



Children's Migration to the United States from Mexico and Central America: Evidence from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects¹

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Executive Summary

In light of rising numbers of unaccompanied minors at the Mexico-US border in 2014, this article examines child migration from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. Using data from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects that permit us to go beyond simple descriptive analysis about children apprehended at the border, we investigate the extent to which children from these countries: 1) enter without legal authorization to do so; 2) are more likely to cross the border now than in the past; and 3) are tied to their parents' migration. In theory, if immigration and refugee protections worked well for children and offered them legal pathways to reunify with their families, then we would expect low levels of unauthorized entry and no dramatic shifts over time. However, our examination of child migration shows that it is strongly linked to unauthorized entry, period of entry, and parents' US experience.

The findings show that the migration of children is closely linked to their parents' migration history. Although the overall likelihood of a Mexican child making a first US trip is quite low, it is practically non-existent for children whose parents have no US experience. Thus, the increase in child migration from Central America, and the continued high levels of child migration from Mexico result from widespread migration networks and the United States' long-standing reliance on the children's parents as immigrant workers. The findings suggest that these children need protection in the form of family reunification and permanent legal status.

¹ We are grateful to the generous support received from Vanderbilt University's College of Arts and Science for this project.

Introduction

In 2014, the number of unaccompanied children detained at the Mexico-US border for attempting to cross without legal documents rose dramatically to almost 68,000. The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported a surge in the number of children (up to 17 years of age) from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras from approximately 1,000 per nation in 2009 to between 16,000 and 18,000 per nation in 2014, and high numbers from Mexico (averaging close to 15,000 per year) (CBP 2014). In prior fiscal years, total apprehensions of unaccompanied children increased from 16,067 in 2011 to 24,481 in 2012 and 38,833 in 2013 (Chishti and Hipsman 2014). Media coverage of the 2014 surge was extensive. Caldwell (2014a) and others described thousands of children as “alone” without parents or other relatives. Photographs showed young children with fearful faces from behind iron bars in sterile institutional settings, and reports described them as being scared, hungry, and tired (Caldwell 2014b).

In light of rising numbers of unaccompanied minors at the Mexico-US border, we examine child migration from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. Using data from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects² that permit us to go beyond simple descriptive analysis about children apprehended at the border, we consider the extent to which children from these countries: 1) enter without legal authorization to do so; 2) are more likely to cross the border now than in the past; and 3) are tied to their parents' migration.

When attempting to understand children's growing presence at the border, many cite the difficult and dangerous conditions that children face in Mexico and countries in Central America including high levels of violence and poverty. Such explanations imply that children are rational actors who, like many international migrants, calculate the costs and benefits of migrating versus staying at home. Evidence from our analysis offers a correction to such narratives by underscoring that children's migration is strongly linked to that of their parents. Unlike other children who face similarly difficult (or worse) conditions in everyday life around the world, children from Mexico and Central America have access to migrant human capital in the form of their parents' US experience. Therefore, rather than viewing them as independent, rational actors who, on their own, decide to leave dangerous conditions and/or limited economic opportunities in their homelands, we suggest that many children are migrating together with their parents or based on information and other resources related to parents' migration experiences. Violence and poverty are structural conditions that underlie migration decisions, but on their own, they do not predict child migration.

² The Mexican Migration Project (MMP) gathers data from households and communities about Mexico-US migration. Created in 1982, data are collected from new households and communities each year and added to the dataset. All data are available to the public (mmp.opr.princeton.edu). Each household sample represents households in that community in a given year. In addition, each community's household sample is supplemented by a small number of interviews with migrants who left their community of origin to permanently migrate to the United States. The Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) is an extension of the MMP. LAMP data have been collected in many countries in Central and South America, including Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru (lamp.opr.princeton.edu). Unfortunately, Honduras is not included in the dataset.

If most unaccompanied child migrants have parents or other relatives in the United States, they should be eligible for protections under a comprehensive immigration system that safeguards the rights and outcomes of children. Yet, recent reports document cases of unaccompanied minors that have been issued deportation orders upon arrival in the United States even though their parents are residing in the country legally with Temporary Protected Status (Sacchetti 2014).³ Unfortunately, this treatment occurs because contemporary immigration policy has largely been driven by security and enforcement since the 1990s, and especially after September 11, 2001 (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002; Kerwin 2012).

In theory, if immigration and refugee protections worked well for children and offered them legal pathways to reunify with their families, then we would expect low levels of unauthorized entry and no dramatic shifts over time. However, our examination of child migration from Mexico and four Central American nations shows that it is strongly linked to unauthorized entry. In addition, for children from Mexico, we see that, net of other factors, their lifetime chances to migrate without authorization are substantially higher if their parents are migrants and these chances fluctuate considerably across recent periods.

