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Zero Undocumented Population Growth Is Here to Stay and Immigration Reform Would Preserve and Extend These Gains

Robert Warren
Center for Migration Studies

Executive Summary

This report demonstrates that a broad and sustained reduction in undocumented immigration to the United States occurred in the 2008 to 2015 period. First, the report shows that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the Great Recession had little, if any, role in the transformation to zero population growth. The population stopped growing because of increased scrutiny of air travel after 9/11, a decade and a half of accelerating efforts to reduce illegal entries across the southern border, long-term increases in the numbers leaving the population each year, and improved economic and demographic conditions in Mexico. These conditions are likely to continue for the foreseeable future. It is time to recognize that the era of large-scale undocumented population growth has ended, and that there is a need to reform the US legal immigration system to preserve and extend these gains (Kerwin and Warren 2017, 319-21). Major findings of the report include:

- The recession did not reduce arrivals or accelerate departures from the undocumented population; it essentially had very little impact on population change.[1]
- Population growth was lower in 2008 to 2015 than in 2000 to 2008 for all major sending areas and for 13 of the top 15 countries of origin.[2]
- Population growth was lower in 2008 to 2015 than in 2000 to 2008 in *all* of the top 15 states. In 10 of the 15 top states, growth changed to decline.

1 The term "population" in this paper refers to the undocumented population, both persons who have stayed in the United States beyond the period of their temporary admission ("overstays") and those who entered without inspection (EWIs).

2 In this paper, the terms "2000 to 2008 period" and "2008 to 2015 period" are not overlapping; they are used for ease of presentation. Estimates for the two time periods are based on data for 2000, 2008, and 2015. Technically, the earlier period is for 2000 through 2007 (eight years), and the latter period is for 2008 through 2014 (seven years).

- Nearly twice as many *left*[3] the undocumented population from Mexico than arrived in the 2008 to 2015 period — 1.7 million left the population and 900,000 arrived.
- Almost twice as many overstays as persons who entered without inspection (EWIs) "arrived" (joined the undocumented population) from 2008 to 2015 — 2.0 million overstays compared to 1.1 million EWIs.
- Overstays leave the undocumented population at higher rates than EWIs: about 1.9 million, or 40 percent, of overstays that lived in the United States in 2008 had left the undocumented population by 2015, compared to 1.6 million, or 24 percent, of EWIs.
- The rate of overstays (65% of the newly undocumented), compared to EWIs, is more dramatic than the numbers indicate since estimates of the undocumented count Central American asylum seekers that cross the US southern border as EWIs.

Introduction

The cessation of undocumented population growth after 2008 and the historic decline in arrivals from Mexico have been well documented in reports by the Center for Migration Studies (CMS) and the Pew Research Center. See, for example, Warren and Warren (2013), Warren (2014), Gonzalez-Barrera (2015), Warren and Kerwin (2015a), and Passel and Cohn (2016). However, much of that information has been about total population size or the population from Mexico. An important question has remained for policymakers: Is this just a pause in population growth, mostly involving Mexico, or has the reduction been widespread and is it likely to continue? The size and breadth of the decline over the past decade, reported here, indicates that fundamental changes have occurred that will prevent the resumption of population growth. Increased awareness of the extensive and lasting reduction in undocumented population growth should enhance the prospects for immigration reform.

The estimates presented here for 2008, and annually for 2010 to 2015, were derived by the Center for Migration Studies based on statistics on the foreign-born population collected in the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), as described in detail in Warren (2014). A summary of the estimation procedure is presented in the Appendix. The estimates by country of origin for 2000 are consistent with estimates, by state, published in *International Migration Review* (Warren and Warren 2013).

The first part of the paper challenges the contention that the recession stopped undocumented population growth. Next, undocumented population growth in the 2008 to 2015 period is compared to growth in the 2000 to 2008 period. The focus is on the major sending countries and areas, and on the 15 most populous states. Then, trends in population change within the 2008 to 2015 period are examined. Estimates of net arrivals and departures

3 Undocumented residents can leave the population in four ways: emigrate voluntarily, adjust to lawful status, be removed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), or (a relatively small number) die.

from the population for the 2008 to 2015 period are shown here for the first time. Finally, new estimates of overstays and EWIs in the 2008 to 2015 period are shown, along with estimates of arrivals and departures from both categories of undocumented residents.

