The end of Mexican migration:
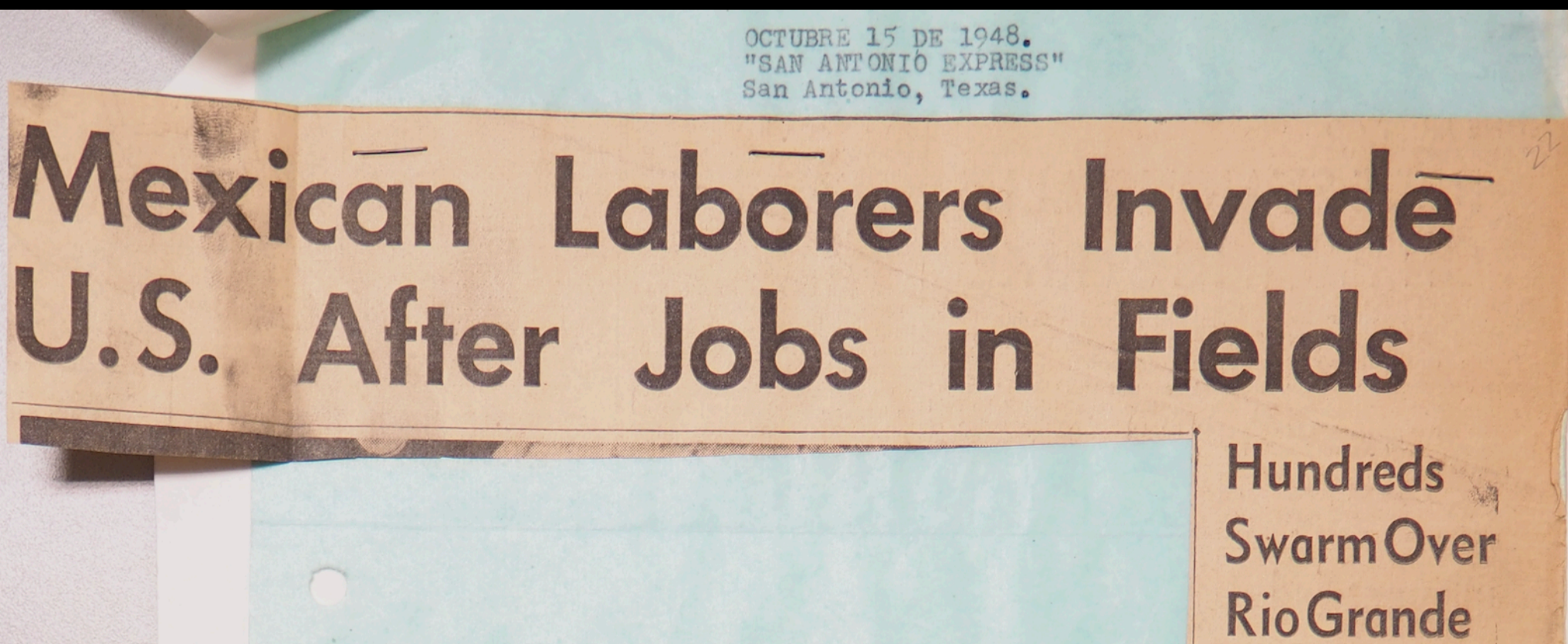## A century of durable patterns and (mostly) failed policies

LM García y Griego

Associate Professor
Departments of History
  and Chicana and Chicano Studies
University of New Mexico

Has a century-long mass migration ended?

A. **Goals of this presentation**
- Summarize major historical patterns 1920-2020
- Assess the relative importance of
  - economic opportunity
  - social networks
  - government policies
- Economy recovered; migration did not. Implications?
- Trump's impact on border migration

OCTUBRE 15 DE 1948.
"SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS"
San Antonio, Texas.

