Survey of Mexican Migrants

March 14, 2005

About the Survey

Fieldwork was conducted at Mexican consulates in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Raleigh and Fresno from July 12, 2004, to Jan. 28, 2005. A total of 4,836 individuals responded to a 12-page questionnaire in Spanish. All respondents were in the process of applying for a *matrícula consular*, an identity card issued by Mexican diplomatic missions. This was not a random survey but one designed to generate the maximum number of observations of Mexican migrants who were seeking further documentation of their identity in the United States. (For further details see the methodological appendix at the end of this report.)

The Pew Hispanic Center is an independent research organization, and it formulated the questionnaire and controlled all of the fieldwork and data preparation. The Center wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Mexico, the Institute for Mexicans Abroad and the Mexican consulates in the seven cities where the survey was conducted for permitting the fieldwork to take place on consular premises. The data and conclusions presented in this report are the exclusive responsibility of the Pew Hispanic Center and do not necessarily reflect the official views of either the foreign ministry or the government of Mexico.

Attitudes about Voting in Mexican Elections and Ties to Mexico

By Roberto Suro
Director, Pew Hispanic Center

Executive Summary

A survey of nearly 5,000 Mexican migrants who were interviewed while applying for identity cards at Mexican consulates in the United States has found that an overwhelming majority would vote in Mexican elections scheduled for next year if they had the opportunity. The Mexican Congress is now debating a proposal that would permit absentee voting by Mexicans living outside the country for the first time.

Nearly nine out of ten (87%) respondents said they would vote in the next Mexican elections if they could, and the sentiment carried in near equal measure across every demographic, socio-economic and geographic category except for age. Older respondents were somewhat more likely than younger voters to say they wanted to vote in the elections.

A key issue in the congressional debate in Mexico is whether to permit voting only by migrants who already hold a valid voting credential issued in Mexico or whether to issue credentials in the United States. In the survey sample, 42 percent of the respondents said they had brought their voting credential with them to the United States. Respondents who have arrived in the United States more recently are more likely to have a voting credential with them than those who have been here longer. For example, 64 percent of respondents who have been in the United States for two years or less said they have the credential with them, compared with 29 percent of those who have been in the country for more than 15 years.

The Pew Hispanic Center's Survey of Mexican Migrants provides detailed information on the demographic characteristics, living arrangements, work experiences and attitudes toward immigration of 4,836 Mexican adults who completed a 12-page questionnaire as they were applying for a *matrícula consular*, an identity document issued by Mexican consulates. Fieldwork was conducted in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Raleigh, NC, and Fresno, CA, from July 12, 2004, to Jan. 28, 2005.

The sampling strategy for the survey was designed to generate the maximum number of observations of Mexicans living in the United States and seeking documentation of their identity at a Mexican consulate. Respondents were not asked directly to specify their immigration status. However, slightly more than half of the respondents (N=2,566) said that they did not have any form of photo ID issued by any government agency in the United States. The share of respondents saying they had no U.S.-issued identity documents was much higher among the more recently arrived—80 percent among those in the country for two years or less and 75 percent for those in the country for five years or less.

This is the second in a series of reports on the survey's findings. The first report examined attitudes towards immigration and major demographic characteristics. Subsequent reports will examine a variety of topics in detail, including the migrants' their employment and economic status, banking and remittances, and gender and family structure. The full dataset of survey responses will be made available to researchers on Sept. 1, 2005, through the Pew Hispanic Center Web site (www.pewhispanic.org).

Major findings in this report include:

- The prospect of voting in Mexican elections has broad and deep appeal among survey respondents, with 87 percent saying they would vote if they could.
- The same overwhelming sentiment in favor of voting was expressed across every demographic category and in every location where the survey was conducted. No significant differences emerged by gender, education or the amount of time a respondent had spent in the United States.
- Older voters were somewhat more likely to say they wanted to exercise the franchise in Mexico, with 90 percent of those over the age of 50 saying they would vote if they could, compared with 84 percent of those 18 to 29 years old.
- In the survey sample, 42 percent of respondents said they had brought their Mexican voting credentials with them to the United States while 54 percent said they had not.
- The share of respondents saying they had a credential with them in the United State was highest among the most recently arrived migrants. The share of respondents who had been in the United States for two years or less saying they held a credential was 64 percent, compared with 29 percent of those who had been in the United States 15 years or longer.
- Several Mexican states, particularly in the south of the country, have patterns of migration that have been established more recently than those in states in the center of the country that have been sending large numbers of migrants north for many decades. This is reflected in the share of respondents who say they have a voting credential with them in the United States. For example, 63 percent of the respondents from Veracruz, a state with a recent history of migration, said they had the credential with them compared with 37 percent of those from Jalisco, a state with a long-established history of migration.
- A little more than a third (35%) of the respondents said they owned land, housing or a business in Mexico, but the share was much higher among men (43%) than among women (24%).
- The survey respondents showed a high propensity to send money home to their families in the form of remittances. Nearly eight in ten (78%) said they send money to Mexico, and about half (52%) said they send money once a month or more.
- More than half of the survey respondents (54%) said they talk with their family in Mexico by phone at least once a week. Even among those who have been in the United States for more than ten years, 46 percent are on the phone to Mexico at least once a week.
- A substantial share of respondents, even the youngest and those who have arrived most recently, said they have previously visited the United States. About half the respondents ages 18 to 29 and a third who have been in the country for two years or less said they have made prior trips to the United States.

The Survey of Mexican Migrants was a purposive sample, in which any individual seeking an identity document on the days the survey was in progress could choose to participate. It was not a probability sample, in which researchers randomly select participants in a survey to avoid any self-selection bias. Moreover, the results have not been weighted to match the estimated parameters of a target population as is often the case with public opinion surveys. Instead the data are presented as raw counts.