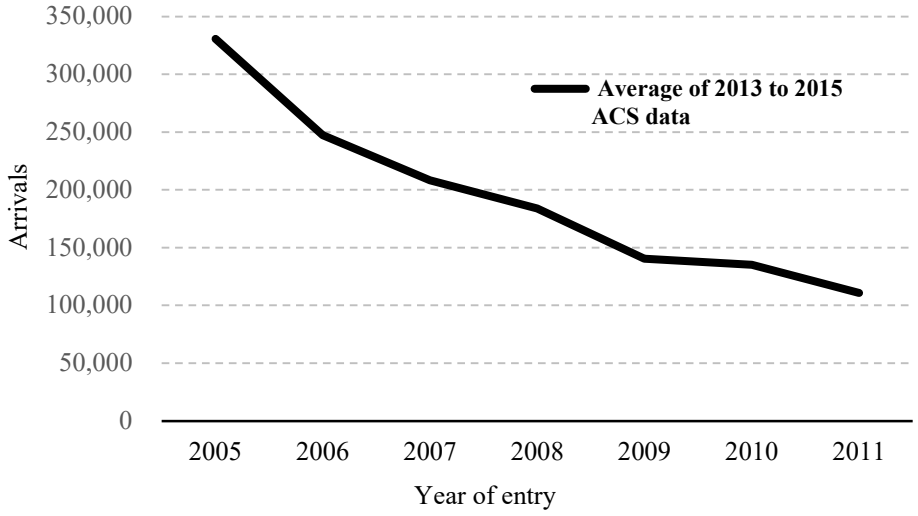
Effects of the Recession on Undocumented Population Change

Conventional wisdom holds that the undocumented population stopped growing after 2008 because of the recession. No demographic data have been presented to support this assertion, and presumably none are needed because the two events occurred at about the same time. The corollary is that growth will resume along with economic recovery. The danger inherent in these erroneous beliefs is that much-needed immigration reform could be delayed based on the assumption that renewed growth is inevitable.

The statistical evidence presented here shows that the recession had very little, if any, effect on either undocumented arrivals or departures within the time frame of the recession. The data presented in the two graphs below are for Mexico, but separate calculations for other parts of the world produce the same conclusion.

Figure 1 shows the trend in undocumented arrivals from Mexico for each year from 2005 to 2011, well within the time period that arrivals would have been affected by the recession. The trend line was derived based on the reported year of immigration of the undocumented population from Mexico in the 2013, 2014, and 2015 ACS.

Figure 1. Undocumented Arrivals from Mexico in 2005 to 2011 Estimated from ACS Data



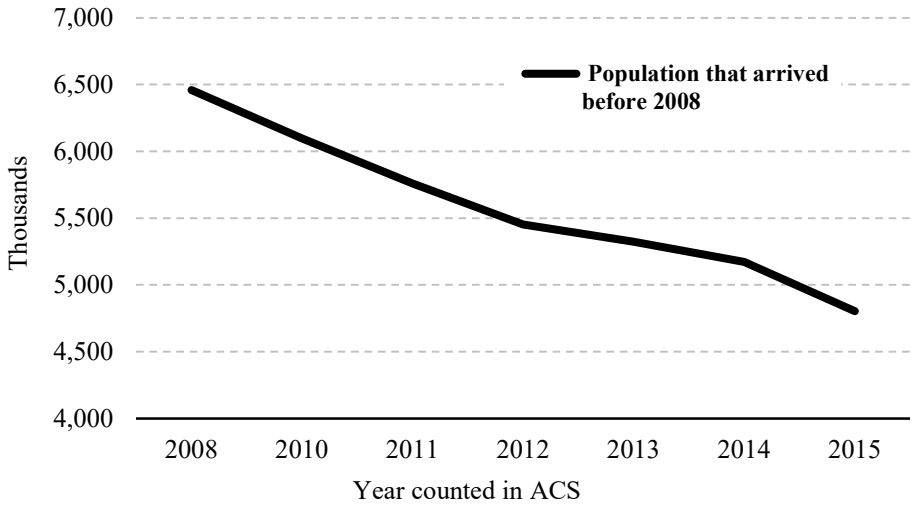
Source: Center for Migration Studies estimates based on the 2013, 2014, and 2015 ACS.

For this discussion, the important feature of Figure 1 is that there was no significant drop in arrivals at the time of the recession. The sharp decline in arrivals from Mexico continued at

a steady pace from 2005 to 2011.[4] Close examination of the trend line reveals a small dip in 2009, but further analysis showed that adding just 20,000 to the data point for 2009 creates an almost perfectly straight line from 2006 to 2010.

As shown in Figure 1, the recession had no significant impact on arrivals from Mexico. The next question is whether the recession led to increased *departures* from the population. If so, there should be a noticeable downturn after 2008 in the size of population that was here when the recession began. Figure 2 shows estimates of the undocumented population from Mexico that arrived before 2008 and lived in the United States in the 2010 to 2015 period. CMS derived the estimates shown in Figure 2 based on annual ACS data.

Figure 2. Change in the 2008 Undocumented Population from Mexico: 2010 to 2015



The trend line shown in Figure 2 declines at a steady rate of about five percent per year, mostly as the result of voluntary emigration, adjustments to legal status, and removals by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS).[5] The trend line in Figure 2 gives no indication that the recession caused large numbers of undocumented residents to return to Mexico. Restricting the analysis to smaller entry cohorts, for example those who arrived in 2002 to 2007, produces the same pattern of gradual decline shown in Figure 2.

