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Methods of Analysis of Illegal
Immigration into the United States

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Part IV: Empirical and Survey Research Findings

Methods of Analysis of Illegal Immigration into the United States

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A major barrier to the discussion of the scope and impact of illegal immigration on the American economy has been the inadequacy of existing data. Although data problems are not unique to this topic, the limited availability of macro-data on the size of the annual flows and of the accumulated stock of individuals as well as of micro-data on their influences on selected labor markets has been effectively used to forestall policy reform efforts.

THE CLASSIFICATION ISSUE

Basically, there are two types of illegal immigrants. One group are those who enter the United States in a surreptitious manner. They may swim, sail, row, drive, climb or walk over some portion of the nation's land or sea borders. Sometimes they come as individuals; sometimes as groups. Many are guided or transported by human smugglers for a fee. The conditions of entry are often hazardous and dangerous as has been documented in two separate accounts (Samora, 1971 and Davidson, 1979) that employed the use of the "participant observer technique" to gain their insights.¹ The unifying characteristic of this group is that they have entered the United States without appropriate documents. In the parlance of the Immigration and

¹ See, Julian Samora, *Los Mojados: The Wetback Story*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971) where a graduate student posed as an illegal immigrant to gain first hand insights into the challenges such persons confront and John Davidson, *The Long Road North* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1979) where the author himself assumed the identity of an illegal immigrant for the same purposes.

Naturalization Service (INS), they are classified as persons who have “entered without inspection” (or EWIs). They are “undocumented”. Typically, EWIs are from the neighboring nations of Mexico or Canada. The term may also apply to some persons from non-neighboring nations who use Canada or Mexico as way-stations for eventual illegal entry into the United States. It is the act of entering without inspection that renders their presence as being illegal.

The second group are persons who legally enter the United States by passing through an established port-of-entry. At that time, they may present authentic documents secured from a consular official of the U.S. Department of State in their native land. Some recipients of visas subsequently violate its terms by overstaying past its expiration date or they seek work during their visa period when, except in prescribed circumstances, non-immigrants are prohibited from doing so. There are also persons who present false documents when they enter or who illegally use someone else’s documents as a means of entry. Sometimes there are persons who unlawfully pose as American citizens when crossing a border. All of these types of persons are called “visa abusers”. There is no typical visa abuser. They come from virtually every country in the world. They can be tourists, students, businessmen, crewmen, or a host of other categories of person who have already entered the country. The fact that they violate the terms of the visas places them in violation of the immigration statutes.

Thus, the entry process of EWIs and of visas abusers are distinctly different. David North has cogently described the difference between the two groups by noting that: “In a very real sense, the presence of EWIs in the nation is a reflection of border patrol failures and the presence of visa abusers is a reflection of State Department failures.” (North, 1978:151) Collectively, it is these two groupings which constitute the illegal immigration population.

THE TRANSFORMATION PROBLEM

There is yet another complication to the study of the illegal immigrants in the United States. Namely, many illegal immigrants use their time in the United States as a means of establishing conditions to be used later to become a legal immigrant. Indeed, the practice of adjusting one’s status after already being admitted to the United States for some other reasons — *i.e.*, as a refugee, or a non-immigrant or as an illegal immigrant — often accounts for as many as one-third of the legal immigrants reported as admitted in any given year. It is more difficult for an illegal immigrant to adjust his or her status to become a legal resident alien than for other groups but it often happens. For instance, in late 1981 officials of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico estimated that “from 65 to 70 percent” of the almost quarter million applicants

for legal immigrant visas pending at the time were “already in the United States”. (U.S. House of Representatives, 1981:9) They had simply immigrated illegally. Not all visa applicants, of course, will be successful in their requests as the sheer number of applicants for some higher preference categories have left little or no opportunities for others in lower preference categories. But, on the other hand, some of these visa applicants will eventually receive them and change their status in the United States from being an illegal immigrant to being a legal immigrant. Others such as persons fleeing from Haiti have been considered illegal immigrants but, on subsequent appeals, been able to have their status changed to refugees and later to legal immigrants.

