

Elite Expatriates?:
The Diminishing Occupational Prestige of Americans in Mexico

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American emigration is a growing phenomenon, with recent estimations placing between five and seven million Americans living abroad.¹ This population continues to grow as a life outside of the United States becomes not only more accessible but more attractive as well. The ease of global travel and connectivity are certainly spurring the movement of all populations around the world, and the American population is not averse to this trend. Despite this, American emigration is almost absent from the literature all together. Few studies of Americans living abroad have been conducted, but these find that American emigration will continue to increase.²

Mexico is home to more American-born people than any other country, a fact that also holds true for the number of Mexicans in the US. This opposite flow of Americans into Mexico has been growing exponentially, as seen in Table 1. By 2010, it had reached 739,918. Additionally, the number of American-born people as a percentage of Mexican's total foreign-born population is also on the rise. As of 2010, Americans made up roughly 76 percent of the non-native population in Mexico.

| Year | American-born Population | Mexico's Foreign-born Population | Percentage | Mexico's Population | Percentage |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1990 | 198,230 | 339,220 | 58.44% | 81,182,420 | 0.24% |
| 2000 | 358,299 | 519,707 | 68.94% | 97,014,867 | 0.37% |
| 2010 | 739,918 | 968,271 | 76.42% | 111,960,139 | 0.66% |

This increase is especially apparent in the younger American-born population. This may be the result of 'return migrants' bringing their American-born children back to Mexico. Theoretically, these return migrants were born in Mexico, had children in the United States that became US citizens by birth, and then returned to Mexico. The 2008 financial crisis and economic downturn in the United States could certainly explain a portion of this influx of emigration from the US.

The American-born population in Mexico is changing. One could surmise that the reason for emigration is likely undergoing a transformation and that the population may be changing in other ways as well. In thinking about this population, one must consider what American emigrants look like throughout the world. They are often thought of as *privileged* or *elite migrants*. Migration for these groups is voluntary and not the result of economic or social difficulties. American emigrants are often viewed as elite and Americans in Mexico, specifically, have been written about as a privileged group.⁴

¹ Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates?: Americans in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

² Sheila Croucher, "Americans Abroad: A Global Diaspora?," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2012).; Klekowski von Koppenfels, *Migrants or Expatriates?: Americans in Europe*.; Magdalena Rappl, "The Nature of American Emigration Cycles: A Qualitative Longitudinal Analysis," *National Social Science Journal* 33, no. 2, (2010): 141-151.

³ Minnesota Population Center. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International: Version 6.3* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014.

⁴ Sheila Croucher, "Migrants of privilege: The political transnationalism of Americans in Mexico," *Identities* 38, no. 4 (2009): 463-491.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Changes in the demographic makeup of the American-born population in Mexico and potential changes to the reason for migration beg the question: “*Are native-born Americans in Mexico that were living in the US in 2005 ‘elite migrants’?*” This question is the basis of this research project. The American-born population in Mexico appears to be changing, but is there statistical evidence to support this?

Considering this research question, an additional question is raised: *How can elite status be measured?* Elite status itself cannot be measured, but measurements of similar indicators of social and economic status can be measured. Occupational prestige can serve as a tool for measuring social and economic status. It has been found to be an effective measure of social position.⁵ For the purposes of understanding how the group has changed, and in an effort to determine if the select population appeared more prestigious at one time in the past than another, this study will use data from three points in time using three Mexican Census datasets, those from 1990, 2000, and 2010.

To investigate the research question, I use the hypothesis: The effect of being US born and a recent US emigrant on occupational prestige has changed across the censuses. Utilizing OLS regression, this hypothesis was measured using identical variables for each census to allow for comparison of the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables between the three points in time. This allowed for investigation into how the changes in the population alter the results of this model. Furthermore, to investigate the change in the effect of independent variables over the three points in time, the datasets were combined and included dummy variables for the census year.

Data and Sample

For an analysis of occupational prestige in Mexico, I have used the Mexican Census—Mexico’s General Census of Population and Housing (*Censo General de Población y Vivienda*). Using data from the census for 1990, 2000, and 2010, for which the public use microdata samples (PUMS) are available through the Integrated Public use Microdata Series, International (IPUMS-International) from the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota. IPUMS-International has organized and harmonized the data for these three censuses, which has allowed me to focus on numerous variables for occupation, country of birth, and migration status.

The Mexican Census PUMS are samples of the population at 10% in 1990, 10.6% in 2000, and 10% in 2010. Frequency weights were provided for the dataset and were used in all tabulations, frequency tables, and regressions.

Observations for each dataset were limited to those at age eighteen or older who were employed. This was done because occupational prestige requires employment. Eliminating the young population additionally avoids problems of overrepresentation of the US-born in Mexico who migrate without much agency and paints a clearer picture of who the adult (and more agential) migrants are in the country. Non-American born individuals were included in the dataset to investigate the effect of being born in the US. The population (after applying frequency weights) that met these criteria was 20,056,330 in 1990; 29,660,607 in 2000; and 37,295,516 in 2010. After combining the three datasets, the total population was 87,012,453.

Measures

The dependent variable in this research is occupational prestige, which was converted from the International Standard Categorization of Occupations of 1988 (ISCO-88). ISCO-88 is standard across all census data available through IPUMS-International. It contains nine categories of occupation. The categories were assigned a Standard International Occupational Prestige (SIOP)

⁵ Brendan Mullan, “The Impact of Social Networks on the Occupational Status Of Migrants.” *International Migration* 27, no. 1 (1989): 69–86.

score based on the 1996 article by Ganzeboom and Treiman.⁶ The nine ISCO-88 categories, listed in order of decreasing SIOP score, are: professionals; legislators, senior officials, and managers; technicians and associate professionals; crafts and related trades worker; clerks; skilled agricultural and fishery workers; plant and machine operators and assemblers; service workers and shop and market sales; and elementary occupations. These scores ranged from 62 for professionals to 21 for elementary workers. The average SIOP score for employed people over 18 in Mexico for the three points in time were nearly identical (37.03 in 1990; 36.68 in 2000; 35.98 in 2010), but was decreasing for the American-born population (41.31 in 1990; 41.34 in 2000; 19.04 in 2000) and even more so for the American-born population in Mexico that was in the US five years prior to the census (42.71 in 1990; 42.77 in 2000; 38.17 in 2010).

