INTERDEPENDENCE IN THE U.S.-MEXICAN BORDERLANDS: AN IRRESISTIBLE DYNAMIC OR FRAGMENTED REALITY?

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June 1983

P-6889

The Rand Paper Series

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The Rand Corporation
Santa Monica, California 90406

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I. INTERDEPENDENCE IN THE U.S.-MEXICAN BORDERLANDS: AN IRRESISTIBLE DYNAMIC OR FRAGMENTED REALITY?[1]

INTRODUCTION

The growing American awareness of the interconnections binding the United States and Mexico are most keenly felt along the 2,000 mile border between the two countries. Indeed, one commentator, in light of what he views as the declining importance of traditional national and regional boundaries on the North American continent, heralds the emergence of "Mexamerica," a binational, bicultural, and bilingual regional complex in the borderland region of the United States and Mexico. He cites several developments as evidence of this phenomenon. First is the increasing intermingling of populations in the borderlands as evidenced by the tremendous growth of the Mexican-origin population on the U.S. side of the border. Second, Mexican food, fashion, and music are becoming increasingly pervasive north of the border as are American food, fashion, and music south of the border. Third, and particularly noteworthy, Spanish is now read and heard with increasing frequency not just in the barrios of the U.S., but also in advertisements, businesses, and schools (Garreau, 1981).

Although the popular awareness and, perhaps, even the desirability of this phenomenon decline as one moves north from the border, the phenomenon itself is in fact a byproduct of a long-standing series of interlocking economic, social, and cultural interests that are inextricably binding together the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. What is most novel about this phenomenon is its discovery by the U.S. media. This discovery, which is no doubt tied to America's increasing sensitivity to conflicts in Central America, our need for a stable oil supply, and the large influx of immigrants during a period of high unemployment, must strike many Mexicans as ironic given the pervasive and long-standing influence of American business and culture in Mexico. However, the phenomenon of borderland interdependence is, by now, a

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[1]This paper is a revised version of a presentation given at the Second Conference on Regional Impacts of U.S.-Mexican Economic Relations, May 25-27, 1983, Tucson, Arizona.

familiar topic of discussion among scholars and policymakers in both countries who, depending on their perspective, debate the degree of equality or inequality of that relationship.

This paper re-examines the phenomenon of borderlands interdependence in an attempt to distinguish the rhetoric from the reality. Focusing on the exchange relationships (socio-cultural, economic, and political) that promote interdependence as well as the characteristics and motives of the parties to the exchange, it reviews the current situation in the borderlands and considers longer-range trends and their implications both for the border and for the wider range of bilateral U.S. and Mexico relations.

INTERDEPENDENCE AND U.S.-MEXICAN RELATIONS

The general phenomenon of interdependence has been fostered by international events and developments since World War II that have produced tremendous increases in the flows of information, technology, capital, people, and cultural influences across national boundaries. Although primarily originating as flows of capital and technology responding to international disparities in the supply and mix of production factors that allow their more productive use elsewhere, once underway, such flows foster increases in other flows. Global exchanges of goods and technology, for example, promote transportation improvements that make it easier and cheaper to increase other flows. Thus, the flow of information through communication satellites runs in two directions. As it projects the poverty of various regions of the world into American living rooms, it also provides the people of those regions with a glance of American affluence and hence a motive for migrating. Moreover, once started, such flows often become self-perpetuating and, as a result, difficult to control. We see this in the sociology of immigrants' destination choices, whereby people tend to congregate in places where their friends and relatives have led the way--so-called chain migration. Finally, such flows serve multiple purposes and involve multiple actors with the result that they often have unanticipated and unintended consequences.