The fact that it is possible for illegal immigrants in the United States to be transformed into legal immigrants in relatively substantial numbers only adds to the intense difficulty of studying illegal immigrants as a discrete entity. It is not a static grouping.

THE NONAVAILABILITY OF RELIABLE STATISTICS

As if the aforementioned conceptual problems were not severe enough, the measurement problems are monumental. Illegal immigrants seek to avoid contact with the established agencies of government. Should they reveal themselves, they fear they may endanger their presence in the country. Hence, there is no effort made — nor can it be expected that there ever should be — to actually collect data through self-identification. The only available government data source, therefore, pertains to the number of apprehensions of deportable aliens required to depart each year by the INS in the performance of its enforcement duties.

The number of reported illegal immigrants apprehended by the INS for the years 1925 to 1980 are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, the largest absolute number of apprehended illegal immigrants occurred in the early 1950s. During those years the Eisenhower administration launched an aggressive sweep of the southwestern border region. Called “Operation Wetback”, it was led by a former military officer, General Joseph Swing, who was the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service at the time (Grebler, *et. al.*, 1970:621-3). Given the relatively enhanced sensitivities by the general population for the feelings of racial and ethnic subgroups; the subsequent development of a number of strong ethnic community organizations; and the advances in the awareness of the latent civil liberties associated with such actions that have occurred since that time, it is unlikely that any such indiscriminate and massive roundups will ever again occur — nor should they.

If one considers the apprehensions during that period in the 1950s to be a tactical aberration, it was not until the end of the “bracero program” in 1964

TABLE 1
 ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS APPREHENDED, 1925-1980

Period	Number of Apprehended Illegal Immigrants	Period	Number of Apprehended Illegal Immigrants
1925-1930	128,484	1956	87,696
1931	22,276	1957	59,918
1932	22,735	1958	53,474
1933	20,949	1959	45,336
1934	10,319	1960	70,684
1935	11,016	1961	88,823
1936	11,728	1962	92,758
1937	13,054	1963	88,712
1938	12,851	1964	86,597
1939	12,037	1965	110,371
1940	10,492	1966	138,520
1941	11,294	1967	161,608
1942	11,784	1968	212,057
1943	11,175	1969	283,557
1944	31,174	1970	345,353
1945	69,164	1971	420,126
1946	99,591	1972	505,949
1947	193,657	1973	655,968
1948	192,779	1974	788,145
1949	288,253	1975	756,819
1950	468,339	1976	866,433
1951	509,040	1977	1,033,427
1952	528,815	1978	1,047,687
1953	885,587	1979	1,069,400
1954	1,089,583	1980	910,361
1955	254,096		

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, *Annual Reports of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*.

that the number of apprehensions began again to increase significantly (Garcia y Griego, 1983: 49-83).

There are severe problems associated with using the apprehension data as an indicator of the magnitude of illegal immigration. To begin with, the data cannot avoid multiple counting. Some persons — especially in the Southwest — are caught more than once in any given year. But, presumably, the problem of repeat captures has always been in the data. There is no reason to believe that this multiple counting problem is proportionately more severe now than it was in the past. Hence, rising apprehensions, as reflected in the data, can be used in a general way to infer increasing numbers of illegal immigrants despite the duplication problem. The data in other words, can be used to indicate a rough trend but it cannot be used as a

precise measure of the number of individuals involved.

The apprehension levels for any one year are to some degree a reflection of the staffing patterns of the INS (Abrams and Abrams, 1975: 22). The slight drop in apprehensions in 1980, for instance, is seen to be a reflection of both budget cutbacks that year and a self-imposed moratorium on raids that was put into effect by the INS during the several months that the 1980 Census count was in progress. The moratorium was deemed necessary to assuage fears that Census participation might lead to persons being turned into the INS. It is unlikely, therefore, that the slight decline in 1980 represents any slackening of illegal immigration pressures.