Mexican Laborers Invade U.S. After Jobs in Fields

Hundreds Swarm Over Rio Grande

Major patterns, 1

I. Early Mexican migration: Replacing European immigration with a difference

   A. Labor migration driven only in part by economic opportunity
- Role of labor contractors
- War time guestworkers

   B. U.S. immigration laws & Europeans, 1921-1924
- Mexicans outside quota

   C. Administrative restriction
- 1920s, 1940-1965

Major patterns, II

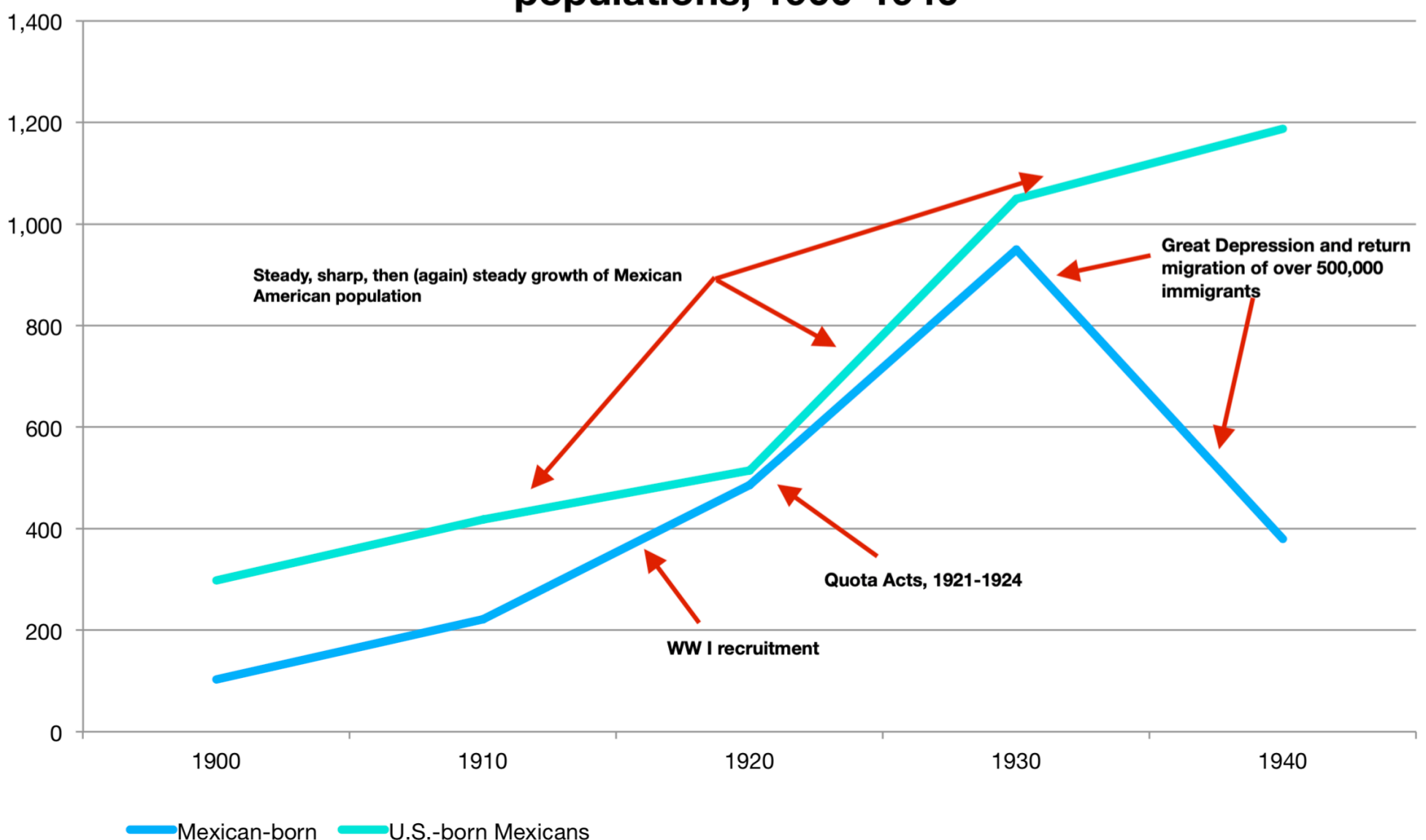II. Unauthorized migration: illegal entries, expulsions, deportations

