unexpectedly empowered smugglers, which flourish on highly restrictive borders, taking advantage of increased professional demand for illegal drug transportation and human contraband. However, it increased dialogue and interaction between all actors to resolve security issues related with illegal migration flows through binational planning committees, governors of border states meetings, meetings of border municipalities, border committees, and others which suggests that its policy and security will include greater cooperation with others against illegal immigration and its criminal elements, thus more effective in the future. Still, a U.S. overall border policy and security appears to alter little to the illegal immigration flows that continue unabated albeit in a safer border space.

**Keywords:** *BORDER POLICY - INTERNATIONAL SECURITY - BORDER SECURITY - IMMIGRATION – MEXICO - UNITED STATES - INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS - IMMIGRATION POLICY - ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION - MIGRATION*

## **Table of Contents**

1. Introduction .....	1
a) Theoretical Framework .....	4
b) Methodology of Investigation .....	7
c) Illegal Migration Flows and Literature Review .....	9
i. Migration Flows: Types and Processes .....	9
ii. Border Policy and Security .....	12
iii. Border Interactions: Actors and Relationships .....	15
2. Theoretical Framework Expanded: Border Policy and Actors Relationship .....	15
a) Illegal Migration Flows .....	15
b) The Border .....	16
c) United States and Mexico Interaction .....	17
d) United States, Mexico and Border Communities .....	19
e) Key Actors' Interactions with Illegal Migration Flows .....	20
f) Actors and Migration Flows Interaction with TOCs .....	21
3. U.S. Border Policy and Security (2001-2008) .....	22
a) Asymmetric Threats: Domestic Security Consolidation (2001-2003) .....	23
b) Border Security Emphasized (2004-2005) .....	30
c) Return to Multilateral Cooperation – (2006- 2008) .....	36
4. Final Thoughts .....	44
Works Cited .....	47

# Illegal migration flows at the U.S.-Mexico border

## 1. Introduction

The United States' border policy and enforcement of deterrence interacts with actors in the border cities at the Mexico-U.S. border. Yet, why does U.S. border policy and enforcement of deterrence decrease insignificantly illegal immigration flows and decrease public security at the U.S.-Mexico border?

The general objective of the investigation is to analyze the impact of border policy of deterrence adopted by the U.S. federal government on its border for security reasons from 2001 to 2008 through its relationships with Mexico (e.g. bilateral) and local border communities (e.g. hierarchical). First, the investigation explains the reasons for U.S. border policy with cooperation with Mexico and local border communities. Second, it analyzes the relationship between these actors with illegal migration flows. And, describes steps taken in the U.S. federal government on issues of border control and immigration security measures. Lastly, it also explains the consequences of the implementation of U.S. border controls in public security at the Mexico-United States border.

Since, the consolidation of nation-states after the Peace of Westphalia, state governments have attempted to control movements of people or migration through their borders (Rosenblum 2004: 1). The United States (U.S.) has attempted to balance policies either by controlling migration inflows or immigration flows through restricting or liberalizing these movements at its borders. Usually states restrict immigration to protect their economy, national security or sovereignty (Rosenblum 2004) (Pereña-Garcia, Mercedes 2004). States liberalize immigration to fulfill domestic labor demands for more workers or as a foreign policy weapon against other states to decrease their populations as seen in the U.S. foreign policy towards communist states and its citizens. Recently, the U.S. has chosen to restrict immigration without counterbalancing it with liberalization because of its concern with illegal immigration flows; entering a country without the receiving state authorization. (The U.S. utilizes the term illegal immigration to identify the process of persons that enter

illegally into a country.)<sup>1</sup> At the US-Mexico border there exists a high incidence of illegal immigration (Anguiano Téllez, María Eugenia and Trejo Peña, Alma Paola 2007). In general, it is illegal immigration that emanate from Mexico and entering the U.S. that concerns the United States government. The investigation focuses mainly on the U.S. perspective on illegal immigration flows.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the U.S. enacted domestic border security measures and pursued policies to prevent illegal immigration flows based upon their assessment of them as a threat to national security (E.g. Department of Homeland Security Act of 2003, Secure Fence Act of 2006). The illegal migration flow contributes significantly to the number of undocumented immigrants, which Robert Suro states had been increasing rapidly since the 1990s (Pew Hispanic Center Unknown). (The term, undocumented, commonly refers to an unauthorized status to reside in the receiving state country regardless of legal or illegal entry of a migrant). George W. Bush, President of the U.S. (2000-2008) and U.S. Congress affirmed their position in laws and speeches assuming that asymmetric actors such as narcotics and terrorists use the flows to enter undetected within the state in order to jeopardize national security. Additionally, the U.S. enacted bilateral agreements with Mexico on the issues [e.g. Action Plan (2001), Border Alliance (2002), FAST (2003)]. According to Rosenblum, (2004) illegal immigration can diminish the wage artificially, cause unemployment in the legal labor market and debilitate the economic infrastructure. The U.S. policies of deterrence to decrease illegal immigration attributed to a rise in violence and crime on the border

First, some U.S. domestic labor demands in the U.S. draws on the flow of undocumented immigrant labor instead from the legitimate labor market. From 2000-2007, undocumented immigrant labor force rose from 5.5 million to 8.4 million to represent 5.5% of the labor force (PASAL, Jeffrey and Cohn, D'Vera 2010). Many Mexican federal entities' perspectives affirm the economic disparity between the United States, Mexico and Central America which push persons to migrate to look for better economic opportunities in other

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. government, illegal immigrant includes migrants that enter the state without passing through an authorized port of entry or without national authorities screening them. (*See Immigration And Nationality Act*) Yet, the term immigration may imply that the intent of the migrant is to reside in the receiving country, as commonly practiced in the U.S. In general, the investigation uses the term illegal immigration as defined by the U.S. government.