There is another serious bias problem in the apprehension data. It derives from the fact that the INS concentrates most of its border patrol activities on the Southwest border. Hence, it is not surprising that over ninety percent of those persons apprehended each year are of persons from Mexico. The INS has long ago recognized that it is much easier and cheaper to apprehend EWIs along the southwestern border region than it is to ferret-out visa abusers who can be living and working almost anywhere in the United States. As Mexicans are most likely to be EWIs, it is they who usually get caught. Illegal immigrants from nations other than Mexico are most likely to be visa abusers and are least likely to be apprehended. The apprehension data, therefore, have contributed to the false public impression that illegal immigration is largely a Mexican problem.

The most severe problem with the INS apprehension data, however, is the obvious one: namely, it only counts those who are caught. It is conceded by both INS and all other studies of illegal immigrants that apprehensions are only the tip of the iceberg. Most illegal immigrants — especially most visa abusers — are never caught. For instance, the only serious study that has interviewed exclusively illegal immigrants who were not in an apprehension status at the time of the interview was done by a group of scholars at the University of California at Los Angeles for the U.S. Department of Labor. It was released in 1979. It found that of the 1,970 illegal immigrants interviewed in Los Angeles who were employed, 69.6 percent had never been previously apprehended (Van Arsdol, *et. al.*, 1979: 27). Most of the persons in their sample were Mexicans (92.6 percent of the total) and EWIs. This study lends credence to the belief that the actual number of illegal immigrants entering the United States each year is certainly several multiples of the number actually reported as being apprehended.

Despite the acknowledged gross deficiencies in the apprehension data, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) in its 1982 survey of the extant data on illegal immigrants was forced to conclude that it constitutes “the most comprehensive data on illegal aliens” that is presently available. GAO also observed that notwithstanding all of its problems, that the apprehension data play “important roles in a variety of policy decisions” (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1982: 17-18).

THE QUEST TO FIND MORE ACCURATE DATA

As the aforementioned GAO report commented, “estimates of the number of illegal aliens are a necessary statistic for policymakers” (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1982:1). For this reason, a search began in the 1970s and continued in the 1980s to find better data on illegal immigrants than that which is provided by the annual apprehension figures collected by the INS. Indeed, the GAO in its survey identified 13 studies which have provided 20 estimates of accumulated stock or of the annual flow of illegal immigrants over this timespan (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1982:4). No effort was made to study any of the countless estimates that have also been made of the sub-national illegal immigration populations of separate localities within the nation. Nor did the GAO survey tabulate or study the numerous “guestimates” offered by various scholars, consultants, and government officials that have been based largely on personal speculation.

The INS Efforts

In addition to publishing annual apprehension data, the INS in the mid-1970s attempted to determine the total illegal alien stock (*i.e.*, those apprehended plus those not apprehended). Such figures were not available from any regular INS data series. These estimates were used during congressional hearings, in news releases, and in public speeches by officials of the INS. Exactly how some of these estimates were computed proved to be a mystery. Even high officials in the INS were uncertain from precisely where the figure came. It should not be surprising then, to learn that when Commissioner Chapman was asked by a Congressional committee as to how the INS in 1973 had estimated the magnitude of illegal immigration to be 4 or 5 million, he testified (Abrams and Abrams, 1975:21):

It is just a mid-point between the two extremes. I have heard one of two million at one end of the scale and eight or 10 million at the other. So, I am selecting a mid-point — just a guess, that is all. Nobody knows.

Nor should one be surprised to learn that in the *INS Annual Report* for 1974 that Commissioner Chapman stated that “it is estimated that the number illegally in the United States totals 6 to 8 million persons and is possibly as great as 10 or 12 million” (U.S. Department of Justice, 1975:iii).