Conducting a survey of *matrícula* applicants on the premises of Mexican consulates while they waited for paperwork to be processed permitted the execution of a lengthy questionnaire among a large number of individuals in the target population. No other survey on this scale has been attempted with Mexican migrants living in the United States.

The survey allows an extraordinary view of a population that by its very nature is exceptionally difficult to measure and study: Mexicans who live in the country without proper documentation and in particular those who have been in the country for only a few years. The survey data and other evidence suggest that a substantial

share of the respondents, especially among those that are young and recently arrived, are not in the United States with legal immigrant status. Over the past decade 80 percent or more of the Mexican migrants who have come to live in the United States on a long-term basis have added to the stock of the unauthorized population, according to estimates based on data collected by Mexican and U.S. government agencies.

The *matrícula consular* is a laminated identity card that bears an individual's photograph, name and home address in the United States and that attests that he or she is a citizen of Mexico. The card is issued by Mexican officials without inquiring as to the individual's immigration status in the United States. As such, it cannot be used as proof of permission to reside or work in the country, and U.S. immigration authorities will not accept it as proof that the holder has the right to enter the country. However, the *matrícula* is accepted as an identity document that establishes the holder's local address by many law enforcement agencies and local governments. The U.S. Treasury Department ruled in 2003 that the *matrícula* can be used to open bank accounts.

For individuals returning to Mexico, the *matrícula* can be used in place of a Mexican passport to enter Mexico at those points of entry, primarily airports, where Mexican authorities conduct immigration checks. And, 43 percent of the respondents said one of their intended uses of the *matrícula* was for travel to Mexico. However, an individual who plans to return to the United States legally will need a valid Mexican passport and some kind of U.S.-issued visa to reenter the country except for short visits near the border.

The Survey of Mexican Migrants was conducted on the premises of the Mexican consulates in Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, Chicago, Fresno, Raleigh and Atlanta, but respondents were advised that this was not an official survey and that it would have no bearing on their business at the consulate. Mexican authorities cooperated with the fieldwork by allowing it to take place at the consulates. However, the design, development and execution of the survey, the compilation and analysis of the resulting data and the production of this report were under the full and exclusive control of the Pew Hispanic Center. Consulate personnel did not take part in any of the fieldwork, and all of the costs of conducting the survey were borne by the Pew Hispanic Center. Fieldwork was conducted by International Communications Research of Media, PA, and Einat Temkin, of the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communications, who served as fieldwork coordinator. Respondents could complete the questionnaire themselves, seek the assistance of an interviewer for any part of it or have the entire questionnaire read to them by an interviewer. All of the fieldwork was conducted in Spanish.

The sites for the survey fieldwork were chosen with several objectives in mind. One was to cover the major concentrations of the Mexican migrant population; hence the choices of California, Illinois and Texas. There was also a desire to produce a mix of locations with well-established immigrant populations, such as Los Angeles, and relatively new immigrant populations, such as Raleigh. And the survey sought a mix of major metropolitan areas, smaller cities and at least one site where a sizeable share of the Mexican population works in agriculture (Fresno). Thus there are some significant variations in demographic characteristics among the samples generated in the various cities.

No researcher has attempted to conduct a survey of a nationally representative sample of the undocumented population that was drawn with the level of statistical certainty that is routine for large-scale public opinion polls, and this survey does not purport to present that kind of sample. Within limits inherent to the nature of the target population, however, the Survey of Mexican Migrants offers an opportunity to examine this population at a level of detail and with a level of confidence not available heretofore.

Neither the U.S. Census Bureau nor any other U.S. government agency conducts a count of unauthorized migrants or defines their demographic characteristics based on specific enumeration. There is, however, a widely accepted methodology for estimating the size and certain characteristics of the undocumented population based on census data. The survey respondents resemble the undocumented population of Mexican origins in recent estimates in their age and gender and the amount of time they have been in the United States.

The sample for this survey drew heavily from among young and recently arrived migrants. The largest age group was the 48 percent of respondents who were 18 to 29 years old. Of the total, 43 percent said they had been in the United States for five years or less. By comparison, only 34 percent of the full Mexican-born population—including the undocumented, legal immigrants and U.S. citizens—living in the United States falls into the 18-to-29-year-old age range, and only 24 percent has been in the country for five years or less.

For more information on how this survey was conducted and a comparison of the sample with estimates of the undocumented population, please see the appendix on methodology at the end of this report.