Children in the Process of Migration

The World Bank (2006) estimated that young people, defined as those between 12 and 24 years of age, make up one-third of all international migrants, and as a consequence, migrant youth have become a major economic development issue. For Mexican immigrants in the United States, the share of youth is lower but still substantial: approximately 14 percent of all Mexican immigrants are aged 19 or below (Gans 2009). This suggests that a sizeable number of Mexicans who migrated to the United States did so when they were children (*ibid.*). Moreover, using IPUMS-International data from 11 censuses, McKenzie (2008) shows that the migration of youth was largely tied to that of their parents; children often migrated with parents or made trips to join their parent in host societies.⁴

Since the 1990s, scholars have begun to focus on children in the migration process. Some have examined the consequences of US migration for children (Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999a, 1999b; Donato, Kanaiaupuni and Stainback 2003; Menjívar and Abrego 2009; Donato and Duncan 2011; Nobles 2011; Dreby 2010, 2012; Adsera and Tienda 2012). Others have analyzed the experiences of the children of global immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Farley and Alba 2002; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, and Haller 2005; Kasinitz

³ Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a program created by the Immigration Act of 1990, offers safe haven to persons from designated countries to which it would be unsafe to return due to armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions and who do meet the legal definition of a refugee. TPS recipients receive work authorization but lack a path to permanent legal status, are ineligible for resettlement assistance and most federal public benefits, and cannot petition for admission of immediate family members to the United States. TPS is not extended to persons from designated countries that arrive to the United States after the effective date of the designation, nor is it available to persons in need of safe haven from non-designated states (Bergeron 2014).

⁴ McKenzie also reports that 42 percent of young US migrants were female. Among migrant youth aged 12-14, many attend school. In the United States, for example, 97 percent of youth migrants from India and China, and 85 percent from Mexico and El Salvador, were enrolled in school.

et al. 2010; Mazzucato and Schans 2011; Bledsoe and Sow 2011; Graham and Jordan 2011; Lee and Zhou 2014). Finally, recent scholarship has examined the experiences of unauthorized Latino immigrant youth in the United States, especially as they transition into adulthood (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2011; Abrego 2013; Enriquez 2014).

Yet exactly how children are involved in border crossing is less well understood. In the Mexico-US case, studies describe an intergenerational process whereby migration has been passed down from one generation to the next, especially from fathers to sons (Reichert and Massey 1979; Massey et al. 1987; Massey and Liang 1989). Other studies refer to child migration but they do not explicitly target their movement as a focus for study. For example, when describing the pre-1965 and post-1965 phases of Mexico-US migration, Reichert and Massey (1979, 1980) report only that many women and children migrated to join former agricultural workers who had become legal US immigrants. Theoretically speaking, Stark (1991) and others imply that children are involved in the migration process in arguing that households—and not individuals—make migration decisions which seek to diversify household risks and costs. Relatedly, women and children enter the migration process as it unfolds over the lives of Mexican communities and households (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994); when Mexican communities first participate in out-migration, they usually send mostly young single men who cross without documentation for US farm or other unskilled jobs. Over time, however, as migration streams mature, many women and children accompany male family members from Mexican communities (Reichert and Massey 1980; Fonseca and Moreno 1988; Goldring 1990; Durand and Massey 1992; Donato 1993, 1994; Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Donato, Wagner, and Patterson 2008; Creighton and Riosmena 2013).

In contrast, Tucker and colleagues (2013) explicitly consider how Mexican youth, aged 14-24, make migration decisions using data from semi-structured interviews. Like many adults migrating northward, youth with prior US experience reported that economic hardship and difficulty finding a job were their main reasons for migrating. Furthermore, their decision to migrate depended on their parents because most migrant children accompanied their parents. However, among those interviewed who had never migrated, adolescents and young adults wanted to remain in Mexico. These youth had no plans to migrate because they could envision economic opportunities for themselves in Mexico and because they feared the difficulties they would face crossing the border and living in the United States without authorization.

Therefore, although studies point to children and young adults in the Mexico-US migration process, most do not focus on children's experiences per se. Furthermore, it is unclear the extent to which children migrate with their parents. If it is true that children have fueled Mexico-US migration for decades, then understanding how, when, and with whom they move is important to understanding children's movement from nations in Central America. Moreover, even if parents are an important trigger of children's migration, studies have yet to empirically examine how children's migration prospects vary by different periods of entry and legal status—an important task given the emphasis on security and enforcement in US immigration policy since September 11, 2001 (Kerwin 2012).

Push and Pull Factors

No agreement exists about the push and pull factors that underlie the recent rise in the number of child arrivals in the United States (Chishti and Hipsman 2014; Kandel et al. 2014). Yet, although the “precise combination of motives” behind the rising numbers of child migrants is not clear, three conditions—limited economic and educational opportunities, family reunification, and recent US immigration policies—are certainly implicated (Kandel et al. 2014, 12). So is the violence that children face, especially in some Central American countries. For example, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala are among the top five nations with the highest murder rates, and they are also known for having smugglers that recruit young children to migrate (Kennedy 2014). These and other conditions were described by children who entered the United States after 2011, and were interviewed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Office for the United States and the Caribbean. They gave protection-related reasons for migrating which suggest that most children in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico “may well be in need of international protection” (UNHCR 2014, 6).

In addition to personally threatening conditions, children in these nations face limited economic and social mobility. For example, in Mexico, which is considerably wealthier than other nations in Central America, student performance in schools remains well behind that of other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, despite the government’s sizeable investments in Mexico’s educational system since the 1990s (Acevedo and Salinas 2000). In 2012, Mexico had one of the highest rates of preschool enrollment but its effectiveness was challenged by high student-teacher ratios (OECD 2012). In addition, although Mexico expanded compulsory attendance to the secondary level in 1993, secondary school graduation rates remain very low.