Consequently, the INS sought credibility by turning to outside consultants. In one contract to Lesko Associates, a Delphi sampling technique was used whereby a number of “experts” outside of government who had studied the issue were asked to submit independent estimates of the stock of illegal immigrants in the United States in 1974. After compiling the estimates, the panel was again asked independently if they wished to revise their estimate

based on the initial average of all of the other panel members. The revised figure was then given to INS. The average figure set by this procedure was 8.1 million illegal immigrants as of 1974 (the range was from 4.2 to 11 million) (Lesko Associates, 1975:15). This procedure was roundly criticized by many scholars who claimed that there was no scientific basis at all for averaging the guesses by the experts (Roberts, Conroy, *et. al.*, 1978).

In 1976, Congress authorized and appropriated one million dollars to INS to conduct a study of the problem of illegal immigration. In the fall of 1976, INS adopted a recommendation made by the Domestic Council of the Ford Administration that year that a household survey be made of the foreign born population in the twelve states in which they were most heavily concentrated. The design of the project was modified due to cost considerations so that it would focus on specific survey areas within the designated 12 states that were known to contain the residences of large numbers of permanent resident aliens (as opposed to the original design that called for detailed estimates to be made of the illegal immigrant population residing in individual states and standard metropolitan statistical areas). The contract to conduct the study was awarded to J.A. Reyes Associates. A structured questionnaire was to be used and, from the answers given, it was intended that it would be possible to deduce whether the interviewee was a legal or illegal immigrant. The methodology was roundly criticized but, nonetheless, it was funded. For reasons that have never been fully explained, however, the study was never completed nor has INS been able even to secure even tentative findings from the contractor.

The Efforts by Independent Researchers

A number of independent efforts have been made by various scholars to fill the data void. These efforts all have their individual methodological deficiencies. As will be discussed later, these studies were among those that the Bureau of the Census officials reviewed in a study prepared for the Select Commission. The GAO has also reviewed many of these studies. A summary of these studies were reported by the GAO and they are listed in Table 2 along with their respective estimates of the illegal immigrant population (or a component of that population) as of a particular point in time. Upon completion of its own review, the GAO concluded that there were "a variety of problems accompanying the approaches" that were used in these studies (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1982:10). In most instances, the studies sought only to measure a subgroup of the total illegal immigrant population for all countries. Some were based on the presumption that illegal immigrants were included in existing data bases. Likewise, many of the adjustment procedures were arbitrary in their rationales for being used. Thus, the GAO concluded the existing state-of-the-art precluded the possibility that reliable

TABLE 2

ESTIMATES OF THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION POPULATION BY INDEPENDENT RESEARCHERS

Estimates in Millions	Years of Estimate	Source and Date of Publication	Methodology
1.6	1970	Goldberg (1974)	Compared the 1970 Mexican Census count with the number expected to result from counting births, deaths, and legal immigrants since 1960 census.
3.9 (from a range of 2.9-5.7 persons 18-44 years old)	1973	Lancaster and Scheuren (1978)	Households categorized in the 1973 Current Population Survey sample by whether or not they represented contributors or recipients of any of three Social Security and Internal Revenue files.
.6 to 4.7 (white males 20-44 years old)	1975	Robinson (1980)	Analysis of trends in selected state death rates from 1950 to 1975 and compared results with the actual number of deaths in selected states.
.4 to 1.2	1975	Heer (1979)	Analyzed change between 1970 and 1975 of the Mexican-origin population as estimated in the Current Population Survey and adjusted figure for both natural increases and legal immigration.
.18 to .38 (flow of overstays by air)	1974-7	Vining (1979)	Analyzed data on air passengers arrivals and departures.
4.3 to 6.2	1977	Morris and Mayo (1980)	Analyzed Mexican adjustment of INS apprehension data in order to secure an estimate of those who entered without inspection.
1.025 to 1.475 (illegal aliens included in <i>Current Population Survey</i>)	1979	Warren (1981)	Compared estimates of foreign born respondents to the November 1979 Current Population Survey who reported they had immigrated since 1970 with two INS population counts: 1) the number of legal immigrants and refugees since 1970 and 2) the number of aliens reporting addresses in 1980.

