

PEW HISPANIC CENTER
MEDIA BRIEFING
NEW ESTIMATES OF THE UNDOCUMENTED U.S.
POPULATION ON THE EVE OF THE BUSH-FOX SUMMIT

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MR. SURO: The three experts who wrote, did the actual calculations, will make some brief remarks. Then we'll open to questions and answers after that.

I'm just reminding everybody that this is embargoed for publication for dailies dated March 22nd. Otherwise for release at 12:01 a.m. Eastern Standard Time tonight, meaning right after midnight tonight, and I hope that works for everybody. If there are any questions, please call Dianne Saenz here, the Director of Communications, at 202.292.3304.

I'd like to talk very briefly about what I see, I think, are some of the highlights in this. Our goal is to provide some numbers that lay out the dimensions, demographically, of the policy matters that we all assume are going to be back on the agenda after the Bush-Fox meeting tomorrow, and as the report states, these are

estimates, subject to a range of variability. But they do give you some good orders of magnitude.

We've gone ahead and produced probably more detail on certain characteristics of the undocumented population, in part because over the last couple of years, the major estimates of the overall populations have been converging, just numbers from The Urban Institute, the Census Bureau's numbers, Frank Bean's numbers, and others, are all now in a fairly narrow range of roughly between 7 to 8.5 million people, and they're all pretty much within their estimates' margins of errors.

That's given us some confidence to push a little farther in terms of trying to understand the numbers along lines of how long people have been here, nationality and occupation.

Each of those factors is relevant to the policy discussions that began last year, and are likely now, again, to resume.

One of the key facts, I think, that marks this round of consideration of policy on the undocumented is slightly different from the 1980s when the 1986 law was adopted, and the discussion departs from an assumption that

the U.S. economy has an appetite and even a need for more workers than are available legally, and rather than trying to shut the door on illegal migration, the thrust of policy discussions now is to try and legalize or regularize it in some fashion.

The two basic policy methods that are under consideration are some sort of legalization or amnesty for people who are already here, and some sort of mechanism to ensure an ongoing source of workers, a regulated workforce beyond that.

These numbers cast some light on what the dimensions of those programs would be, and some of the demographic factors that would come up in designing those programs.

First of all, there's the basic question of whether there's going to be a Mexican program only for Mexican undocumented or whether it'll go beyond that to include the entire undocumented population.

Frank Bean has produced a range of estimates that give you a pretty good idea of how that breaks up in terms of Mexicans versus Central Americans, and then all others, and what you see is that if you did a program that solely

legalized Mexican undocumented, you would have a residual illegal population of at least 3 million people who would not be part of a legalization program.

The other likely policy consideration is what kind of eligibility requirements there would be for people in a legalization program. If we take the last amnesty as a model, enacted in 1986, and went into effect in 1987; it required people to show that they had been living in the United States before 1982, so roughly a five-year, at least a five-year residency requirement.

Given the very rapid growth of the undocumented population during the latter part of the '90s, that requirement would now leave a good 2 million undocumented outside of the program. That's about a quarter of the undocumented population which would not be captured by a legalization program with those kinds of requirements.

And finally, the other very interesting numbers, I think, are the breakdown of the unauthorized labor force by industry.

You can see that in certain sectors, not terribly surprising, restaurants for example, nearly 10 percent of the workforce is unauthorized.

Even in big sectors like manufacturing, you're talking about 5 percent or more of the workforce being unauthorized.

We have very significant chunks of the American labor force that are undocumented at this point, and any program that attempted to produce guest workers or temporary workers filled those slots in the peak. But these are all obviously very large numbers.

And finally, Phil Martin of the University of California at Davis has done some very extensive work for us on the kind of agricultural programs we're likely to see, programs for agricultural workers.

Again, as with the industrial sectors, one of the main points there is that even if you legalize the existing undocumented population, within a few years you'll end up probably with undocumented workers still in the U.S. in a temporary worker program. Depending upon how the eligibility requirements are determined, you could, in a legalization program end up not effectively wiping the slate clean but leaving a substantial residual population of undocumented people.

Now I'm going to turn the telephone over, first, to Frank Bean, at the University of California at Irvine, and he's going to talk about the broad calculations of the undocumented population for a few minutes. Then Lindsay Lowell, here at the Pew Hispanic Center, the Director of Research, is going to talk about the industry aspects, and then finally Phil Martin from the University of California at Davis will talk about his findings in terms of agricultural workers.

Frank, are you there? Do you want to take over?

DR. BEAN: I'm here. This is Frank D. Bean. I use my middle initial for, if anybody needs the full name for whatever reason, and I'm Director of the Center For Research on Immigration Population and Public Policy, here at the University of California at Irvine.

And working with Jennifer Van Hook and Karen Woodrow-Lafield, we put together--and they were part of this research team--we put together these estimates for Roberto Suro, Lindsay Lowell and the Pew Hispanic Center.

They are essentially updates of work that we had done for the Mexico-U.S.--

[Interruption.]

DR. BEAN: Hello. We've got some interference, Roberto.

MR. SURO: Keep going.

DR. BEAN: Okay. --updates of some work we did for the Mexico-U.S. Binational migration study about six or seven years ago. Roberto has hit the highlights. We estimate that there are in 2001 about 7.8 million unauthorized persons total in the United States, of which about 4.5 million are from Mexico, about 1.5 million from other Central American countries and about 1.8 million from all remaining countries.