   A. Border controls informal until 1924, Border Patrol

- Evolution of immigration enforcement, 1924-1929

   B. Depression era returns: more than meets the eye

- County governments, Mexican govt cooperation
- Deportation scares;
- Mexicans that remain ➡ Mexican Americans

Estimates of Mexican immigrant and Mexican American populations, 1900-1940

Steady, sharp, then (again) steady growth of Mexican American population

Great Depression and return migration of over 500,000 immigrants

Quota Acts, 1921-1924

WW I recruitment

Mexican-born   U.S.-born Mexicans

Major patterns, III

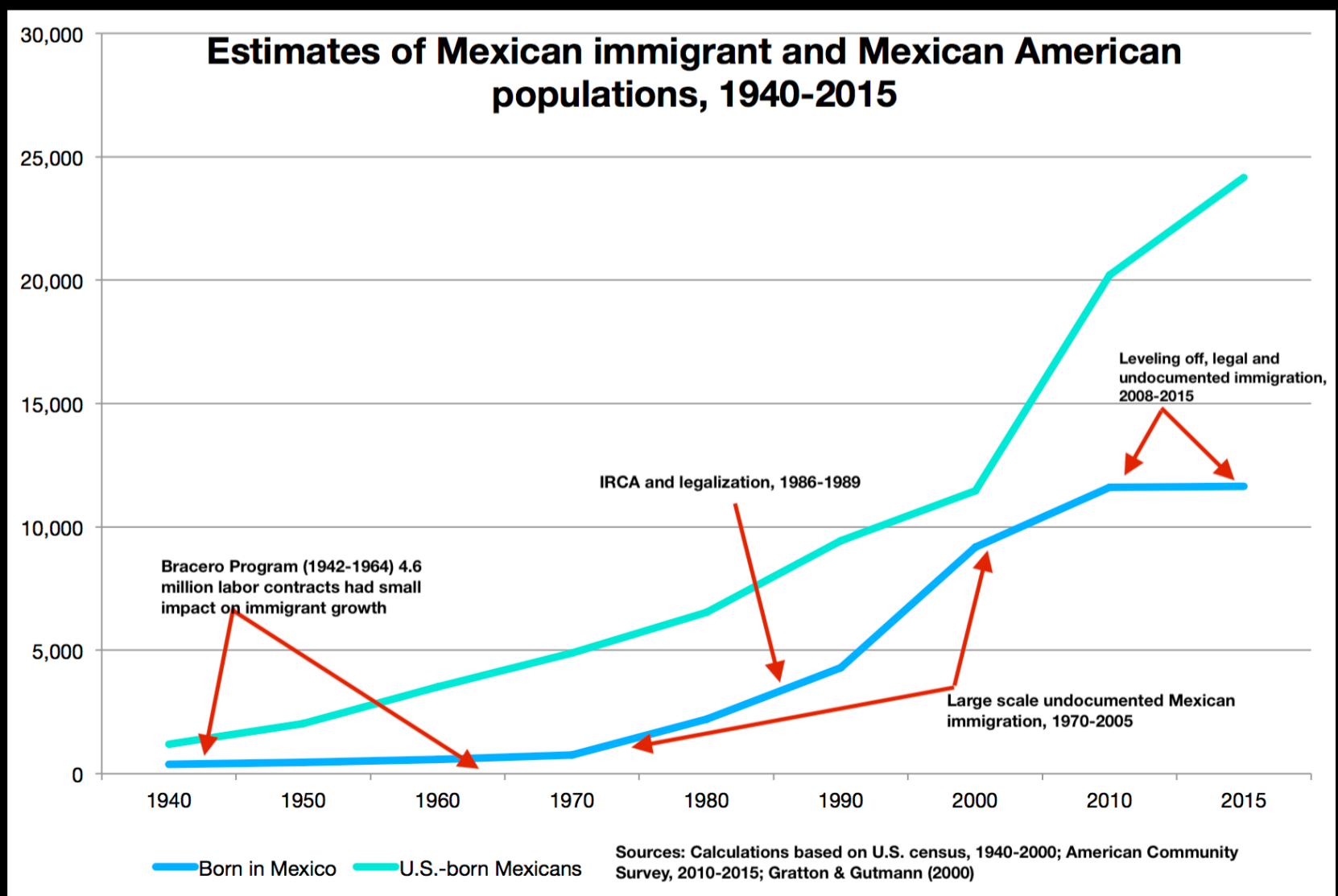III. Mass Mexican migration, 1965-2008

A. Post 1965 two related patterns
- Unauthorized migration post Bracero Program
- Growth of legal immigration & U.S.-born MexAmericans

B. Immigration and Immigrant policies
- Immigration and Reform and Control Act, 1986
- California Proposition 187

C. Growth and levelling off
- Net immigration halts after 2008
- Latinos largest ethnic minority

Estimates of Mexican immigrant and Mexican American populations, 1940-2015

Bracero Program (1942-1964) 4.6 million labor contracts had small impact on immigrant growth

IRCA and legalization, 1986-1989

Leveling off, legal and undocumented immigration, 2008-2015

Large scale undocumented Mexican immigration, 1970-2005

Sources: Calculations based on U.S. census, 1940-2000; American Community Survey, 2010-2015; Gratton & Gutmann (2000)

Born in Mexico — U.S.-born Mexicans

Major patterns, IV

Summing up historical patterns

A. **Economic trends in U.S. major impact on migration trends**
   - Wartime demand; economic depression & recession
   - Mexican economic trends minor impact

B. **Some non economic pressures critical**
   - Labor recruitment
   - Social networks: unauthorized migration ➜ legal immigration; family migration

C. **Immigration and immigrant policy impacts**
   - Policies can easily stimulate migration; have little impact on reducing it
   - IRCA legalization had major impact on permanent settlement; so did 1930s repatriation
   - Hostility to Mexicans in CA, AZ seem to have pushed Mexican immigrants elsewhere

The end of Mexican migration?

Decline in Mexican unauthorized ~ 100K/yr; zero net growth Mexican immigrant population