Voting in Mexican Elections

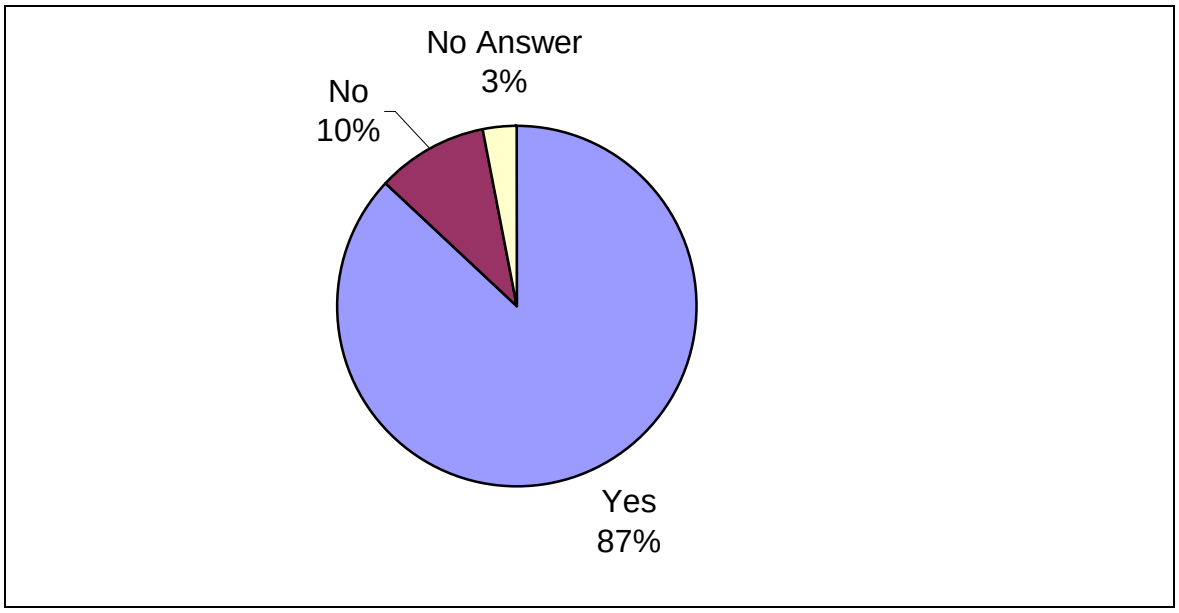
Nearly nine of ten respondents (87%) in the Survey of Mexican Migrants said they would cast votes in the next Mexican elections from the United States if they could. Only a tenth of the respondents (10%) said they would not. The same overwhelming sentiment in favor of voting in Mexican elections was expressed across every demographic category and in every location where the survey was conducted. No significant differences emerged by gender, education or the amount of time a respondent had spent in the United States. However, older voters were somewhat more likely to say they wanted to exercise the franchise in Mexico, with 90 percent of those over the age of 50 saying they would vote if they could, compared with 84 percent of those 18 to 29 years old.

Currently, by law only Mexican citizens who are in Mexico on polling day are allowed to vote in elections for federal offices. As of this writing, the Mexican Congress is debating a measure that would grant the vote in presidential elections to Mexicans who are outside the country at the time of the balloting. Mexico will hold its next vote for president in 2006.

Figure 1: Voting in Mexican Elections

Si usted tuviera la oportunidad de votar en las próximas elecciones mexicanas en los Estados Unidos, ¿votaría?

(IF YOU COULD VOTE IN THE NEXT MEXICAN ELECTIONS FROM THE U.S., WOULD YOU?)

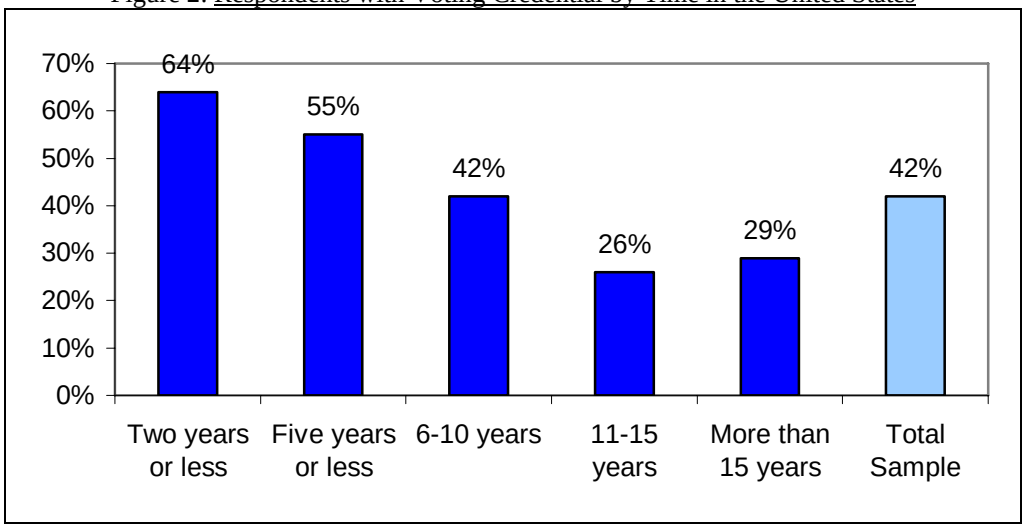


Slightly more than four of ten respondents (42%) said they had brought their Mexican electoral credential with them to the United States. This credential is a form of photo ID that resembles a U.S. driver's license. It is issued by the *Instituto Federal Electoral*, an autonomous public agency that was created as part of a constitutional reform in 1990 to conduct presidential and congressional elections. In recent years the electoral credential has become widely accepted in Mexico as a standard identity document for a variety of purposes. A key issue in the congressional debate in Mexico is whether to permit voting only by migrants who already hold a valid voting credential issued in Mexico or whether to issue credentials in the United States.

Migrants who have been in the United States for just a relatively few years are much more likely than those of longer tenure to say they have the credential with them. This could be the result of several factors. For one thing, Mexico has only recently started issuing the voting credential in its current form, and its use as a general-purpose identity document is also a recent phenomenon. Moreover, in order to get a card a Mexican citizen has to register at the office of the election institute that oversees voting in his or her home town, file an application, wait an average of 20 days for notification that the application has been accepted, and then reappear

at the office with an official document establishing identity (the *matrícula consular* is not accepted for this purpose). For some migrants of long tenure in the United States, aspects of this process could prove burdensome. Thus it is not surprising that the share of respondents who said they had the credential declined sharply according the amount of time that they said they had been in the United States.

Figure 2: Respondents with Voting Credential by Time in the United States



If holding a valid election credential issued in Mexico is a requirement for absentee voting, then a greater share of recent migrants than those of longer tenure will be entitled to vote. Because of the nature of migration patterns this would in turn influence where in the United States the votes are cast.