The general characteristics of global flows have direct implications for the nations involved in such transactions--implications that are especially pronounced in the case of the U.S. and Mexico, given the long-standing and wide-ranging flows of people, capital, and goods between these two nations. First, such flows result from interdependence and, in turn, foster its growth because all parties have a stake in the system of exchange. Although those stakes are not always equal and that imbalance can sometimes be exploited to the stronger party's advantage, by its very nature interdependence reduces any one nation's ability to regulate the system of flows or restrict their effects. Second, because they serve multiple interests and purposes, global flows have wide-ranging effects that cannot be restricted to a single dimension. Thus, the apparent interpenetration of American and Mexican social and cultural influences within the border region can be seen as an inevitable result of the system of flows of people, goods, tourists, information, etc., between these two countries. Moreover, the wide-ranging objectives served by these flows make it unlikely that either nation, even if it wanted to, could limit those effects.

THE CONTEXT OF U.S.-MEXICAN RELATIONS AT THE BORDER

These characteristics of global flows are most evident in the borderlands. Witness, for example, the diverse and mutually dependent character of economic relations along the border itself. Located in a terrain that is not well-suited for agriculture nor well-situated for industry, the borderlands have nurtured a vibrant system of economic exchange upon which residents on both sides have come to depend. The maquiladora plants, for example, provide jobs and incomes for Mexicans which, in turn, promote profits for American manufacturers and provide markets for American retailers. Characteristically, these twin plant arrangements, while established for one purpose, end up serving and promoting a much wider range of interests. Moreover, the transportation routes set up to foster these legitimate economic exchanges facilitate a much wider range of transactions, including U.S. contraband into Mexico and Mexican contraband and migrants into the U.S. Finally, efforts of both governments to restrict these respective flows have not been

notably successful. Even when they are, they often trigger a response by the other government. For example, when the Mexican government's drastic devaluation of the peso severely curtailed retail trade in American border cities, pressure by economic interests on the U.S. side of the border prompted President Reagan to promise to study the impact of devaluation on American retailers.

Such exchange networks are rarely limited simply to economic transactions. Indeed, an important distinguishing element of borderland interdependence is its propensity to promote social and cultural interpenetration across national boundaries. During the 1970s, for example, the four U.S. metropolitan areas in the border region grew three times more rapidly than the total U.S. population and much of that growth was fueled by their higher than average Hispanic populations (U.S. Census, 1981). Similarly, the Mexican municipios along the border have consistently grown faster than the country as a whole for several decades (Stoddard, 1978; Hansen, 1982). Moreover, 8 of the 12 largest U.S. cities in the borderlands have mayors with Hispanic surnames--a percentage far exceeding the national average (less than 8 percent of the U.S. population is of Hispanic origin). Even more important than such formal signs of interpenetration are the informal mixing of cultures such as businesses on both sides catering to nationals in both countries, the widespread use of both English and Spanish, and the casual familiarity displayed to the social customs of both nationalities in the borderlands.

While such signs of familiarity and acceptance do not entirely mask underlying tensions and occasional hostility, they do signal an altogether different attitude than prevailed less than twenty years ago when Carey McWilliams could accurately report that the Mexican-origin population in the United States was a "group so old it has been forgotten and so new that it has not yet been discovered" (McWilliams, 1964).

These changes implicitly signal an awareness among American businessmen and politicians that Mexican-Americans and Mexico can no longer either be taken for granted or ignored. Indeed, the long-coming recognition of the U.S.-Mexican connection has reached the point that, even in the face of the highest unemployment rates since the Depression,

no responsible politicians either along the border or in Washington have proposed anything like an "Operation Wetback" but instead have incorporated amnesty for the undocumented as an essential element of immigration reform.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF BORDERLANDS INTERDEPENDENCE

Despite the current blending of social and cultural influences in the borderlands, it remains to be seen whether this process will produce an organic binational, bicultural, and bilingual "Mexamerica" region. There are, for example, not two but at least three distinct cultures currently mixing in the border region: Mexican, Anglo, and Chicano. I use the modifier "at least" since none of the three can realistically be considered homogeneous. Given the multi-ethnic (and indeed multi-racial) character of the non-Hispanic population of the U.S., the notion of a homogeneous Anglo culture is obviously an abstraction. Similarly, there are notable differences between Hispanos in New Mexico, Chicanos in California, and Tejanos in Texas, who can, in turn, be differentiated from the Mexican population in each of those areas. The distinction between Chicanos and Mexicans is drawn here in terms of which nation is regarded as "home" (Browning and Rodriguez, 1982).