A. Pew Hispanic Center estimates: decline of Mexican unauthorized population since 2007
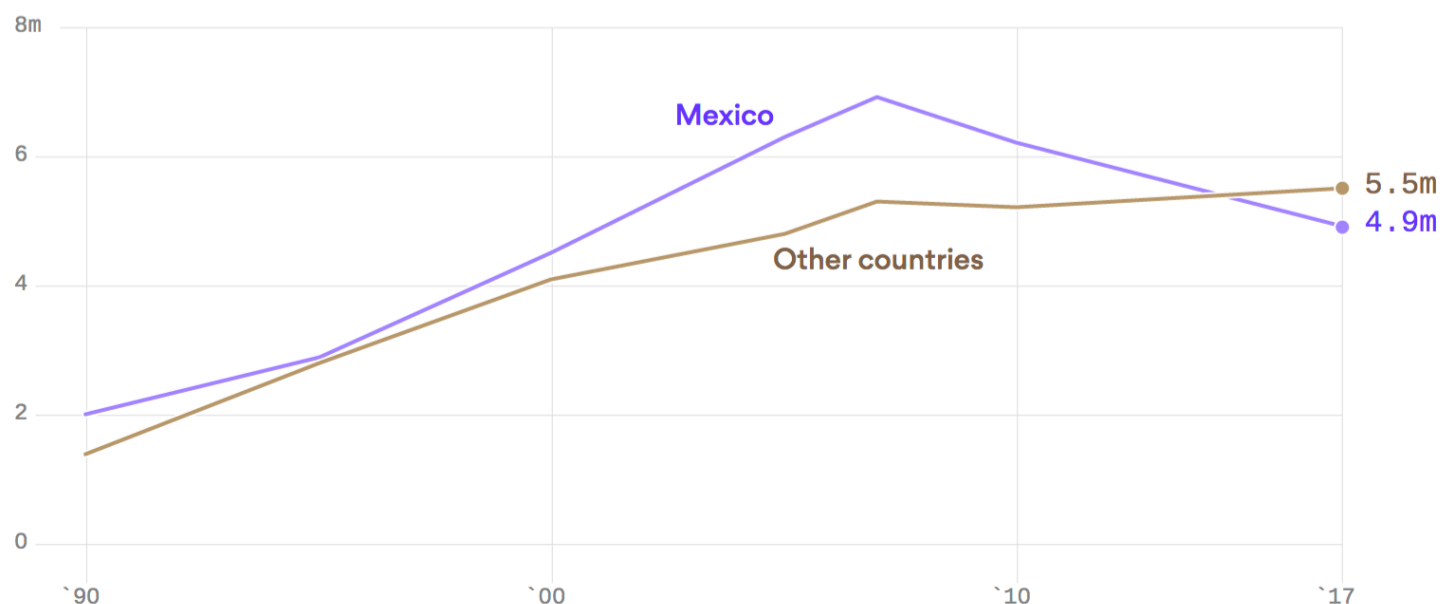- Components of change: returns to Mexico
- Change in status of unauthorized to legal immigrant
- Small numbers new unauthorized immigrants still arrive

B. Most plausible hypothesis
- Labor force replacement by Central Americans
- 2009: 90% border apprehensions Mexicans; 2019 74% Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans

Most unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. are not Mexican

Number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. by country of origin

1990 to 2017

Mexico

Other countries

8m

6

4

2

0

5.5m

4.9m

`90     `00   `10     `17

Reproduced from a Pew Research Center study; Chart: Axios Visuals

Trump administration policies, I

Focus on Mexico

A. "Border wall"
- Original purpose of wall to reduce drug trafficking
- 386 miles fencing constructed during Trump term

B. Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA)
- Essentially a renewable 2-year stay of deportation
- Applied to children brought by parents as entered illegally ~ 750K, all nationalities

C. Successfully pressured Mexico re asylum
- 67K asylees stayed in Mexico awaiting hearings
- Limits on # applications accepted; adverse consequences for innocent errors

Trump administration policies, II

Policy and humanitarian disasters

A. **Muslim ban, January 2017**
- Court responses
- Travel ban extended to Nigeria in 2020

B. **Separating children of unauthorized immigrant parents April - June 2018**
- Therapists notes from interviews w children used against minors in deportation hearings
- Parents of 545 children still to be located

C. **"Special visas" for victims of human trafficking**
- Unsuccessful witnesses against traffickers now referred to deportation hearings
- Applications have dropped sharply

D. **Executive cuts on legal immigration**
- Refugee admissions 2016 - 110K; 2019 18K
- "Wealth test" for green card applicants, broadening definition of likely to become public charge
- Rejection of applications with minor errors

Challenges for the future

Changing immigration policy via executive action

A. Biden has promised concrete action re:
- Halting deportations temporarily
- Proposed legalization
- Re-instating DACA
- Repeal of Muslim travel ban
- Restoring Obama practices on asylum
- Ending family separation; task force to find missing parents

B. All Trump executive actions in theory can be undone; in practice some complicated
- Comment periods and court challenges
- Some components interdependent with others
- Will find uncooperative segments of ICE, ICS, CBP

C. But COVID & other issues higher priority
- Plus. . .significant change requires congressional support

D. Expect continued decline of Mex migration
- Other migration at border will continue