

Number of Mexican immigrants returning home dropped during latest recession, study finds

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Fewer Mexican immigrants returned home from the United States during 2008 and 2009 than in the two years prior to the start of the recession, a finding that contradicts the notion that the economic downturn has hastened return migration to Mexico, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

The study, published online by the journal [Demography](#), is the first to track return migration trends by analyzing [household survey](#) information routinely collected by the Mexican government.

"The [recession](#) in the United States and the [global financial crisis](#) did not increase the number of immigrants returning to Mexico," said Michael Rendall, the study's lead author and director of the RAND Population Research Center. "Migration in both directions between the United States and Mexico slowed during the recession, but our findings show there was no rush by [Mexican immigrants](#) to return home."

The researchers found declines in return migration among labor-migrant groups of men and 18- to 40-year-old migrants who have less than a college education, as well as a decline in total return migration in the fourth quarter of 2008 immediately after the triggering of the global financial crisis.

For example, while return migration to Mexico during the fourth

quarters of 2006 and 2007 totaled 117,120 and 133,490, the numbers dropped to 95,238 and 79,959 during the fourth quarters of 2008 and 2009, according to the study.

The researchers say the findings are broadly consistent with earlier studies about [migration patterns](#) between Mexico and the United States during the U.S. [recessions](#) of the early 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The results also are consistent with findings from Europe that found no exodus of immigrants from France and Germany during the 1973 oil crisis or from Spain during the current financial crisis.

"Experience shows that economic troubles slow migration in both directions across a border," Rendall said. "The Mexican immigrants who are in the United States have not been returning to Mexico in larger-than-usual numbers, but inflow into the United States has fallen sharply."

The researchers say one explanation for the findings is the "target earner hypothesis," which is based on the belief that an immigrant chooses the date of return to their country of origin based on when he or she achieves a planned savings level.

"This theory suggests that immigrants stay in the [United States](#) until they have achieved a certain levels of savings, even if they face a period when their earnings drop and employment becomes harder to find," Rendall said.

The study is based on information collected by Mexico's National Survey of Occupation and Employment, a quarterly survey of 100,000 households that asks a wide variety of questions about family members. Among the questions asked is whether households have new members who were in another country during the previous quarter.

Since the RAND study is the first to use the Mexican survey as a basis

for evaluating return migration, researchers first conducted analysis to validate the National Survey of Occupation and Employment as an appropriate tool to use for tracking return migration.

Provided by RAND Corporation

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