The major independent variables for this research are *country of birth* and *migration status*, which categorizes country of residence five years prior to the census. Each was recoded into dummy variables. The former was recoded as a dummy variable for being born in the United States. The latter was recoded as a dummy variable for living in the United States five years before the census. Other controlling variables were sex, years of schooling, and age.

To test the hypothesis, the datasets were combined and a variable was created to control for the year of the census. In the combined dataset, a dummy variable was created for each year of the census. This method of measurement was used to investigate the effect of each year.

Methods and Results

To test the hypotheses, I used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with an interaction term to test the hypothesis. The model tested the effect of being both US-born and a recent US emigrant on occupational prestige with an interaction term for the year of the census, which was treated as dummy variables with 1990 serving as the reference category. The hypothesis investigates the change in the effect of being both born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US on occupational prestige across the censuses. All coefficients $p < 0.01$ level. The results of the OLS regression are displayed in Table 2.

| Table 2. Unstandardized Coefficients for OLS Regression of the Effect of Being US Born & a Recent US Emigrant on SIOP with an Interaction Term for Census Year (1990 is reference) | |
|---|--------------|
| | Coefficients |
| US born & recent US emigrant | 1.1642 |
| 2000 Census | -1.8404 |
| 2010 Census | -3.9104 |
| US born & recent US emigrant X 2000 Census | 0.4851 |
| US born & recent US emigrant X 2010 Census | -1.4368 |
| Years of schooling (centered at 9) | 1.1070 |
| Sex (1 = Female) | -1.2471 |
| Age (centered at 37) | 0.1199 |
| Constant | 39.7724 |
| R-squared | 0.2454 |
| N | 87,012,453 |
| All coefficients are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level | |

In 1990, having been born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US increased an

⁶ Harry B. G. Ganzeboom & Donald J. Treiman, "Internationally Comparable Measures of Occupational Status for the 1988 International Standard Classification of Occupations," *Social Science Research* 25, no. 3 (1996): 201–239.

individual's predicted occupational prestige score by 1.1642 units when controlling for education, sex, and age. In 2000, this effect increased by 0.4851. The total effect of having been born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US in 2000 was 1.6493, which was calculated by finding the sum of the main effect of being US born and a recent US emigrant and the interaction term for this year. In 2000, having been born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US increased an individual's predicted occupational prestige score by 1.6493 units when controlling for education, sex, and age. The effect was very different for the 2010 census. In 2010, the effect of having been born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US was 1.4368 units smaller than in 1990. The effect of having been born in and a recent emigrant from the US in 2010 was -0.2726, which was found by summing the effect of being US born and a recent US emigrant and the interaction term for this year. In 2010, having been both born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US decreased an individual's predicted occupational prestige score by 0.2726 units when controlling for education, sex, and age. This regression shows that the effect of having been born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US is different across the censuses and in 2010 that effect has become negative.

Conclusion

This data analysis was conducted in an effort to answer the question "*Is the American-born population still elite?*" This produced interesting results, which are very relevant to the research question and the investigation of the changing population of Americans in Mexico. The hypothesis, which states "The effect of being US born and a recent US emigrant on occupational prestige has changed across the censuses," was supported by the OLS regression used to test the effect of being US born and a recent US emigrant across the censuses. The differential effect for 2010 was so different than in 1990 that for the 2010 census, being born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US actually *decreases* an individual's predicted occupational prestige score. This finding shows that the effect of being both born in the US and a recent emigrant from the US is changing across the censuses and has a negative effect on occupational prestige in 2010.

The hypothesis was supported, however, this study did not necessarily find a causal relationship. Though it appears that being born in the US and a recent US emigrant has a direct effect on occupational prestige, the data does not necessarily suggest that this is a causal relationship. Nevertheless, the findings are interesting. The findings show that the US-born population of in Mexico is changing in terms of (occupational) prestige and that education, sex, and age do not completely explain this change. Further analysis of this data could find that an additional characteristic of the population better explains the change in the population.

Additionally, this study has limitations that could skew the findings. As this analysis focuses on comparing three points in time, it does not account perfectly for changes in the economy or changes in prestige among occupations. Secondly, this study focuses on comparing the US-born population in Mexico to the rest of the Mexican population. Neither group is stagnant. What may appear to be a decrease in the prestige of the US-born recent US emigrant population could be an increase in the prestige of the Mexican population.

Despite these limitations, this study finds that the American-born population in Mexico is changing in new and interesting ways. The reason for this change is not completely evident, but this study can serve as a tool to support further analysis of this group. Furthermore, the findings here show that population leaving the US is not stagnant. Though this study focuses on a group in one country, it shows that American emigrants are a changing population and perhaps they are less privileged and elite than previously theorized. The research question stated above asked "*Are native-born Americans in Mexico that were living in the US in 2005 'elite migrants'?*" This study found that the population is becoming less prestigious and that being a being born in the US and having moved to Mexico from the US after 2005 decreases an individual's occupational prestige. These findings show that researchers should not necessarily label Americans in Mexico as 'elite migrants', as the group's *eliteness*—at least in terms of occupational prestige—is diminishing.