Complicating the story is an enforcement-first US immigration policy regime that has made conditions difficult for all immigrants (Meissner et al. 2013; Aranda, Menjivar, and Donato 2014; Donato and Sisk 2013). As a consequence, more unauthorized immigrants have settled, rather than returned home after temporarily working, in the United States (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). With enforcement spending much larger than it was in 1986 and billions spent on CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement each year (Meissner et al. 2013), immigrant families have lived in a context of pervasive fear and anxiety since the mid-1990s (Rodriguez and Hagan 2004). More deportations have created family trauma (Hagan, Castro, and Rodriguez 2009; Hagan, Eschbach and Rodriguez 2008; Hagan et al. 2003), which is especially injurious for children (Dreby 2012).⁵

Not surprisingly, these structural conditions drive “the desire for family reunification” (Kandel et al. 2014, 15). However, children are independently migrating because many who reside in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have ties to parents in the United States. UNHCR (2014) reports that 22, 49, 27, and 47 percent, respectively, of unaccompanied children entering the United States from these four countries since 2011 had at least one parent living in the United States. Some Central American parents residing in the United States, such as El Salvadorans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans, have Temporary Protected Status, but it cannot be extended to their children or other beneficiaries without

⁵ Studies also describe a wide range of other consequences (see Garcia 2010; Armenta 2012; Donato and Rodriguez 2014).

US Senate support (Kerwin 2014; Bergeron 2014).

At the center of public debates about the rising numbers of unaccompanied minors at the US border are provisions of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008. It guides the treatment of minors being apprehended at the border, and mandates that only those from contiguous countries—Mexico and Canada—may be quickly processed and deported.⁶ Children from non-contiguous countries, such as those in Central America, are placed in formal removal proceedings and, after processing, are released to parents or other relatives who will care for them as they wait to appear in front of an immigration judge as part of formal removal proceedings. As a result of immigration court backlogs, however, unaccompanied minors apprehended during the summer of 2014 were given a waiting period of approximately two years for their court dates. Chishti and Hipsman (2014) suggest that long-waiting periods, as well as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, have helped to create a perception among many potential migrants that the United States' treatment of minors "has softened in recent years" and the "false idea" that the children entering now could receive legal status. Thus, more children may be attempting to enter because they believe they will ultimately receive permission to remain permanently in the United States.

Data and Methods

Given this backdrop, we analyze data about child migration from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects (MMP and LAMP). Although they cover periods when child migration from Central America represented a small share of overall child migration, these data offer three important advantages. First, they give us an opportunity to go beyond simple descriptive results, such as those using US Customs and Border Patrol data to describe recent patterns and shifts in unaccompanied minor apprehensions at the southwest border. Second, MMP and LAMP data tell us about all children who migrate rather than only unaccompanied minors apprehended at the Mexico-US border. And third, the data permit us to consider whether there are social protections that work for children; if they exist and work well, then we would expect low levels of unauthorized entry and no dramatic shifts over time.⁷

Using detailed information on the social and demographic characteristics of children and their parents from the MMP and LAMP, we consider how many children make a first US trip, where they come from, and the extent to which their crossing is linked to family reunification, unauthorized status, and particular periods of entry. In addition, we use the larger MMP sample to examine how children's propensities to migrate vary by: (1) parents' migration histories; (2) children's period of entry; and (3) legal status, controlling for the effects of other factors. Using life table analysis, we also show how children's cumulative

⁶ Minors entering from Mexico and Canada are summarily deported only if screening results show they are not trafficking victims or have asylum claims based on a credible fear of persecution or torture.

⁷ The LAMP and MMP data reported here were not specifically designed to examine the migration experiences of children; however, the survey design allows us to investigate some elements of child migration, especially how it relates to parents' experiences and legal status.

migration chances (up through age 17) vary by these three characteristics.

The analysis is divided into two sections, the first of which is a descriptive analysis of MMP and LAMP data. For the descriptive analysis, we illustrate the extent that children from four Central American countries and Mexico make a first US trip. To make the descriptive analysis comparable across countries, we use surveys conducted from 2000-2013. We use all LAMP countries in Central America (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador);⁸ these data include 23 communities and, within each, 4,112 randomly chosen households.⁹ For Mexico, we use MMP data from 71 communities and 10,723 randomly chosen households. For all countries, the analysis is limited to respondents residing in households where they are categorized as a child of the head of household and are 40 years of age or less at the time of the survey.¹⁰ With these sample restrictions, we create a sample of Mexicans and Central Americans who migrated to the US as minors between 1977 and 2013, with information about the legal status of those trips and migration history of their parents.¹¹

The second section is a multivariate analysis of MMP data. Because MMP data represent many more respondents than the LAMP, the second half of the analysis uses multivariate regression and life table techniques to examine how children's migration from Mexico varies by parents' migration, legal status, and period of entry, net of other factors. This analysis is restricted to children residing in two-parent households and to those with at least one biological parent in the household.¹² The MMP's larger sample of communities reflects the project's longer history (since the mid-1980s) and includes an economically and geographically diverse set of sending communities. Unlike the descriptive analysis, the larger sample size allows us to limit the multivariate analysis only to respondents who are age 17 or younger at the time of the survey. We also use data from surveys conducted from 1987 to 2013.