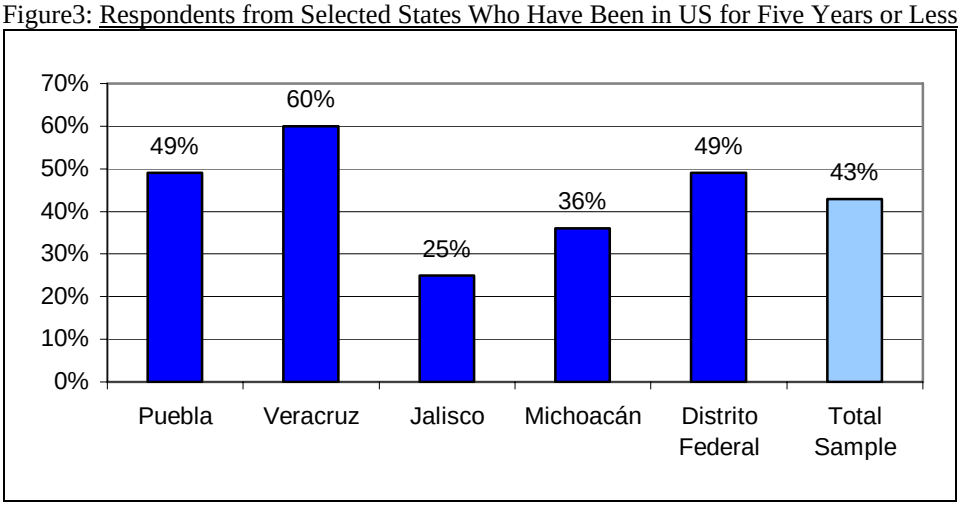
Table 2: Migrants with Mexican Voting Credentials
¿Trajo usted a los Estados Unidos su credencial electoral mexicano?
(DID YOU BRING YOUR MEXICAN VOTING CREDENTIAL TO THE U.S.?)

	Yes	No	No Answer
Los Angeles	36	62	2
New York	41	57	2
Dallas	45	50	5
Chicago	45	51	4
Fresno	38	59	3
Raleigh	51	45	4
Atlanta	49	46	5
TOTAL	42	54	4

Differences from one survey location to another in the shares of respondents holding a voting credential largely reflect differences in the mix of recent and long-term migrants surveyed in each location (see: Survey of Mexican Migrants, *Attitudes about Immigration and Major Demographic Characteristics*, Pew Hispanic Center, March 2, 2005). Traditional settlement areas such as Los Angeles and Fresno, CA, have larger shares of long-term migrants than new settlement areas such as Raleigh, NC, and New York.

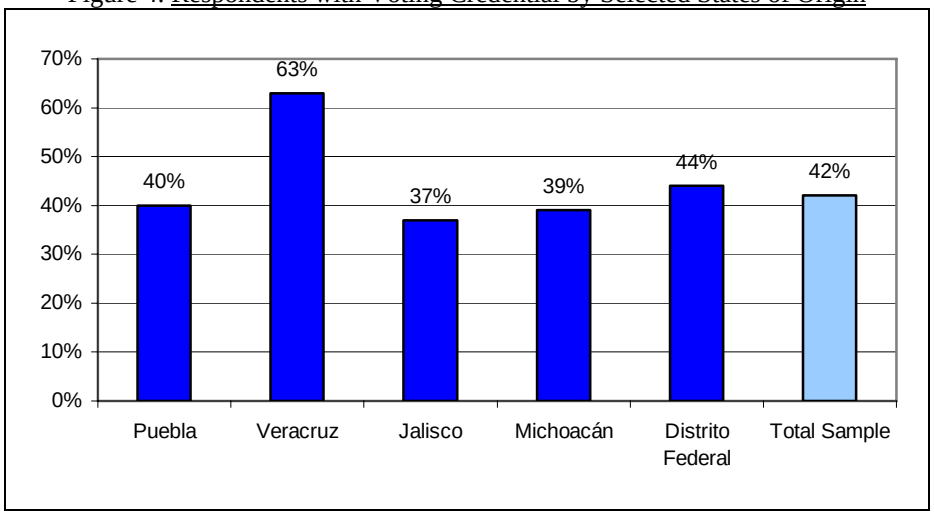
There are similar differences in terms of where Mexican migrants come from. Smaller shares of respondents from states with well-established migration patterns, such as Jalisco and Michoacán, said they had been in the United States for five years or less; by contrast, respondents from states with relatively new migrant flows such as Puebla and Veracruz were more likely to have arrived within this period. The figures below show results from a selection of Mexican states with major migratory flows to the United States.

Figure3: Respondents from Selected States Who Have Been in US for Five Years or Less



The share of respondents saying they had their voting credential varied according to a similar pattern.

Figure 4: Respondents with Voting Credential by Selected States of Origin



By nature of the fact that the target population for the Survey of Mexican Migrants was individuals applying for a *matrícula consular*, the sample contains a greater share of respondents who have been in the United States a relatively few years compared to the full Mexican-born population living in the United States. In the survey sample 43 percent of respondents said they had been in the United States for five years or less compared to 24 percent of the entire Mexican-born adult population, according to the March 2003 U.S. Current Population Survey (see Appendix 1.)