Source: A selection of the major studies cited in U.S. General Accounting Office, *Problems and Options in Estimating the Size of the Illegal Alien Population*, Washington, D.C., U.S. General Accounting Office, 1982) Appendix II, p. 26-7.

data can be provided as a basis for sound public policy development (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 1982:11).

Efforts by the Mexican Government

In response to the claims by various scholars and public officials in the United States in the 1980s that significant increases were occurring in the number of illegal immigrants from Mexico, the Mexican government also supported two research studies to determine the size of the flow. The studies were conducted by scholars associated with the *Centro Nacional de Informacion y Estadisticas del Trabajo* (CENIET).

One study involved a survey of emigration which was conducted from December 1978 through January 1979 (Zazueta and Corona, 1979). A sample of households in the border states between the two nations as to whether any members of their households over the age of 15 were currently in the United States looking for work legally or illegally. The study estimated that about 400,000 Mexicans could be so classified.

The second study involved interviews by CENIET of a sample of illegal immigrants who the INS had apprehended and returned to Mexico (Garcia y Griego, 1979). They were questioned concerning their length of stay in the United States and the number of times they had been apprehended and returned to Mexico, as well as the number of times they had not been apprehended but had returned. The study concluded that about 500,000 to 1.2 million Mexicans were illegally in the United States in 1977.

Efforts of the Select Commission

Given its mandate, the Select Commission also felt obliged to provide some estimate of the stock of illegal immigrants. Believing that it did not have either the time nor the funds and, probably uncertain exactly how it would proceed even if it did have both, the Select Commission elected not to make an independent estimate of its own. Instead, it requested a report be made by the Bureau of the Census. The subsequent Census review placed the stock of illegal immigrants within a range of between 3.5 to 5 million persons from the estimates provided by the studies and they concluded that the maximum number would seem to be no higher than 6 million persons (Siegal, *et.al.*, 1980:18). The Census figures, however, were derived exclusively from a staff review of the aforementioned reports by the INS, consultants, the Mexican government, and academicians. They are essentially the same studies mentioned in the GAO survey and listed in Table 2. All of the cited studies were based on data for various years in the early to mid-1970s — not for 1981 when the Select Commission's report was released. Consequently, the quoted range has subsequently been widely reported as being a maximum range for

1981 when it is, if anything, a minimum estimate of the illegal immigrant population as of some time period in the early 1970s.

IMPACT

Related to the issue of numbers, there is also the critical question of impact. Obviously, there are many dimensions of this issue and, as could be expected, there have been a number of research studies undertaken to determine these related effects. Among the topics of study have been the effects of illegal immigration upon juvenile delinquency, the incidence of crime, the use of social services, the use of educational services, and the payment of various taxes to mention a few. For the most part, the results of these studies have been inconclusive due basically to an inability to define the study population. Also, most of the studies have had a narrow subnational focus upon a particular city or region (*e.g.*, the borderlands).

The specific issue that has aroused the most controversy and which has received a disproportionate amount of attention in both academic circles and in the political arena has pertained to the effects of illegal immigrants on the labor market. One school of thought has tended to downplay any adverse effects that might accrue from illegal immigration. The logic of this position stems from the basic assertion that illegal immigrants fill jobs that citizen workers refuse or are reluctant to take (Piore, 1979 and Cornelius, 1978). It has even been alleged that there is a "genuine demand" by U.S. employers for illegal immigrants due to a perceived shortage of low skilled workers who are willing to take these less desirable jobs (Boehning, 1979:7). There are even some writers who believe that the entire process is generally beneficial for U.S. society as it will serve to discipline citizen workers and cause them to moderate their wage demands and employment expectations (Gordon, 1975 and Smith, 1983). Other writers in this vein see the Marxian spectre of an opportunity for capitalist exploitation behind the permissive and tolerant immigration policies of the United States (Bustamante, 1978).

