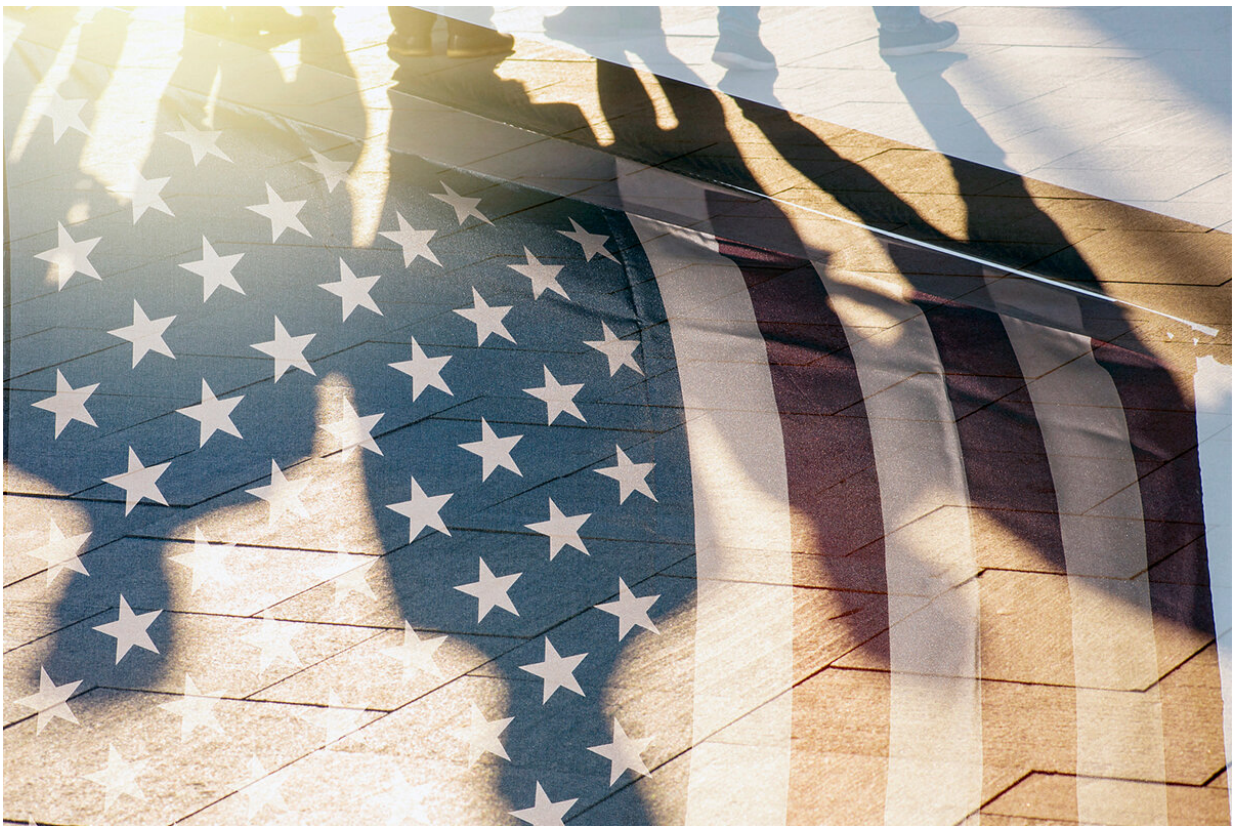


New study examines immigration demographics and deportations under different presidential administrations

February 21 2023, by Senta Scarborough



Credit: Emory University

No matter the U.S. political climate, young, single and less educated men seemed to be at higher risk for deportation than other undocumented

Mexican immigrants from 2001–2019, an Emory University-led study scheduled to be published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* shows.

The article, "Deportations and Departures: Undocumented Mexican Immigrants' Return Migration During Three Presidential Administrations," analyzes deportation and voluntary return migration data encompassing the administrations of U.S. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump.

Lead author Emory assistant sociology professor Heeju Sohn teamed up with University of California Los Angeles colleagues Anne Pebley and Amanda Landrian Gonzalez, and Noreen Goldman of Princeton University to examine trends in socio-demographic characteristics of undocumented Mexican immigrants deported by the U.S. along with those who chose to return to Mexico.

Each administration had different policies toward [undocumented immigrants](#). Bush had a pro-immigration view before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Trump promoted anti-immigrant rhetoric. Obama targeted deporting [recent immigrants](#) and those with criminal backgrounds.

While the study does not predict or offer any absolute probabilities, it provides insight into relative potential risks.

Sohn explained that "even through the Trump administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric advocated deporting all undocumented immigrants, particularly from Mexico, the characteristics of Mexican immigrants deported during the Trump years were not dramatically different from previous administrations."

On average, each administration annually deported about 893,000 people with the majority of them Mexican citizens.

"Despite each administration's differing approach and rhetoric, who was actually being deported or deciding to leave didn't change all that much," Sohn said. "Just because an undocumented person voluntary leaves the U.S. doesn't always mean they felt they had a choice in that decision either."

Fewer immigrants were deported annually during the Trump administration than under Obama or Bush who had the highest number of deportations. During Obama's first term, there was an increase in deportation of Mexican immigrants with criminal convictions but that percentage decreased in the last two years of his presidency.

While Trump's administration prioritized all undocumented immigrants for deportation, the result shows deportation focused more on [young adults](#) and those with less education, groups which already face higher deportation risks.

"Policy makers and the public need to understand the consequences of the immigration policies that are implemented—whether they work or not. While the Trump administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies had many negative effects on immigrants and Americans, they did not do what they were apparently intended to in terms of deporting a larger and more diverse group of undocumented immigrants," says co-author Pebley, a UCLA professor and California Center for Population Research faculty fellow.

The Trump administration's anti-[immigrant](#) rhetoric and heightened enforcement didn't appear to motivate a more diverse group of undocumented immigrants to leave voluntarily. Rather, voluntary return migration to Mexico was a trend that began early in the Obama administration after the great recession of 2007-2009, according to the study.

"People who are leaving or being deported do not exist in a vacuum. You can't isolate them separately from the social and family connections they have interwoven in U.S. society," Sohn said. "So, what happens to undocumented people that society has neglected has a direct effect on the well-being of U.S. citizens. We have a duty to not discriminate and there is a need for additional research."

The experiences of undocumented children living in the U.S. is a [blind spot](#) in national data; the youngest age group in this study is 18 to 31.

"Moving across countries is a disruptive life event. This is an age group where people take major steps as adults—finding a partner, having children or establishing a career. This can have reverberating consequences for the rest of their lives," Sohn said.

For the study, Sohn and the other researchers combined deportees' and voluntary returnees' data from both sides of the border—the Migration Survey on the Borders of Mexico-North (EMIF-N) and U.S. Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC).

It's the first time these two major sets of data were combined for research purposes and studied in a novel way.

"It was critical that we understood the nuances of the data and sampling strategy. We took a lot of time and effort making sure our method accounted for the differences," Sohn said.

"This is part of a bigger desire to make sure the lives of underrepresented groups have adequate representation. A lot of the research in social sciences are based on [large data sets](#) that don't put much focus on the smaller groups or ones that are harder to measure," Sohn said. "I hope getting this important topic published will get visibility to a wider audience."

More information: Deportations and Departures: Undocumented Mexican Immigrants' Return Migration During Three Presidential Administrations, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2212184120

Provided by Emory University

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