The distinction between Chicanos and Mexicans is particularly important because, as a population with a foot in both cultures, Chicanos might be expected to provide a natural bridge between Anglos and Mexicans. However, as de la Garza (1980) has suggested, this possibility seems unlikely. For example, when asked to identify their high priority issues, Chicanos place little emphasis on Mexican-U.S. relations per se; rather they stress issues that relate directly to their acceptance by the dominant Anglo society. Thus, employment discrimination, access to education, and pressures to abandon their language and culture are their paramount concerns (de la Garza, 1980).

One issue that might be expected to transcend the apparent gap between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals is immigration. Indeed, most Hispanic groups have joined in opposition to the pending immigration legislation (the Simpson-Mazzoli bill). However, this opposition seems to stem less from a concern with Mexico per se than from Chicanos' concern with their access to jobs and political power in

the U.S. As Chicanos have become more adept in the ways of the American political system, for example, they have realized, as have numerous immigrant groups before them, that American politics is played by the numbers. The more successful they are in building an active electoral constituency, the more effective they will be in exercising political power. This goal is clearly served by continued immigration from Mexico, but only to the extent that these immigrants become part of the American political process--a transformation that *sui generis* requires renunciation of their Mexican citizenship. Similarly, the vocal opposition of American Hispanics to the worker identification provisions of the current legislation relates to fears that those provisions will be used to deny them employment rather than to concern for undocumented workers. Indeed, the position of Chicanos towards the employment of the undocumented worker has been decidedly ambivalent (de la Garza, 1979).

Hispanic-Americans' opposition to the current immigration legislation is not solely based on political, and economic considerations, since there are distinct social and cultural advantages to be reaped from a continuation of the status quo. As was true for prior immigrant groups in the U.S., the on-going replenishment of the existing immigrant stock serves a central role in the maintenance of a distinctive Mexican-American cultural and social identity. The clearest example of these advantages is the maintenance of the native language--traditionally a very important vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of basic cultural values. Among all the immigrant groups to the United States, for example, the Germans were perhaps the most successful in maintaining the use of their native language from their initial settlement (in the early 18th century) until early into the 20th. Their success was in no small part attributable to the fact that Germany sent more immigrants to the U.S. during the 19th century than any other nation (Schlossman, 1982). As German immigration tailed off, so did the use of German among German-Americans.

The Mexican-Americans enjoy, of course, an advantage not shared by other immigrant groups--geographic adjacency. However, the current immigration legislation could limit that advantage by limiting the access of Mexican immigrants to the U.S. labor market.[2]

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[2]Interestingly, only one other non-English speaking immigrant

While language maintenance is clearly a central concern among Mexican-Americans as reflected by their strong support for bilingual education, the motivation for that support focuses less on identification with their former motherland, than on their desire to perpetuate what has become a distinctive Chicano culture. Although sharing a common ancestry and language with Mexicans, Chicanos have developed their own distinctive culture by blending their Mexican heritage with their American experience. Within certain border areas, for example, Chicanos have developed their own distinctive music and language patterns (Browning and Rodriguez, 1982), and, as Octavio Paz (1961) has pointed out, the "pachuco" is a distinctively Chicano phenomenon.

The differences between Chicanos and Mexicans increase noticeably among second and third generation Mexican-Americans since assimilation to American society occurs relatively rapidly among later generation Mexican-Americans (Jaffe et al., 1980). For example, among monolingual Chicanos a far greater percentage speak English than Spanish (Lopez, 1976) and the fertility of American-born Chicanos is much closer to that of native-born Anglos than to Mexican-born women (Jaffe et al.,. 1980). Moreover, on several key dimensions (e.g., residential location and earnings) Chicanos appear better integrated into U.S. society than other American minorities (Massey and Mullen, 1982). Indeed, Stolzenberg (1982) finds that after controlling for language skills among second and succeeding generations, Hispanic Americans perform as well in the labor market as Anglos with the same level of human capital.