The opposite view has been expressed by other scholars that there is no evidence to support the view that citizens will not take legitimate jobs if, as in all other instances, employers are willing to pay competitive wages to attract workers (Briggs, 1979 and Fogel, 1978). They argue that to the degree that any difficulties do occur in finding citizen workers in certain labor markets, it is often because illegal immigrants artificially depress the wage rates and working conditions for certain jobs below what they would be in their absence. The U.S. Department of Labor has supported this view by disclosing in testimony in support of the Simpson-Mazzoli bill that "in 1981, close to 30 percent of all workers employed in this country, some 29 million people, were holding down the same kind of low-skilled industrial, service, and farm jobs in which illegals typically find employment (Lovell, 1982:367). It was

also reported in the same testimony that 10.5 million workers were employed in jobs in the United States in 1981 that paid at or below the prevailing federal minimum wage and another 10 million were earning within 35 cents above that level. Hence, it seems incredulous to argue that illegal immigrants do work that citizens will not do when there are millions of citizen workers who are currently employed in these same occupations. It was also pointed out that the unemployment rates for the segments of the labor force that compete most directly with illegal immigrants are consistently far higher than the national average — a fact that at least challenges the notion of the non-availability of citizen worker.

As there are no established data series for illegal immigrants, research efforts to verify the occupational, industrial, and geographic employment patterns of illegal immigrants have been few in number. Even those that are available have had to conduct their studies under extremely restricted circumstances. There are only two studies that have been able to make a serious attempt to capture some measure of these patterns. One was a nationwide study made of apprehended illegal immigrants by David North and Marion Houstoun in 1976 (North and Houstoun, 1976). The second was the aforementioned subnational study made of unapprehended illegal immigrants in Los Angeles in 1979 by a research team from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) (Van Arsdol, *et. al.*, 1979). Both studies were funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Both studies have their limitations. The North and Houstoun study was composed entirely of apprehended illegal immigrants. Because a disproportionate number of apprehended Mexican illegal immigrants are employed in agriculture, the North and Houstoun study has an excessive bias in favor of the number of farm workers in their study. Conversely, the UCLA study was done entirely within the urban center of Los Angeles. As a result, it disproportionately underestimates the employment of Mexican illegal immigrants in agriculture. In the North and Houstoun study, the respondents had been in the United States for an average of 2.5 years while in the UCLA study the mean was 4.0 years. In the North and Houstoun study, there were 793 respondents of whom 48.6 percent were from Mexico; in the UCLA study, there were 2,792 respondents of whom 92.5 percent were Mexican. Neither study makes any pretense at being a random sample of the entire illegal alien population. The occupational patterns of the respondents in the two studies are shown in Table 3. In comparison, Table 4 shows the distribution of the occupational patterns in the United States for all workers; for all Hispanic workers (*i.e.*, Mexican origin, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and others of Spanish origin); for all Mexican origin; and all black workers for 1977 (the year closest to the publication date of the two studies). The data contained in Table 3 closely resembles that of these racial and ethnic subgroups in Table 4. With respect to Chicanos (*i.e.*, those workers of Mexican origin who are citizens), they are employed

disproportionately in exactly the same occupations as are most illegal immigrants in the cited studies. The employment pattern of Chicanos, in fact, better resembles the pattern of illegal immigrants than it does the distribution pattern of all U.S. workers. The fact that both Chicano workers and illegal immigrants are highly geographically concentrated in the same selected urban and rural labor markets of the five states of the Southwest makes it certain that the two groups are highly competitive in the same labor markets. In fact, a public opinion poll conducted by the University of Texas in 1982 designed to identify the most important problems in Texas found that more Mexican Americans cited the problem of illegal immigrants as the state's most pressing problem than did any other racial grouping (Peterson and Kozmetsky, 1982). The data on blacks in Table V-2 is only given as a reference to add to the fact that there are millions of citizen workers who are employed in the same occupations as are illegal immigrants. Black workers, of course, are not geographically concentrated in the same labor markets as are Chicanos or Mexican illegal immigrants. In a number of specific labor markets (*e.g.*, in Los Angeles, Chicago, San Antonio, Miami, and Houston), however, they do compete. Likewise, it is increasingly the case that black workers in urban labor markets in the East and in the North Central States are feeling the adverse effects of job competition from illegal immigrants from nations other than Mexico (Jackson, 1979).