Given each child's date of birth and year of the survey, we construct a year-by-year life history up to the date of the child's first US trip.¹³ The outcome measure is whether the

8 Unfortunately, Honduras is not included in the LAMP dataset.

9 We use data from 9 communities and 1,789 households in Nicaragua, 7 communities and 1,428 households in Costa Rica, 3 communities and 513 households in Guatemala, and 4 communities and 382 households in El Salvador.

10 Although it may be preferable to restrict the analysis only to respondents who are minors at the time of the survey, we are unable to do so because of the small sample size of respondents who migrated as children in the LAMP data.

11 The majority were interviewed in Mexico or Central American origin communities; the US samples accounted for less than two percent of our total sample.

12 In a separate analysis, we added children from one-parent households to those from two-parent households and re-estimated the multivariate models by including a 0,1 dummy variable to control for children in one-parent households. We also ran separate models by family structure. Although children from one-parent households were slightly more likely to make a first US trip, the findings reveal no substantive differences for children in two versus one-parent households in the coefficients for predictors of a first US migrant trip (analysis available upon request). Thus we chose to display results from the two-parent household analysis.

13 That is, we built a discrete-time person-year file that followed each child from birth to the date of their nineteenth birthday or to the first US trip, whichever came first.

child migrated within the person-year in question. If he/she did not migrate in a given year, the migration variable is coded 0; if he/she migrated in that year, it is coded 1, and all later years of life are excluded from the file. In every year when migration occurred, we also record legal status (authorized or unauthorized).¹⁴

We regress the 0-1 migration variable on indicators representing legal status, child's period of entry, parental migration history, gender, age, and type of origin community from which the migration occurred. Children's period of entry includes before 1987, when Mexico-US migration was largely predictable and circular; 1987-96, immediately after passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which increased border enforcement funds and offered amnesty to approximately three million previously unauthorized immigrants; and 1997-2011, a period after passage of the 1996 Immigrant Responsibility and Act which strengthened IRCA's enforcement provisions and set new standards that criminalized immigrants. This period also covers post-September 11, 2001, during which immigration became a national security issue and the Department of Homeland Security was established. We capture the migration history of both parents in the household relative to children in three categories: either of the parents migrated in a year before the child migrated; either of the parents migrated in the same year as the child migrated; and both parents did not migrate (reference category). Finally, in addition to gender and age, we include a measure of the metropolitan status of the community of origin (large metropolitan are the reference).

Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents three different sets of percentages to assess national origin differences in child migration calculated from the LAMP and MMP data. Panel A shows the percent of sons and daughters who were 40 years or younger at the time of the survey and reported a first US trip from surveyed households from Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Approximately 10 percent from Mexico had migration experience, compared to 4.7 percent for those from Nicaragua, 5.8 percent from Costa Rica, 8.1 percent from Guatemala, and 14.3 percent from El Salvador. That most percentages were significantly lower than Mexico's is worth noting, except for El Salvador; its percentage well exceeds Mexico's.

Similar national origin differences appear in Panel B, which presents the percentages of all sons and daughters who made a migrant trip as a minor by national origin. Although overall percentages are smaller because of the additional restriction that migrants crossed at less than age 18, rates remained higher for Mexicans than for Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans (3.4 versus 2.2 and 2.2, respectively). Moreover, although rates did not significantly differ between Guatemalans and Mexicans, El Salvadorans reported a significantly higher share of sons and daughters who made first trips as minors (5.3 percent).

¹⁴ Legal (or authorized) child migrants had valid US documents to enter and reside in the United States; unauthorized migrants did not.

Table 1. Migration Characteristics of Sons/Daughters in Household Ages 40 and Below, by Country

	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>	<i>Costa Rica</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>El Salvador</i>
<i>Panel A: Percent of All Sons/Daughters Reporting US Migration Trip</i>					
Percent	10.0	4.7*	5.8*	8.1*	14.3*
Total N	33,195	5,384	3,652	1,514	892
<i>Panel B: Percent of All Sons/Daughters Reporting US Migration Trip as a Minor (Age < 18)</i>					
Percent	3.4	2.2*	2.2*	2.9	5.3*
Total N	33,195	5,384	3,652	1,514	892
<i>Panel C: Of Migrants, Percent Reporting First US Migration Trip as a Minor (Age < 18)</i>					
Percent	34.1	46.0*	36.1	35.2	36.7
Total N	3,375	252	213	122	128

* Indicates value is significantly different ($p < .05$, two-tailed test; ^ $p < .10$, two-tailed test) from Mexico.

Note: Analysis limited to survey years 2000-2013 and respondents classified as a son/daughter of the household head that are age 40 or younger at the time of the survey.

Panel C switches the focus somewhat by presenting the shares of migrant sons and daughters who were 40 years or younger at the time of the survey and made that trip as a minor (less than 18 years of age) by country. Approximately one-third (34.1 percent) of Mexican migrants made their first trip as a minor. Moreover, although rates of first minor trips from Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador were comparable to those for migrants from Mexico, significantly more migrants from Nicaragua (46 percent) than Mexico made a first trip as a minor.