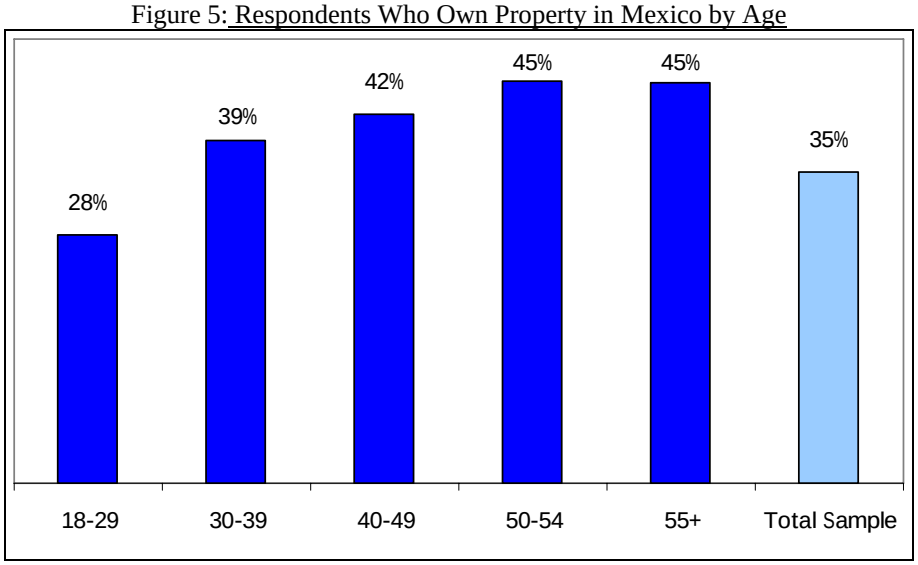
Given that more recently arrived migrants are more likely to hold a Mexican voting credential than those who have been in the United States for many years, according to the survey findings, then the share of survey respondents holding the credential is almost certainly higher than in the population as a whole. Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that because 42 percent of the survey respondents hold an election credential, the same percentage of the approximately 10 million Mexican citizens living in the United States hold a credential. Because there is a larger share of persons of longer tenure in the full population than in the survey sample, the number holding voting credentials should be lower.

Ties to Mexico

Substantial shares of respondents in the Survey of Mexican Migrants reported maintaining close ties to Mexico in a variety of ways, such as owning property there or sending remittances to family members.

A little more than a third (35%) of the respondents said they owned land, housing or a business in Mexico, but the share was much higher among men (43%) than women (24%). As well as gender, age was an important factor in determining which respondents owned property or a business in Mexico; the share saying they did so increased markedly among older respondents. Finally, the propensity of respondents to say they owned property increased along a steady gradient according to the income they earned in the United States. Respondents who earned $400 or more a week were more than twice as likely to say they owned property as those who earned $100 or less (52% vs. 20%). It is worth emphasizing that the survey question did not inquire about family holdings but specifically asked, "*¿Es usted dueño de tierra, vivienda o negocio en México?"* (Are you the owner of land, housing or a business in Mexico?)

Figure 5: Respondents Who Own Property in Mexico by Age



Owning property was not, however, linked to the amount of time respondents had been in the country. Recently arrived and long-term migrants said they owned property in Mexico in roughly equal shares. Similarly, no significant differences emerged according to the respondents' level of education. And relatively small differences were apparent in levels of ownership according to the respondents' state of origin in Mexico.

Housing was by far the most common form of ownership, with 23 percent of all the respondents and 28 percent of the males saying they owned homes in Mexico. Land was owned by 14 percent of all respondents and 19 percent of the males, while only 2 percent of respondents said they owned businesses. The survey asked respondents to indicate all forms of ownership, and some owned more than one.

The survey respondents showed a high propensity to send money home to their families in the form of remittances. Nearly eight in ten (78%) said they send money to Mexico, and about half (52%) said they send money once a month or more.

A quarter (25%) of the male respondents and just a tiny fraction (2%) of the female respondents who said they were married or had a long-term partner said that their spouse or partner lived in Mexico. Most of the respondents (59%) who said that their spouse or partner lives in Mexico had been in the United States for five years or less.

As for keeping in touch with their homeland, more than half of all respondents (54%) said they talked with their family in Mexico by phone at least once a week. This remained true even among those who had been in the United States for more than ten years; of these, 46 percent said they were on the phone to family in Mexico at least once a week.

New forms of communication are also taking hold in this population. Asked how often they communicate with family in Mexico by email or another means involving a computer, 17 percent of the

respondents said they do so regularly and an additional 18 percent said they do so sometimes. Not surprisingly, the computer users were concentrated among the younger and better educated respondents.

Civic organizations, sports teams or social clubs in the United States that bring together other Mexicans who share the same community of origin are a much less common way of maintaining ties to the homeland. Only 14 percent of respondents said they belonged to such groups.

Migration Experience

As noted above, the sample for this survey drew heavily from among young and recently arrived migrants. As such, the survey sample is not representative of the full range of migratory experiences by Mexicans in the United States. The sample encompasses a reduced share of older migrants and migrants of longer tenure who may have lived in the United State periodically in the past, making numerous trips back and forth across the border. Because the sample was drawn only from Mexicans who were applying for a *matrícula consular*, there are also smaller shares of legal permanent residents and U.S. citizens—individuals who can freely cross the border in both directions—than in the Mexican-born population in the United States as a whole

Within these boundaries, the survey offers important insights into recent migration patterns, and the results indicate that a sizeable number of young, recently arrived respondents have come to the United States repeatedly. The youngest age category of respondents—those 18 to 29 years old—were almost equally divided between those who said they were on their first trip to the United States (49%) and those who said they had been here before. Among those who had been in the United States five years or less, 57 percent said they were on their first trip. Among those who had been here two years or less the share was 64 percent. This indicates that even among the young and most recent arrivals, substantial shares of respondents had made multiple trips to the United States. Half of the respondents age 29 or younger and a third of those in the country for less than two years had already visited the United States at least once before.