The data supplied by these two empirical studies plus numerous anecdotal accounts from other sources strongly suggest that the impact of illegal immigrants is selective. Thus, it is not at the aggregate or macro level of the economy but, rather, in selective or micro labor markets, that presence of illegal immigrant workers is manifested. Interestingly, all sides of the debate over the employment effect agree that it is the secondary labor market of the economy where illegal immigrants are concentrated and the data from these empirical studies confirm these earlier assertions by the descriptive writers. Interpreting the data, as always in the social sciences, remains open to difference of opinions.

Another study of the labor market implications of illegal immigrants took another tact. It was conducted in San Diego, California in 1981 (Nalven and Frederickson, 1982). In particular it sought to discover whether or not employers could pay competitive wages for citizen workers in several industries in which illegal immigrants were known to be widely used. It sought to determine if employers actually preferred foreign workers — illegal immigrants if need be but foreign “guestworkers” if possible — over citizen workers. If employers could “afford to hire domestic workers, but choose not to do so, then the claim of a labor shortage or ‘need’ must be considered to be devoid of empirical support”. Employers in agriculture, restaurants, and electronic manufacturing in San Diego were interviewed. Consistently, the employers expressed admiration for illegal immigrant

TABLE 3
EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FROM TWO RESEARCH STUDIES
PREPARED FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

	Detention Site Study, 1974-5 ^a All Apprehended Aliens	Los Angeles Community Study 1972-1975 ^b		
		Total	Previously Apprehended Aliens	Never Apprehended Aliens
White Collar:	5.4	10.5	6.6	12.1
Professional and Technical	1.6	4.3	2.7	5.0
Managers and Administrators	1.3	0.7	.8	.7
Salesworkers	1.1	1.9	.8	2.3
Clerical	1.4	3.6	2.3	4.1
Blue Collar:	55.2	73.0	79.0	70.4
Craft Workers	15.3	28.8	32.8	27.1
Operatives	25.1	31.8	31.1	32.1
Non-farm Laborers	14.8	12.4	15.1	11.2
Service Workers	20.6	16.1	14.2	16.9
Farm Workers	18.8	.4	.2	.5
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ^a David S. North and Marion F. Houstoun. *The Characteristics and Role of Illegal Aliens in the U.S. Labor Market: An Exploratory Study*, Washington, D.C., Linton & Company, 1975, p. 104.

^b Maurice D. Van Arsdol Jr., Joan Moore, David Heer, Susan P. Haynie, *Non-Apprehended and Apprehended Undocumented Residents in the Los Angeles Labor Market*. Final Draft submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor under Research Contract No. 20-06-77-16, (May, 1979), p. 65.

workers over citizen workers. Many agricultural employers lauded the former *braceros* that they once were able to employ. But rather than rely simply on the attitudes of employers, the study also sought to investigate whether it was true that employers would be forced to go out of business (or, in the case of electronic manufacturing, would they be forced to relocate south of the border) if they had to compete actively for citizen workers. Hence, they did not ask the employers if they were willing to pay a prevailing wage. Rather, they were asked "at what wage would you go out of business if you had to raise wages in order to attract U.S. workers?" The conclusion of the study

TABLE 4

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF ALL EMPLOYED PERSONS IN U.S.:
ALL EMPLOYED HISPANIC PERSONS, ALL EMPLOYED MEXICAN ORIGIN PERSONS,
AND ALL EMPLOYED BLACK PERSONS, 1977

	All U.S. Workers	All Hispanics	Mexican Origin	Black Workers
Total Employed	90,546,000	3,938,000	2,335,000	9,812,000
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
White Collar	49.9	31.7	27.2	35.3
Professional and Technical	15.1	7.4	5.6	11.8
Managers and Administrators	10.7	5.6	4.9	4.8
Salesworkers	6.3	3.7	3.0	2.6
Clerical	17.8	15.0	13.7	16.1
Blue Collar:	33.3	46.6	49.3	37.6
Craft Workers	13.1	13.7	15.0	9.0
Operatives	11.4	20.9	20.4	15.1
Transport Operatives	3.8	4.1	4.6	5.2
Non-Farm Laborers	5.0	7.9	9.3	8.3
Service Workers	13.7	17.1	16.5	25.0
Farm Workers	3.0	4.4	6.9	2.2