This assimilation pattern is rooted in the dominance of English and Anglo cultural practices in America's social, political and economic life. As a result, Mexican migrants who come to the U.S. for upward mobility (as indeed most do) must adapt to Anglo patterns to advance. Such adaptation involves learning English as well as the social mores of the dominant culture. This situation contrasts sharply with that of Cuban immigrants in Miami where much of the commerce and the political

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group--French Canadians--shares the same advantage of adjacency, not to mention many other similarities and, although their numbers are substantially smaller, their experiences are remarkably similar to those

power is dominated by Spanish-speaking Cubans as well as with that of French Canadians in Quebec where the dominant social and cultural institutions are French. Such differences help explain the sharply different assimilation patterns of Cubans and French Canadians to what are otherwise similar Anglo cultures and suggest that the analogy of Mexican Americans in the borderlands to Cubans in Miami and French Canadians in Quebec--often cited by those who fear that a substantial influx of Hispanics into the U.S. will threaten the national cohesion of what is already an ethically diverse nation--is unlikely to hold in the borderlands.

The dominance of Anglo economic, political, and social institutions is, however, not the only factor creating ambivalence in the relationship between Chicanos and Mexicans. As Gutierriez (1973) has pointed out, Mexican officials have, in general, made little effort to cultivate a positive relationship between these two groups. Instead, for whatever reasons, the Mexican government has displayed what can be characterized as an essentially disparaging attitude towards Mexican-Americans. A clear example of this attitude was the reaction of Mexican officials and the Mexican press to former President Carter's appointment of a Hispanic, Dr. Julian Nava, to the ambassador's post in Mexico City.

In summary, while the Chicano population in the U.S. could serve to promote social-cultural understanding and acceptance in the border region by serving as a bridge between the Anglo and the Mexican national populations, the mutual ambivalence of Chicanos and Mexicans combined with the Chicanos' need to assimilate seems likely to inhibit that role. This point is especially important because the typical Anglo in the borderlands will come into much closer contact with Chicanos than with Mexican nationals. Those Chicanos are, of course, likely to speak English and to be more interested in making it economically than in promoting understanding between Anglos and Mexicans.

The typical contact between Anglos and Mexicans, even in the border region, is likely to be one of economic exchange (e.g., Mexicans dealing with Anglo tourists or Anglo businessmen catering to a growing Hispanic market). Such "gesellschaft" relationships are typically segmented and

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of Mexican-Americans.

formalized and unlikely to promote either a sense of community or a mutual understanding of alternative cultures except in the most narrow way. Furthermore, immigrants from Mexico, particularly the undocumented, often view themselves as sojourners, who enter the U.S. to earn, remit, and return and, as such, have little incentive to seek extensive contact with the Anglo population or culture. Indeed, with the proliferation of Spanish language television and radio stations, movie theaters, newspapers, et al., along the border, the undocumented immigrant who intends to return to Mexico has little reason to interact with Anglos other than for economic reasons.

This situation could change if an increasing fraction of the undocumented population settles permanently in the U.S.--a phenomenon that already appears to be occurring. Cornelius (1981) and Browning and Rodriguez (1982), for example, report an increasing percentage of families (who are likely to settle permanently) and a declining fraction of young single males (who are likely to return to Mexico) within the undocumented population. Moreover, by raising the cost of entry, a stricter border enforcement policy will increase the incentive to remain in the U.S. for longer periods and indirectly the percentage of undocumented who settle permanently in the U.S.