Figure 6: Respondents on First Trip to the United States by Age

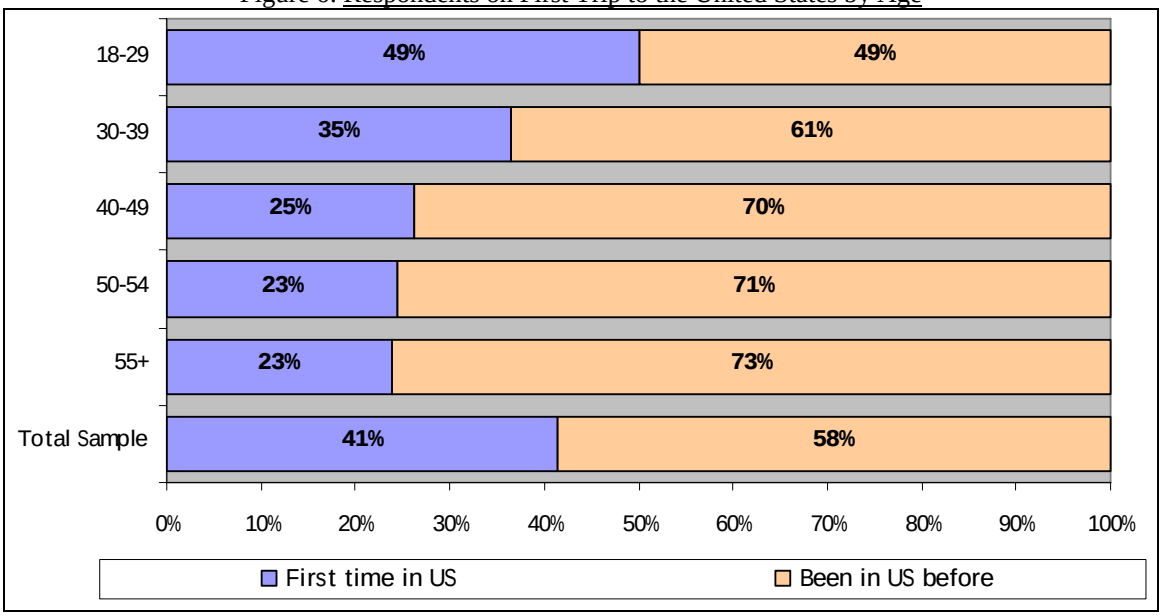
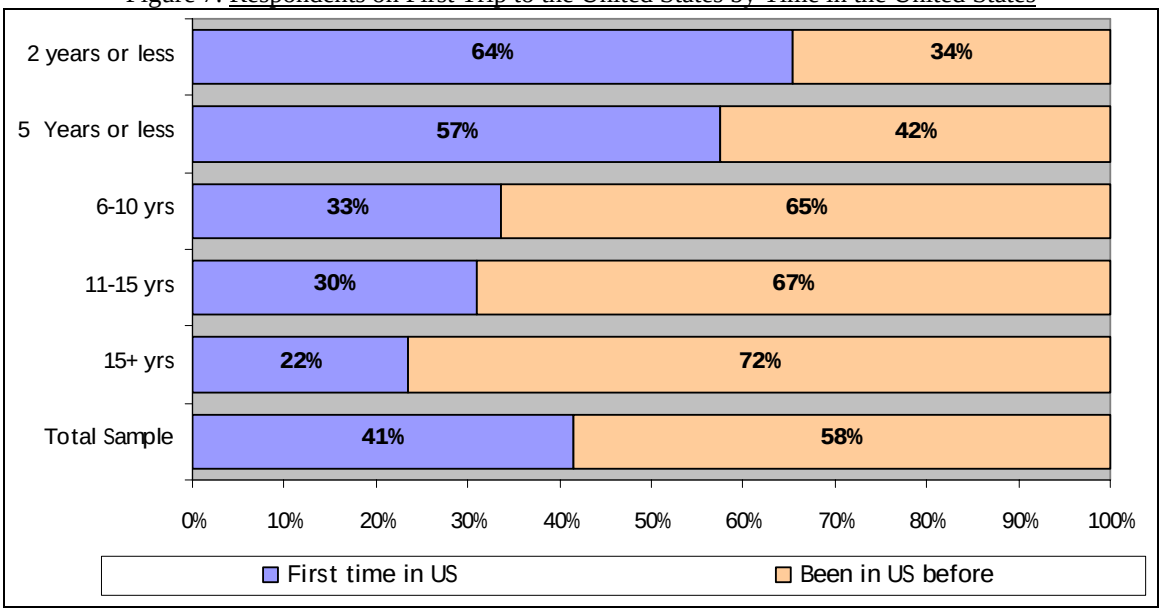
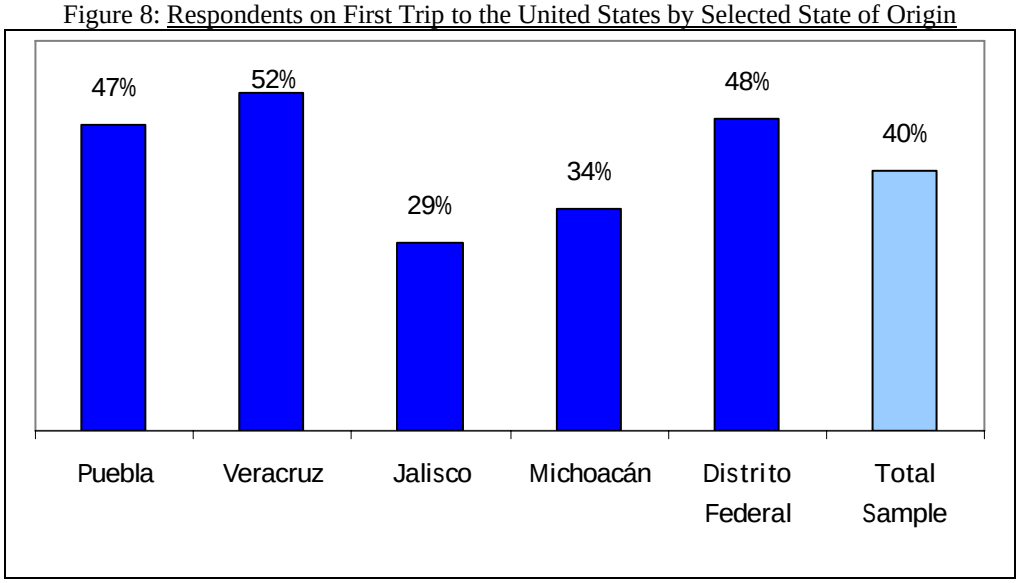


Figure 7: Respondents on First Trip to the United States by Time in the United States



The share of respondents saying they were on their first trip to the United States varied by state of origin in a pattern that mirrored the relative age of the migratory flow from those states. Larger shares of respondents from states with recent migratory flows such as Puebla said they were on their first trip compared with states with long-established migratory flows such as Jalisco.