Source: Morris Newman, "A Profile of Hispanics in the U.S. Work Force", *Monthly Labor Review* (December, 1978), pp. 3-13; and *Employment and Training Report of the President, 1979*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979, pp. 262-3.

that the ceiling wage, as indicated by employers, was high enough to attract citizen workers but that the employers preferred foreign workers and that labor displacement was occurring in the San Diego labor market.

In 1979, the National Commission on Employment and Unemployment Statistics completed its two year work on the adequacy of the nation's labor force indicators. With regard to illegal immigrants, the Commission reluctantly concluded:

No single area in labor statistics is as undeveloped, incomplete, and imprecise as is our data on undocumented workers. Estimates of the illegal alien population, the labor market situation of undocumented

workers, and the effects of their presence on the supply and the demand for resident workers vary widely (National Commission on Employment and Unemployment Statistics, 1975:101).

The Commission had sought the best professional information it could find from both government agencies and outside consultants. The frustrations of the Chairman of the Commission, Sar Levitan, with the results of their inquiry can be seen in his subsequent testimony before Congress on this precise point:

In the National Commission on Employment and Unemployment Statistics we talked to the best authorities in and out of the government. We asked them, "Can we get a reliable number?" The answer was, "No." So we threw up our hands and said given the present survey instruments — which are voluntary — we cannot hope to obtain a reasonably precise number. The Immigration and Naturalization Service does not have it; the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not; and the Census does not have it (U.S. House of Representatives, 1979:243).

Nevertheless, in its final report the Commission strongly recommended that "the scope and frequency" of studies that would estimate the size and impacts of illegal immigrants "should be increased". It did not suggest how this feat might be accomplished from what has already been tried.

CONCLUSIONS

From the preceding review of the literature pertaining to the attempts to measure the size and the employment impact of illegal immigrants, it is clear that the subject has received substantial scholarly attention. Many methodological and intuitive approaches have been tried out but the results still remain highly speculative. Even if more conclusive information is provided, it will of necessity be a retrospective finding to some time in the past. But, illegal immigration is dynamic and it is certain that the subject will continue to be high on the research agenda of scholars and policymakers.

As frustrating as the lack of good data is, it is important to keep in mind that gross data deficiencies are not unique problems to the study of illegal immigration. In truth, the lack of reliable and useful data plagues virtually every important area of serious public policy concerns. Data are either non-existent or totally inadequate about such critical topics as unemployment in local labor markets, the health of the population, the degree of employment discrimination, the state of mental health, the incidence of crime, the use of narcotics, the degree of environmental degradation, and the size of available energy supplied to the nation to mention only a few vital areas. It is virtually an article of faith in the social sciences that the more important the issue the worse the data. Yet the lack of good data has in no way retarded the initiation

of significant policy interventions in these and other critical areas of public concern. It is only with respect of immigration reform that the argument of lack of adequate data has been raised and effectively used to forestall reform efforts.

Furthermore, it makes little conceptual difference whether the stock of illegal immigrants in the nation is 3 million, or 6 million, or 9 million or 12 million persons. All of these numbers have been cited in one or more of the various reports, statements, or research studies mentioned in this article. The precise number is irrelevant if one concedes that the number of persons involved is substantial and that the direction of change is toward annually increasing numbers.

Obviously it would be preferable if reliable data were available. But it is not. Although it might at first glance seem presumptive, the fact of life is that policy formulation as well as the selection of topics for social science inquiry cannot be dependent on the quality of available data.

APPENDIX A

CITATIONS FOR THE EIGHT STUDIES CITED IN TABLE 2

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