This apparent shift in the migration patterns of the undocumented is likely to continue for two certain and a third potential reason. First, it reflects a secular shift of undocumented workers out of seasonable agriculture work well suited for circular migration into year-round jobs in the urban service and manufacturing sectors. This shift reflects a long-run substitution of capital for labor which is likely to continue even without changes in immigration law. Second, rapid population growth combined with economic problems in Mexico will almost certainly continue to generate a labor surplus that cannot be effectively absorbed by the Mexican economy. Mexico's economy, for example, was unable to fully employ its growing labor force during the period of very rapid growth proceeding the recent economic crisis and is unlikely to do so soon after the crisis has passed. The third and potentially the most important reason for assuming settlement rates may increase is the distinct possibility of future labor shortages in the U.S. Although U.S. labor markets are currently very loose, demographic

factors could change this situation dramatically in the next decade (Butz et al., 1980).

The long-term effects of higher settlement rates for borderland interdependence are, however, uncertain. Traditionally, a large fraction of the undocumented migrants who eventually settle in the U.S. arrive with the intention of returning and thus make little effort either to learn English or to become familiar with Anglo culture. This limits their contact with the non-Hispanic population and helps, in part, explain the low naturalization rates even among legal permanent resident aliens from Mexico.[3] Indeed, as long as undocumented migrants face the possibility of deportation, they have little incentive to pursue a strategy of assimilation. Consequently, a higher settlement rate and even an explicit amnesty program will not of themselves facilitate the interaction among the Anglo and Mexican national population necessary to promote a socially and culturally integrated Mexamerica. Indeed, as long as Mexicans living in the U.S. are residentially and socially segregated from the non-Hispanic population, the result is more likely to be an increasing sense of distinction rather than communality between the two populations.

In summary, while the borderlands exhibit many features of interdependence, the dynamic underlying that phenomenon rests less on a shared sense of social and cultural community and more on an implicit recognition of mutual economic need. Furthermore, the recognition of that need declines markedly as one moves away from the border. Thus, while residents of San Ysidro or El Paso may be acutely aware of their dependence, those in Los Angeles and Dallas are less so, and those in Salt Lake City and Oklahoma City hardly at all. Thus, despite the obvious facets of interdependence in the borderland, the primary dynamic for interdependence remains economic and until that changes, the notion of an emergent organic "Mexamerica" will be too simplistic.

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[3]Again, an interesting parallel can be made between Mexico and Canada both of which send to the U.S. a large number of immigrants who enter with the intention of returning but eventually settle. Those immigrants are far more likely than others to later emigrate or, if they do decide to settle, to become U.S. citizens.

THE WIDER CONTEXT OF BORDERLAND INTERDEPENDENCE

While cities on both sides of the border have developed common ties that are in some ways stronger than their ties to their respective countries, the dynamic behind that interdependence can only partly be explained by events at the border itself. Decisions made by officials in Wasington and Mexico City, as well as the actions of a wide variety of individuals and businessmen throughout both countries, have contributed to the evolution of the institutions and exchanges that have promoted interdependence in the borderlands.

From the U.S. perspective, economic, strategic, foreign policy, and even domestic political considerations dictate an explicit recognition of the need for a special relationship with Mexico. The U.S. has historically relied on Mexico for a variety of economic purposes, e.g., as a source of goods and labor and as a market for trade and investments. Indeed, while increasing competition from Japan and Western Europe has reduced our once overwhelming dominance in trade the rest of the with Western Hemisphere, our trade and investment in Mexico have increased substantially. Similarly, the growing Soviet presence and general political instability in the hemisphere have made Washington increasingly aware of the importance of a stable and friendly neighbor on our Southern border. Finally, a growing number of interest groups within the U.S., including local officials, businessmen, and Hispanics, has added domestic political considerations to the policy equation. Similar, although not identical, considerations in Mexico have led policymakers in Mexico City to promote the continued development of their northern border region even though incomes and industrial development in that region surpass that in most of the rest of the country.

As a result, both governments have instituted policies, particularly with regard to trade and investment, that have increased the volume of flows between the two countries. These flows have in turn promoted the development of borderlands interdependence. Indeed, these policies are often cited as an example of the explicit recognition of the growing interdependence between the two countries.