When we break--One of the most interesting things is breaking out the Mexican origin group by how long they've been in the U.S. and we estimate that about 2.4 million persons have been here ten years or longer, and of course as we go to smaller and smaller, shorter and shorter time frames, the numbers go up, and about 3.5 million persons from Mexico would be eligible for any kind of regularization program. If five years of residency were required for eligibility, then these numbers are higher in the case of the total population.

Why don't I stop there, and I'd be happy to take any questions or comments as far as the estimating procedures are concerned, or other figures as far as the total unauthorized, by how long they've been in the country and so forth.

MR. SURO: Okay.

DR. BEAN: Should I add anything else, Roberto?

MR. SURO: I think that's good. Frank's paper is up on our web site along with our summary report. It's located at www.pewhispanic.org if you haven't seen it. Now I'm going to turn it over to Lindsay Lowell.

DR. LOWELL: Hello. This is Lindsay Lowell. I'm Director of Research at the Pew Hispanic Center. I'm just going to talk about the estimates we came up with for the working population by industry, and Frank did the hard work. You have to start hitting it with total numbers, and that's the best way to start with these estimates. So he gave us a total population group. Well, the question is about workers for the population and not folks who are too young to be in the labor force, and not everybody who's old enough is in the labor force.

There is of course the distribution by industry. We're confident we have good proxy measures. For example, those immigrants coming in from Mexico and Central America over the last decade, well over the majority are unauthorized. So using their labor force and industry characteristics, we get a pretty good idea where unauthorized workers who arrived in the last ten years would actually be working.

But then the question becomes, how about ten years and further back? Ten years and further back is a mixed population of folks who have been legalized, and in fact a good deal of that population in the United States is in fact authorized, a bigger share. The question became how to characterize that population and we looked at a number of sources and ways of computing, and decided that the best was actually looking at the 1992 distribution of newly legalized workers.

They had been in the country about 15 years, and from other information it doesn't look like a large shift over time. And what you really see when you look at this kind of industry breakdown and shift over time, though, is a movement of new unauthorized workers from agriculture and

construction out into different sectors of the urban economy, including manufacturing and, increasingly, service jobs.

So that's how we've modeled this data. I can be much more precise if there are questions. The idea is to reduce the total down to the unauthorized working population, those in the labor force, and that's what these estimates are based upon. I leave agriculture out because agriculture has unique characteristics, and that's what Phil's going to talk about next.

DR. MARTIN: Okay. I'm Phil Martin, professor of agricultural economics at the University of California at Davis, and there are three important points to keep in mind about the undocumented in agriculture.

First, when people talk about farm workers, the definition of a farm worker is anyone employed for at least one day of wages on U.S. farms. There are about 2.5 million people employed for wages on the nation's farms, and many of them do not work year-round. Many of them work only seasonally.

In fact, the majority of fully employed on U.S. farms work under 120 days per year. So when we look at

those 2.5 million farm workers, the best estimate is that about half of the people who were employed at some time during the year for wages are not authorized to work in the United States.

The percentage is a little higher in crop agriculture, that is, harvesting fruits and vegetables, because those jobs tend to be seasonal, a little lower in other types of agriculture because those jobs tend to be year-round, and offer the salary, rather than piece rate for hourly wages.

The second point is that if we look at that half of the workers, about 1.2 million workers are unauthorized, and somewhere between 50 and 70 percent would be eligible for earned legalization, depending on how many days of farm work they would have had to do in the preceding year.

Look at the requirement of 90 days of farm work: Then about half of the unauthorized would wind up being eligible. In 1986, the requirement was 90 days.

If the requirement was raised to 120 days, the percentage who would qualify would go down to about 40 percent, and if it were lowered to 60 days, then the percentage who would qualify would go up about 65 percent.

So clearly, the day's work requirement will affect the number of people who are eligible.

Then the third is that farm work is a job; it's not a career. Farms workers eventually get out of agriculture. The average job, the average tenure in agriculture as a farm worker is about ten years. So in a work force of 2.5 million, that means every year that work force has been pretty stable over the past two or three decades. Every year, we need about 250,000 new entrants, and farm work is one of the few occupations in which 99 percent of new entrants are born abroad.

It's very safe to say that the farm workers of tomorrow are growing up today, outside the United States, and that's why the issue is: On what terms should U.S. agriculture get access to those workers?

If newly legalized workers exit at the normal 10 percent rate, and we would need about 250,000 new entrants per year, they are currently 99 percent foreign born, we could imagine a lower exit rate if there were a legalization program, that is, people being required to continue working, and we could imagine a higher exit rate if the unemployment

rate was low, or if the demand for labor and services, or other types of sectors was high.

Those are the main points of looking at the agricultural sector.

MR. SURO: Okay. And again, Phil's paper, "Agricultural Workers and the Implications of Various Policy Proposals" is also on our web site, along with the Pew Hispanic Center's summary report, and Frank Bean's study. Lindsay Lowell will be posting additional numbers on industry breakdowns later this afternoon.

For questions, if you would please identify yourself clearly and say who you want to direct the question to. That would be helpful.