Figure 8: Respondents on First Trip to the United States by Selected State of Origin



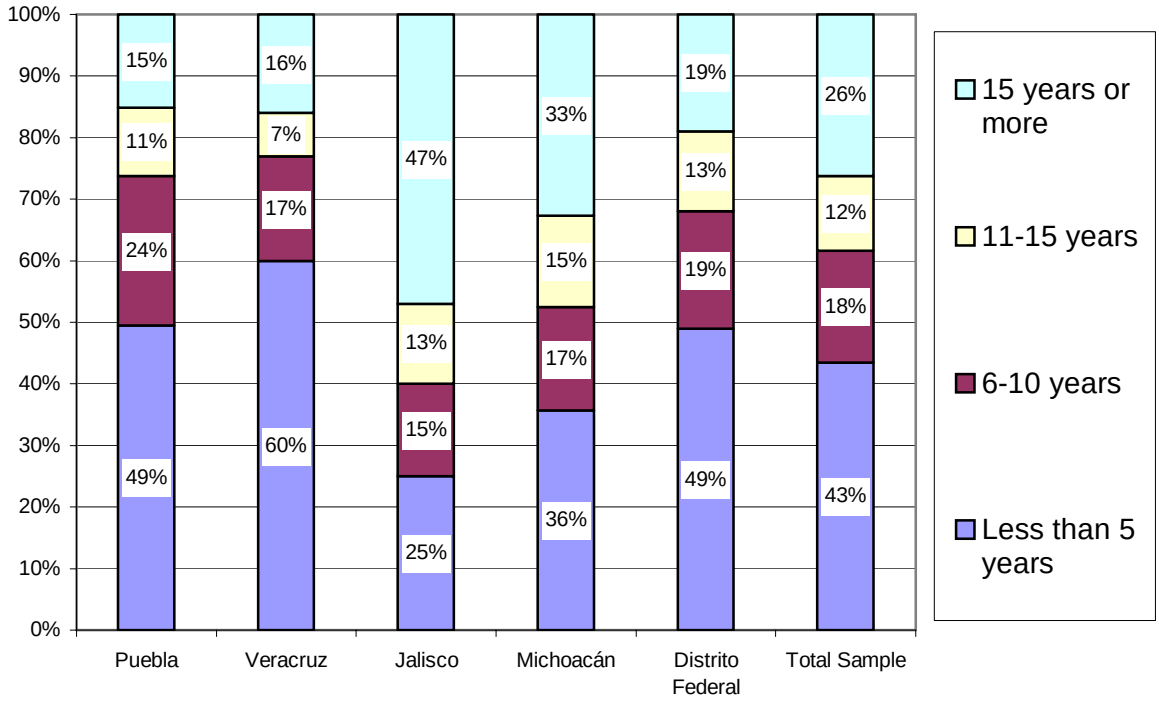
The survey did not explicitly ask respondents to reveal their immigration status, but it did ask whether respondents had any form of photo ID issued by any government agency in the United States. A little more than half (53%) said they did not. This sub-sample was evenly divided between those who said they were on their first trip to the United States and those who were not (51% vs. 47%). Thus, about half of the respondents who said they had no form of U.S.-issued identity documents said they had traveled to the United States at least once before their current visit.

States of Origin in Mexico

In recent years new migratory streams to the United States have developed outside the Central Highlands region, which has a migratory history dating back several generations. The Survey of Mexican migrants shows that the migrant streams from various Mexican states differ considerably in terms of their history and their destination.

For the sake of simplicity, the following analysis focuses on five Mexican states which together contributed 40 percent of the survey respondents and which represent well-established migrant streams (Jalisco and Michoacán) and newer streams (Puebla, Veracruz and the Distrito Federal, which comprises the Mexico City metropolitan area). As the figure below indicates, there are significant differences in the amount of time respondents from various states have spent in the United States.

Figure 9: Years spent in the United States by Selected States of Origin



Given these migration patterns, there are also differences in the gender composition of the flows from various states. Males make up a greater share of the respondents from new states of origin such as Puebla (65%) compared with traditional states of origin such as Jalisco (50%).

Destinations also differed by state of origin. Respondents from new sending states were more likely to be found in parts of the United States where migration from Mexico is a relatively recent phenomenon, such as New York City and Raleigh. Meanwhile, respondents from states with longstanding migration patterns are more likely to be found in places such as Los Angeles and Fresno that have been migrant destinations for many decades.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by State of Origin across Survey Sites

	LA	NYC	Chicago	Fresno	Atlanta	Dallas	Raleigh
Puebla	24%	57%	9%	3%	3%	1%	3%
Veracruz	16%	16%	21%	2%	12%	16%	17%
Jalisco	52%	1%	21%	14%	5%	5%	1%
Michoacán	31%	3%	24%	20%	7%	11%	4%

Appendix 1

Methodology

Data collection was conducted at Mexican consulates in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Raleigh, and Fresno from July 12, 2004, to Jan. 28, 2005. In each location, data collection was conducted for five or 10 business days, depending on the estimated size of the target population in each city. In most cases, applicants for a *matrícula consular* are guided through a series of stations, where documents are examined, applications are submitted, photos are taken, etc. Depending on the number of applicants, the efficiency of the work flow and conditions at the consulate, the applicants could spend anywhere from 20 minutes to four hours at the consulate during their visit. In some locations, the *matrícula* applicants were concentrated in one room or area, while in other locations applicants for all types of documents were in one line or area. Therefore, recruiting only those who were applying for the *matrícula consular* was a primary concern. This was usually achieved by asking potential participants to identify themselves as *matrícula* applicants. Only respondents who replied affirmatively to the first question on the survey, asking if they were applying for a *matrícula consular* that day, were included in the survey data. Respondents were not asked for their names or any other identifying information at any point in the process.