Because differences in Table 1 likely reflect other characteristics about immigrants from these five countries, Table 2 offers us more detail about the minor sons and daughters who made first US trips. The table features critical information regarding minor migrants: legal status, period of entry, and parents' migration experience. Among those from Mexico, for example, fully 81 percent were unauthorized on their first trip, with 1994 as their average year of entry, 42 percent made the initial trip after 1996, and slightly more than half (52.6 percent) had at least one parent with US migration experience. Compared to Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans, and Guatemalans were less likely to be unauthorized but the percentage for El Salvadorans was comparable to that for Mexicans. The average year of first trip was earlier for both Nicaraguans and El Salvadorans (1988 and 1990), but only Nicaraguans differed significantly from Mexicans in their smaller share making a first trip after 1996. Among minor migrants from other countries, including Mexico, approximately 40 percent made their first trips after 1996. With respect to parental migration, the shares

of child migrants from Nicaragua and Costa Rica with migrant parents were higher than that for Mexico, but significantly lower for those from Guatemala and no different for those from El Salvador.

Table 2. Characteristics of Sons/Daughters in Household Ages 40 and Below Who Migrated to the United States as Minors, by Country

	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Nicaragua</i>	<i>Costa Rica</i>	<i>Guatemala</i>	<i>El Salvador</i>
Unauthorized Migration on First Trip (%)	81.2	35.3*	12.9*	58.1*	72.3
Year of First US Trip (mean)	1994	1988*	1993	1992	1990*
Parents with Migration Experience (%)	52.6	61.2^	64.9*	11.6*	40.4
<i>Total N</i>	1,152	116	77	43	47

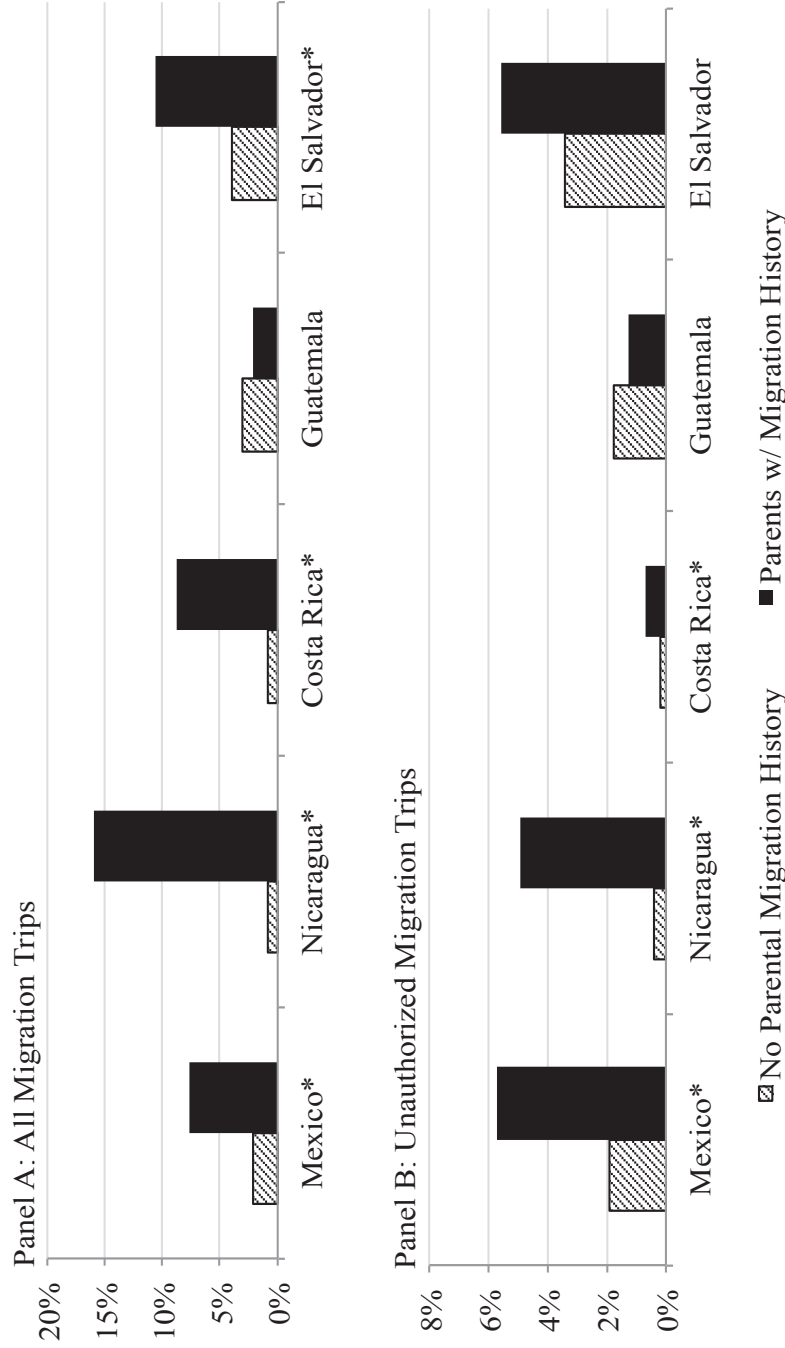
* Indicates value is significantly different ($p < .05$, two-tailed test; ^ $p < .10$, two-tailed test) from Mexico.

Note: Analysis limited to survey years 2000-2013 and respondents classified as a son/daughter of the household head that are age 40 or younger at the time of the survey.