However, it would be a mistake to equate the degree of interdependence in the borderlands with that at the federal level. By almost any measure, the extent and symmetry of the relations between the two countries are far greater at the border than elsewhere. For example, while trade with Mexican nationals in the border region constitutes a very important element of that region's economy, U.S. trade with Mexico as a whole, although increasing, still constitutes a relatively small share of total U.S. trade.

Moreover, U.S.-Mexican relations at the federal level are complicated by an array of considerations that simply do not come into play in borderland relations. Such foreign policy issues as U.S. policy in Central America, for example, often play an important role in bilateral U.S.-Mexican relations but are of little importance to the border. Similarly, the range of domestic political interests with a stake in relations between the two countries at the federal level is both greater and more diverse than in the border region. Indeed, despite differences between U.S. and Mexican nationals in the border region over such issues as water rights, pollution, and a host of other border-related issues, there is far more likely to be agreement about the mutual interests of both parties in the border than in the wider federal context. As a result, linking such broader issues to borderland problems can significantly complicate borderland relations.

The contrast between the border and federal level exists not only in terms of the range of issues and interests involved, but also in terms of the goals of the parties. As Urquidi and Villarreal (1975) have pointed out, residents along the Mexican side of the border, in the face of their distance from the Federal District, the centralized pattern of decisionmaking in Mexico, and their superior income levels vis-a-vis the rest of the country, have far more reason to favor increased integration with U.S. border cities than do policymakers in Mexico City who already fear that the close connections between the northern border states and the U.S. threaten national integration. Correspondingly, U.S. residents in the borderlands have a vested interest in policies which increase the volume of trade between the two countries and thus promote the economic welfare of what has historically

been among the poorest regions in the U.S. Indeed, the continued economic development of the U.S. border region no doubt depends significantly on increased cross-border trade. These mutual interests in the border region are further strengthened by the frequent exchanges between business and political elites in border cities.

U.S. residents living outside the border area, in contrast, often feel that their economic interests are threatened by increased trade with Mexico. For example, U.S. labor unions frequently complain that the effect of such special arrangements as the in-bond industries is to take jobs from their members. Similarly, farmers often view Mexican agriculture as competitors for U.S.markets, just as non-hispanic minority groups view the on-going flows of documented and undocumented immigrants as a direct threat to their jobs as well as their political aspirations.

Thus, the broader context of U.S.-Mexican relations has a decidedly ambivalent effect on borderland interdependence. While it fosters increasing interdependence in the border region by emphasizing the special character of binational relations, it also complicates and in some ways impedes that integration by introducing into cross-border relations a much wider and decidedly less manageable set of issues. Indeed, by linking regional and federal concerns and expanding the range of domestic interest groups whose concerns must be accommodated, bilateral relations at the federal level significantly complicate negotiations about specifically border issues. In sum, the broader context of U.S.-Mexican relations on balance probably limits the possibilities of an organic "Mexamerica."

COMING TRENDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR BORDERLAND INTERDEPENDENCE

While the current state of interdependence in the borderland reflects less the significance of social and cultural factors than the priority of economic realities, what will the future hold? Any number of events and trends could profoundly affect interdependence in the borderlands, however, I will discuss two issues that I believe to be of special importance.

The first issue concerns the potential complementarity between longer-term demographic trends in both countries. Currently, unemployment rates in the U.S. are at their highest levels since 1940, and the prospect of continued large-scale immigration seems likely to pose additional problems for national economic recovery. In contrast, continued high fertility and slowing economic growth in Mexico will produce a labor surplus and thus a large pool of potential immigrants. However, this apparent incompatibility could well change and a large influx of migrants may forestall a severe labor shortage in future decades. Specifically, the recent flows of immigrants into the U.S., which rival the enormous waves at the turn of the century, have been only one of three demographic events that have strained the absorptive capacity of the American economy. At the same time that we were experiencing increased flows of immigrants, our labor market was also trying to create jobs for the maturing "baby boom" cohorts and to accommodate an unprecedented influx of women into the labor force. With the drop in the fertility rate, however, and the likely peaking of women's labor force participation, fewer and fewer native-born workers will be entering the labor force. Thus, what currently appears to be a labor surplus could well become a labor shortage by the end of the decade.

