

Testimony of
Douglas Massey

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Good morning senators. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am a social scientist who has been studying immigration for three decades and co-direct a research project that has been in the field for more than 25 years and generates the largest and most reliable source of data on the behavior of documented and undocumented migrants to the United States.

During the 1970s the United States declared a War on Crime; during the 1980s it declared a War on Drugs; and in the 1990s it declared a War on Immigrants. In my view, these policies had more to do with domestic politics than with the underlying realities of crime, drugs, or immigration, with negative consequences all around.

In the case of immigration, in 1986 the Immigration Reform and Control Act launched what proved to be a two decades-long militarization of the Mexico-US Border; and in 1993 the Border Patrol enacted a new strategy of blocking the border at strategic crossing points. From 1980 to 2000, the number of Border Patrol Agents increased 3.7 times, linewatch hours rose by a factor of 6.5, the agency's budget increased by a factor of 12 (see Figure 1).

Paradoxically, this militarization occurred as undocumented migration reached its peak and moving downward. It also unfolded as we were drawing closer to Mexico economically, by treaty agreeing to lower the barriers to cross-border movements of goods, capital, information, services, and certain classes of people. Between 1980 and 2000 total trade increased nine times, business visitors 7.4 times, treaty investors ten times, and intracompany transferees 27 times (see Figure 2). Somehow wished to integrate all factor markets in North America except one, and to build a border that was impermeable to all flows except workers. This fundamental contradiction was not sustainable.

Nonetheless, border enforcement accelerated during the late 1990s despite the fact that the rate of undocumented migration to the United States had been falling for years (see Figure 3). The 1990s War on Immigrants was followed by the post-911 War on Terror, which was quickly conflated with immigration and identified with the Mexico-U.S. border, despite the fact that none of the 911 hijackers entered from Mexico, that country has no Islamic terrorists cells, has no significant Moslem population, and by that point had a declining rate of undocumented migration. Border enforcement nonetheless rose exponentially after September 11, with the Border Patrol Budget increasing 95 times its 1980 level and the number of line watch hours rising 111 times. After 911 deportations also began a marked increase, rising from just 11,000 in

1980 to some 350,000 in 2008, breaking old records last set during the mass deportation era of the 1930s.

As already noted, this massive increase in enforcement came during a time of North American economic integration and falling rates of undocumented migration and did not solve America's immigration problems. Although the probability of initial undocumented migration fell after 1990 and the likelihood of taking an additional trip fell after 2000 (see Figure 4), even more pronounced was the sharp decline in the rate of return migration. Between 1980 and 2005 the likelihood of returning to Mexico within 12 months of an undocumented entry fell by more than half (see Figure 5).

This shift in behavior occurred because our militarization of the border increased the costs of crossing it from \$600 to \$2,200 in constant dollars (see Figure 6) while also increasing the risk of death (see Figure 7) while having no effect on the probability of apprehension (see Figure 8). Given the higher costs and risks of border crossing, fewer migrants left; but those who did still got across because the odds of apprehension did not rise. Once inside the US they hunkered down and stayed longer and in larger numbers to avoid experiencing the costs and risks again. In sum, it was because of a decline in return migration and not an increase in entry from Mexico that the undocumented population ballooned during the 1990s and made Hispanics the nation's largest minority a decade before demographers had predicted. If return migration to Mexico had remained at its pre 1986 levels, we would have had nearly 2 million fewer undocumented Mexicans settling between 1980 and 2005 (see Figure 9). This is the reason Mexico dwarfs all other countries in the unauthorized population (see Figure 10).

In three years, estimates suggest the undocumented population has peaked and begun to trend downward. This development is no doubt partly because of the remarkable acceleration in border enforcement in the wake of 911 and the rise of mass internal deportations; but it also reflects the evaporation of labor demand. Nonetheless rising enforcement and growing joblessness have not prompted a significant return of already settled migrants. Indeed, as we have seen, rates of departure have fallen to record low levels. At the same time, a quiet but massive increase in the availability of guest worker visas has provided a legal alternative to undocumented entry. According to official data, the number temporary legal workers entering from Mexico rose from 3,300 in 1980 to 361,000 in 2008, rivaling numbers last seen during the Bracero Program of the late 1960s.

These data clearly indicate that Mexican immigration is not and has never been out of control. It rises and falls with labor demand and if legitimate avenues for entry are available, migrants enter legally. The massive militarization of the border and resumption of mass deportations occurred despite the fact that rates of undocumented migration were falling and the perverse consequence was that these actions lowered the rate of return migration among those already here.

To solve our serious immigration problems, we need to undertake a program of legalization for those already resident in the country, and especially for the more than three million people who entered the country as minors and are guilty of no sin except obeying their parents. We also need to provide for the legal entry of Mexicans by increasing the number of permanent resident visas

and guest worker permits to levels consistent with the needs of an integrated North American economy. Unfortunately the current immigration crisis is very much one of our own making, reflecting bad policy choices in the past; but fortunately this means that with better policy choices we have the power resolve the dilemma moving forward. Thank you for your time and attention.