Potential respondents were informed that they were eligible to participate in the survey using public announcements (with or without microphone, depending on the facilities) and individual recruitment. They were asked to fill out the survey while waiting in line to conduct their transaction or while waiting to pick up their newly obtained identity card. The participants received a verbal explanation regarding the survey, its content, the nature of the questions and the length of time needed to fill out the survey, as well as a detailed explanation of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. In addition, they were verbally informed that upon completion of the survey, they would receive a phone card which could be used to telephone Mexico as a token of gratitude for their time and patience. Potential participants were also given a detailed information sheet that explained more fully the purpose and implications of the survey. Both during the recruitment process and on the information sheet potential participants were advised that their dealings with the consulate would not be affected in any way by their decision whether to take the survey or not or by their responses.

Those who expressed an interest in participating in the survey and were of age had the choice of self-administering the survey independently or having an interviewer read out the questions and fill in the questionnaire for them. Because the targeted sample is characterized by a high rate of illiteracy, special attention was paid to the potentially illiterate or semi-literate people in the sample by emphasizing that reading and writing was not a prerequisite to participation and that interviewers were available to provide assistance and to conduct as much of the survey as necessary.

Participants were then given a copy of the survey, a pencil and a clipboard. They were told to take as long as needed and to come back to any of the interviewers if they had any doubts or questions. Those participants who opted to have an interview conducted were usually interviewed in line or by the interviewers' table. When completed, the survey was returned to an interviewer. It was then checked to assess whether the participant had completed the survey. While participants could skip questions if they so desired, there were some cases in which the participant had stopped marking responses entirely. In these cases, an effort was made to have the participant complete, as much as possible, the remainder of the survey. Interviewers offered to conduct the rest of the survey in an interview by reading questions and marking the answers. If the participant refused to complete the survey, either independently or through an interview, their survey was marked noncomplete.

The survey was conducted under the auspices of the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and was subject to the university's regulations on human subject research. Respondents were advised of their rights under these regulations and were given phone numbers where they could call to register complaints or note any concerns about the conduct of the survey.

Completed survey forms were marked as such and numbered per day. In addition, all completed surveys were checked in the field for any open-ended comments. Responses and all other handwritten text were translated into English for future coding and data entry. The translations were written underneath or in proximity to the original handwritten comment and placed in parentheses to distinguish the translation from the subject's comments.

Each day's completed survey forms were then sent to the offices of International Communications Research (ICR) in Media, PA, where data entry was conducted and a database established. The completed surveys are stored at ICR using procedures that accord with university regulations for maintaining the confidentiality and security of the data.

Sample Comparisons

Neither the U.S. Census Bureau nor any other U.S. government agency conducts a count of unauthorized migrants or defines their demographic characteristics based on specific enumeration. There is, however, a widely accepted methodology for estimating the size and certain characteristics, such as age and gender, of the undocumented population based on census and survey data. This methodology essentially subtracts the estimated legal-immigrant population from the total foreign-born population and treats the residual as a source of data on the unauthorized migrant population (Passel et al. 2004; Lowell and Suro 2002; Bean 2001).

Using this methodology, Jeffrey S. Passel, a veteran demographer and a senior research associate at the Pew Hispanic Center, has developed estimates based on the March supplement of Current Population Survey (CPS) in 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau's annual effort to measure the foreign-born population and provide detailed information on its characteristics. Comparing the sample from the Survey of Mexican Migrants with these estimates demonstrates significant similarities with the estimated characteristics of the undocumented population.

Overall the survey sample has the same preponderance of males as the full Mexican-born population from the CPS. However, a greater share of the sample respondents are concentrated in the younger age ranges than in the Mexican-born population as a whole; and in this respect, the survey sample resembles the estimated characteristics of the undocumented population, with the share under 40 being identical. A greater share of the survey respondents are recently arrived in the country (five years or less) than in the full Mexican population, and again this resembles the undocumented population. In terms of education, the share of survey respondents that went as far as high schools is the same as that in the estimates of the undocumented population and the Mexican-born population as a whole. Differences emerge at the high and low ends of the educational profile.

Comparison of Survey of Mexican Migrants with Mexican-Born Population by Legal Status from the March 2003 Current Population Survey

Variable & Category	Survey of Mexican Migrants*	Undocumented**			Mexican-Born**	
		Percent	Difference		Percent	Difference
Sex						
Male	57%	57%	0%		56%	1%
Female	40%	43%	-3%		44%	-4%
Age Group						
18-29	48%	44%	4%		34%	14%
30-39	29%	35%	-6%		33%	-4%
40-49	13%	15%	-2%		19%	-6%
50-54	3%	3%	0%		6%	-3%
55+	5%	3%	2%		7%	-2%
Years in U.S.						
5 or less	43%	36%	7%		24%	19%
6-10 yrs	18%	26%	-8%		20%	-2%
11-15 yrs	12%	18%	-6%		15%	-3%
>15 yrs	19%	20%	-1%		41%	-22%
Education						
Primary or less	34%	41%	-6%		40%	-6%
Lower sec./voc. ed	36%	25%	11%		23%	13%
High school	23%	23%	-1%		23%	0%
College+	7%	11%	-4%		14%	-7%

* Composite estimate for sample from all seven sites. "No answer" responses omitted in computing distributions.

** CPS universe for comparison is the Mexican-born population classified by legal status using assignment methods developed by Passel and Clark (1998) at Urban Institute. For undocumented migrants, all ages 18 and over are used; for the entire Mexican-born population, only ages 18-64 are used from the CPS. Undocumented migrants are included in Mexican-born groups.