National origin differences in parental migration experience are related to legal status. Figure 1 contains two panels; the top panel describes the percent of sons and daughters who reported making a first US trip as a minor by national origin and parental migration experience; the second describes these differences only for minors who were unauthorized. For those from Mexico, 2.1 percent of respondents whose parents had no history of migrating took a US trip as a minor; by comparison, 7.6 of respondents whose parents did have US experience migrated as a minor. Among those from Nicaragua, the gap between minor children with and without migrant parents was much bigger. Although approximately one percent of respondents with parents with no US experience made a first US trip as a minor, 16 percent of those who had migrant parents did so. Parents' migration history also increased the possibility that minor children from Costa Rica and El Salvador would make a first US trip, although it had no effect for those from Guatemala.

The bottom panel of Figure 1 reveals that parents' history differentiates the unauthorized migration chances of minor children from Mexico, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. For example, of all sons and daughters from Mexican households aged 40 years or less at the time of the survey and who made their first trip as a minor, approximately two percent migrated as minors on an unauthorized trip if their parents had no migration experience compared to more than twice that share (5.5 percent) for those with parents with migration experience. Parental migration history also significantly differentiated the shares of unauthorized migration of minor children from Nicaragua and Costa Rica, although levels for the latter were very small.

Figure 1. Percent of All Sons/Daughters Reporting US Migration Trip as a Minor (Age < 18) by Parental Migration History



* Indicates statistically significant ($p < .05$, two-tailed test; ^ $p < .10$, two-tailed test) within-country difference between respondents with and without parental migration history.

Note: Analysis limited to survey years 2000-2013 and respondents classified as son/daughter of the household head and age 40 or younger at the time of the survey.

The findings suggest some interesting differences by legal status, period of entry, and parental migration. First, parental migration affects children's migration. Whether we consider all child migrants or only those making a first unauthorized US trip, their ties to parents with prior or current migration history translate into significantly more migration. The gaps are especially large for Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Mexico (in that order) among those making a trip as a minor child. For those minors making an unauthorized trip, the gap between children with and without parental migration is statistically significant and notably different only for Nicaragua and Mexico. Given that the overall percentages of respondents who reported having migrated as children are relatively low and range from only two to five percent across countries (see Panel B of Table 2), the results in Figure 1 indicate that for Mexico, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, there is a strong link between parental migration and the likelihood that a minor child will migrate to the United States.

To examine whether these differences hold net of other factors, Table 3 presents regression models that predict whether or not a child makes a first US trip up through age 17. The first set of columns refers to all first trips, whereas the next two sets of columns refer to authorized and unauthorized trips. Results for all first trips suggest that the likelihood of migrating varies by children's period of entry. Among those entering in the 1987-96 period, the likelihood of migrating is higher than in the pre-1987 period. This finding suggests that children's migration was linked to IRCA's amnesty program, although children were far less likely than their parents—especially fathers (Donato 1993)—to regularize their status during this period. By comparison, children's likelihood of making a first trip drops in 1997-2011, which reflects growing restrictions on all immigrants during this time.

Coefficients for parents' migration experience clearly show that it is linked to children's migration. Compared to children whose parents had no US experience, those with migrant parents (either in the past or present) were much more likely to make a first US trip. Girls were much less likely than boys to migrate, and older children were more likely than younger ones to migrate. Community type also matters; compared to children from metropolitan areas, the likelihood of children migrating was higher in small urban areas and isolated ranchos in rural areas.

Comparison of the next two sets of models reveals a very different process of first-trip migration for children making authorized versus unauthorized trips. Yet there is one exception: it refers to effects for parents' migration history. Whether we consider children's authorized or unauthorized first trips, children are much more likely to migrate in the year their parents migrate, and they are also more likely to migrate if their parents migrated in the past, relative to children whose parents have never migrated.

However, differences in time period are much larger for children's making unauthorized first US trips. Similar to the model for all trips, the likelihood of making a first unauthorized trip is highest during the amnesty period, relative to the pre-1987 period. The likelihood turns negative in 1997-2011. Among children making their first authorized trip, the only effect is negative and marginally significant (at $p < .10$) for the 1997-2011 period.

Among the remaining effects, gender matters for children's unauthorized first trips but not for authorized ones. Girls were significantly less likely than boys to make a first unauthorized trip. Age effects were also different across the two models. Although children

Table 3. Results of Logistic Regression Predicting First US Migration Trip, Ages 0-17