Whether this possible complementarity between the economic and demographic situations in the U.S. and Mexico will in fact serve to increase the mutual dependence of the two countries depends on factors whose future course is uncertain. Specifically, the pattern of future growth in the various sectors of the American economy and, correspondingly, the level of skills that will be needed in the next decade, will largely determine the types of immigrants the American economy will need.

If, as is certainly possible, the future supply of low-skilled labor fails to keep pace with demand, then the complementary demographic and economic situation in the U.S. and Mexico will almost certainly promote increasing interdependence--not just in the borderland but more generally throughout American society. For example, to the extent that tight labor markets raise wages and reduce unemployment, then the

traditional opposition of American labor unions to wide-scale immigration may well abate. Moreover, unions could well view these new immigrants as a fertile ground for new recruits with the result that their membership will contain significant numbers of Mexican-born and second generation Mexican-Americans (Butz et. al., 1982). By facilitating a wider range of social contacts among Anglos and Mexican-Americans, such a development would certainly promote a better socio-cultural understanding between those two groups than currently exists.

If, on the other hand, the changing industrial composition of the U.S. economy creates a supply-demand imbalance in its high-skilled service and so-called "high tech" industrial sectors, then the continuing economic and demographic situations in the U.S. and Mexico could well exacerbate tensions between the two countries. Historically, immigrants have concentrated in low-skill, low-wage jobs and industries, in particular in agriculture and basic manufacturing, for which plentiful cheap labor was vital. However, these industries are no longer growing. Their place in the American economy has been usurped by services and high-technology industries, which are widely expected to spur the nation's future economic growth. If, as many believe, these industries will require predominantly high-skilled workers, then a continuing large influx of low-skilled immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere could well produce a situation of unacceptably high unemployment in some skills and industries and shortages in others. This possibility could well shift the traditional family reunification emphasis of U.S. immigration policy toward a policy favoring the importation of highly-skilled labor. Such policies could induce a "brain drain" from the lesser developed countries (including Mexico) and thus exacerbate rather than alleviate their economic problems.

The second uncertainty concerns the future political role of Mexican Americans in bilateral U.S.-Mexican relations. As we have already noted, the relationship between Chicanos and Mexicans can best be characterized as ambivalent, with neither group attaching a high priority to cooperation. Indeed, we have argued that Chicanos today place a much greater emphasis on gaining full access to the benefits, both economic and political, that American society has to offer than on reapprochement with Mexico.

This situation could change, however, as the Hispanic population continues to increase in size and political power. Although Hispanics currently comprise only 6 percent of the current U.S. population, their numbers are growing more rapidly than either the Anglo or the black population (the largest of the minority groups in the U.S.) and, given their currently higher immigration and fertility rates, should continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Indeed, Hispanics are already the dominant minority group in two of America's three largest states and, according to some projections, will surpass blacks as the dominant minority group in the country as a whole by early in the next century.

Although Hispanics, and Mexican-Americans in particular, have been unable to translate their increasing demographic importance into equivalent political power (primarily due to low naturalization and voting rates), there is considerable evidence that this situation may also be changing. Witness, for example, the growing number of political positions held by Hispanic Americans and the increasing political visibility attached to issues of special concern to Hispanics, e.g., bilingual education. Given their potential demographic and political importance, Mexican-Americans could well become a potent lobby for Mexican interests in bilateral U.S.-Mexican relations, much as Jewish Americans are in U.S.-Israel relations today. If this should occur, it would affect not just interdependence in the borderlands but the whole character of U.S.-Mexican relations by bringing the interest at the federal level in line with the U.S. borderlands' interests in strengthening U.S.-Mexican interdependence.

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RAND/P-6889

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