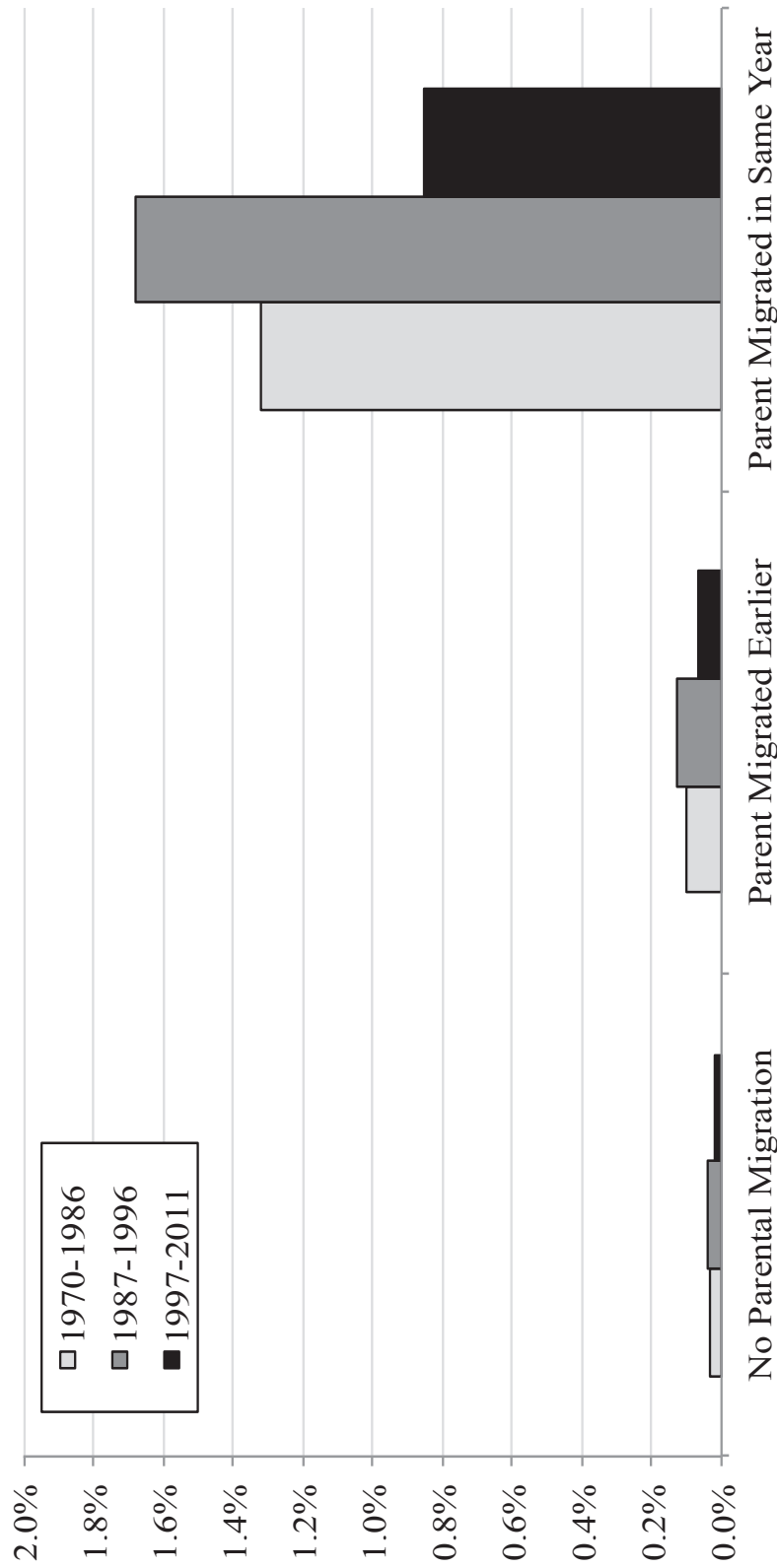
Variable	<i>All Trips</i>		<i>Authorized</i>		<i>Unauthorized</i>	
	B	SE ^a	B	SE ^a	B	SE ^a
Period (pre-1987=reference)						
1987-1996	0.19 [^]	0.10	-0.07	0.17	0.25*	0.12
1997-2011	-0.40**	0.12	-0.39 [^]	0.21	-0.44**	0.14
Parent Migration History (none=reference)						
Parent Migrated Earlier	1.34**	0.10	2.31**	0.30	1.20**	0.10
Parent Migrated in Same Year	4.15**	0.10	5.69**	0.29	3.75**	0.11
Gender						
Female (male=reference)	-0.61**	0.07	-0.16	0.14	-0.79**	0.09
Age in Years (0-1=reference)						
2-3	0.04	0.15	0.11	0.24	-0.00	0.19
4-5	-0.04	0.16	-0.66*	0.32	0.18	0.18
6-7	-0.29	0.18	0.05	0.27	-0.53*	0.24
8-9	-0.16	0.18	-0.02	0.29	-0.24	0.23
10-11	-0.06	0.18	0.20	0.29	-0.22	0.24
12-13	0.56**	0.16	0.46	0.29	0.62**	0.20
14-15	1.74**	0.14	0.95**	0.27	1.99**	0.16
16-17	2.80**	0.13	1.36**	0.28	3.13**	0.16
Community (metropolitan area=reference)						
Small Urban Area	0.30*	0.13	0.19	0.23	0.33*	0.15
Town	0.11	0.13	-0.69**	0.26	0.36*	0.15
Rancho	0.24 [^]	0.13	-0.02	0.24	0.34*	0.16
Constant	-7.82**	0.16	-9.72**	0.32	-8.12**	0.20
Person Years (N)	400,612		388,721		398,184	
Pseudo R ²	0.258		0.265		0.250	

**p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.10

^a Robust standard errors that adjust for within-individual cluster correlation.

aged 14-15 and 16-17 were more likely to make a first trip than younger ones, irrespective of legal status, these coefficients were much larger for unauthorized trips. In addition, among children crossing without authorization, those aged 12-13 were also significantly more likely to make a first US trip. Finally, compared to large metropolitan areas, children from small urban areas, towns, and rural ranchos were more likely to make a first unauthorized trip.

Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Unauthorized First US Migration Trip by Parental Migration History and Period, Ages 0-17



Note: Probabilities generated from logistic regression model displayed in Table 3, holding all other variables at their means; in Panel C, probability for 1997-2011 period is statistically different ($p < .05$, two-tailed test) from previous periods.

Figure 2 presents predicted probabilities of children making a first unauthorized trip from Mexico by parental migration history and period of entry. These probabilities were calculated from coefficients in the unauthorized model in Table 3. Figure 2 shows that, while the chances that children make an unauthorized trip are low, children's migration is clearly tied to their parents. Net of other factors, the chances that children make a first unauthorized trip are higher for those whose parents crossed in the same year. In addition, the chances were highest in 1987-96, followed by the 1970-86 period, and lowest in 1997-2011.

To make the results of this analysis even more tangible, we used the model coefficients in Table 3 to generate predicted probabilities of children making a first legal and unauthorized trip and from these probabilities, we derived a set of life tables to compute the cumulative probability of children's legal and unauthorized migration by age 17. Table 4 presents the cumulative probability that children would migrate by age 17—with and without authorization—for the three time periods and across the three different states of parental migration.

Table 4. Cumulative Probabilities of First US Migration Trip by Parental Migration History and Legal Status

	<i>No Parental Migration</i>	<i>Parent Migrated Earlier</i>	<i>Parent Migrated in Same Year</i>
<i>Panel A. All Trips</i>			
1970-1986	.020	.074	.692
1987-1996	.024	.089	.755
1997-2011	.013	.051	.555
<i>Panel B. Authorized Trips</i>			
1970-1986	.001	.012	.315
1987-1996	.001	.012	.298
1997-2011	.001	.008	.226
<i>Panel C. Unauthorized Trips</i>			
1970-1986	.019	.063	.537
1987-1996	.024	.079	.621
1997-2011	.012	.041	.398

Note: Results generated from regression models in Table 3.

These results show what would happen if a child born in Mexico were to go through their seventeenth year of life subject to the rates of out-migration prevailing in different years. Overall, irrespective of legal status, there are two noteworthy findings. First, children

with parents migrating in the same year have much larger chances of making a first trip than children with parents who never migrated or those whose parents migrated earlier. The chance that a child makes a first US trip if his/her parents have no US experience ranges between 1 and 2 percent across the three periods of entry, but for those whose parents migrated in the same year, the chances are considerably larger (.692, .755, and .555 across the three periods). Second, the chances that children, by age 17, make a first trip are consistently higher for the 1987-96 period, when IRCA's amnesty program was implemented, but only for unauthorized trips. For example, the probability that a young child would make a first unauthorized US trip during the year his/her parent migrated was .537 in 1970-86, grew to .621 during the period when many Mexicans received amnesty, and then dropped to .398 in 1997-2011. These results, when taken together, indicate that the overall likelihood of child migration from Mexico has substantially decreased for children with and without parents with US experience. Moreover, children's lifetime chances of making a first unauthorized trip shift across different periods of entry.

Discussion

Although the data we examine here do not include the child migrants who arrived at the US-Mexico border in 2014, they do offer some insight into the mechanisms by which individuals migrate as minors. In particular, our findings indicate that the migration of children is closely linked to that of parents, and that a minor child is significantly more likely to go on a first US trip if their parent has US migration experience. Rather than support the hypothesis that child migrants are independent rational actors, this finding lends support to the idea that child migrants are incorporated into the migration process via their ties to families.

Our analysis of child migration from Mexico, in particular, highlights the interconnections of migration between parents and children. Although the overall likelihood of a Mexican child making a first US trip is quite low, it is practically non-existent for children whose parents have no US experience and it significantly increases for children with migrant parents. Furthermore, while annual rates of Mexico-US immigration have declined over the past decade (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012), the Central American immigrant population has grown rapidly (Stoney and Batalova 2013).¹⁵ These trends suggest continued growth of Central American immigration in the future, which implies that the linkages between migrant parents and their children in communities of origin will continue to be a part of the Central American migration landscape for years to come (see also Massey, Durand and Pren 2014). Thus, we recommend that discussions of children's migration should be rooted in a larger discussion about the opportunities that these minors have for family reunification and access to legal immigration.

¹⁵ Between 2000 and 2010, Central American immigrants grew faster than any other Latin American region. In the last three decades, the numbers of Central American immigrants have nearly tripled from 1.1 million to more than 3 million (Stoney and Batalova 2013). During the 2000s, after Mexico, the top national origins for unauthorized immigrants in the US are El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and this population grew faster than that from Mexico (Hofer, Rytina, and Baker 2012). Finally, immigrants from Central American nations have been the primary recipients of Temporary Protected Status (Wasem and Ester 2010).

As migrant human capital has grown in recent decades between the United States and Central America, Congress has been unable to pass comprehensive immigration policy reform. The existing policy regime has significant shortcomings, especially with respect to protections for child migrants and family reunification. Therefore, the number of unaccompanied minors recently apprehended at the border should not be surprising. Although the structural conditions leading to out-migration are related to high levels of poverty, violence in communities of origin, and smugglers who promote migration to children, the rising number of children from Central America and Mexico are part of widespread migration networks and a long-standing reliance on immigrant workers in the United States. It is time to recognize that these children need protections in the form of permanent legal status to reunify with their families. If the United States cannot pass comprehensive immigration reform, at minimum it should provide for the children of immigrants it readily employs.

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