4 It is important to note that the single-year data for Figure 1 have not been smoothed statistically. For each year of entry, single-year data were derived from the 2013, 2014, and 2015 American Community Survey (ACS), and those estimates were averaged, within the same year of entry, to reduce the effects of sampling variability. For example, the estimate shown for 2011 is the average of estimated arrivals in 2011 based on data from the 2013, 2014, and 2015 ACS.

5 Note that the population in Figure 2 should only *decline* because it does not receive any new arrivals; by definition, everyone in the population arrived before 2008.

Population growth stopped in 2008 because trends that were in place well before the recession continued. These included enhanced scrutiny of air travel after 9/11, greatly increased and generally successful efforts to reduce illegal entries across the southern border, and positive economic and demographic changes in Mexico. As these factors were acting to reduce the inflow, the number leaving the population increased steadily as a growing population generated higher levels of emigration, adjustments to lawful status, and deportations.[6] The population stopped growing because these complex historical and demographic trends converged in 2008. The fact that population growth stopped at about the same time that the recession began was merely a historical coincidence.

Population Change — 2000 to 2008 Compared to 2008 to 2015

Estimates by Country of Origin

Table 1 shows estimates of the undocumented population for world regions and the top 15 countries[7] in 2000, 2008, and 2015. Columns 4 and 5 show average annual population change for the 2000 to 2008 and 2008 to 2015 periods. Annual undocumented population change declined in 2008 to 2015, compared to 2000 to 2008, for every major sending area and for 13 of the 15 top countries (Table 1). The only exceptions to the across-the-board declines were El Salvador and China. Population change for these two countries is discussed below.

Overall, there was a large reduction in population change in the latter period; in many cases, net growth became net decline. The total population increased by nearly 360,000 in 2000 to 2008; it *dropped* by an average of 60,000 per year in 2008 to 2015. Annual growth from Mexico fell sharply, from a net gain of about 200,000 per year in 2000 to 2008 to a net decline of more than 100,000 per year in 2008 to 2015 (Table 1). The US undocumented populations from South America and Europe changed from net gains in 2000 to 2008 to net losses in 2008 to 2015.

Estimates by State of Residence

Table 2 is similar to Table 1 except that it shows estimates by state of residence instead of country of origin. Annual population change was lower in *all* 15 top states in 2008 to 2015 than it was in 2000 to 2008 (Table 2). Of the top 15 states,[8] all had positive growth in 2000 to 2008. In 2008 to 2015, the undocumented population declined in 10 of those 15 states, with only Texas, at 17,000, growing by more than 6,000 annually.

6 According to Warren and Warren (2013), the number leaving the undocumented population increased gradually from about 180,000 in 1990 to 550,000 in 2008 (see Table 3 in that report). The numbers of adjustments to lawful status and removals by DHS increased in 2001 to 2008 compared to earlier periods.

7 Ranked by the size of the population in 2015.

8 "Top 15 states" and "Top 15 countries" refer the states and countries of origin that had the 15 largest undocumented populations living in the United States in 2015.

Table 1. Estimated Undocumented Population, by Area and Country of Origin, 2000, 2008, and 2015, and Average Annual Change

In thousands, rounded independently.

Country or area of origin	Estimated undocumented population			Average annual change	
	Countries ranked by population in 2015				
	2000 *(1)*	2008 *(2)*	2015 *(3)*	2000 to 2008 *(4)=(2)-(1)/8*	2008 to 2015 *(5)=(3)-(2)/7*
All countries	**8,600**	**11,460**	**11,045**	**358**	**-60**
Mexico	4,995	6,590	5,810	199	-111
Central America	960	1,345	1,615	48	38
South America	575	775	680	25	-14
Europe	350	380	300	4	-12
Asia	1,050	1,500	1,740	57	34
Africa	230	300	340	9	6
All other	435	560	560	16	-
15 countries with the largest population in 2015 *(ranked by population in 2015)*					
Mexico	4,995	6,590	5,810	199	-111
El Salvador	430	520	635	11	17
Guatemala	275	440	510	21	10
India	185	360	460	22	14
China	230	245	385	2	20
Honduras	150	275	365	16	13
Philippines	170	265	245	12	-3
Dom. Rep.	100	165	190	8	3
South Korea	145	210	175	8	-5
Ecuador	115	155	140	5	-2
Colombia	155	150	135	0	-2
Haiti	110	140	130	4	-1
Vietnam	70	100	125	4	3
Peru	75	120	110	5	-1
Brazil	90	145	105	7	-6

Source: Center for Migration Studies. The figures in column 1 are consistent with estimates in Warren and Warren (2013).

Table 2. Estimated Undocumented Population, by State of Residence, 2000, 2008, and 2015, and Average Annual Change

In thousands, rounded independently. Estimates are shown for the top 15 states in 2015

Country or area of origin	Estimated undocumented population *States ranked by population in 2015*			Average annual change	
	2000 *(1)*	2008 *(2)*	2015 *(3)*	2000 to 2008 *(4)=(2)-(1)/8*	2008 to 2015 *(5)=(3)-(2)/7*
US total	**8,600**	**11,460**	**11,045**	**358**	**-60**
California	2,600	2,975	2,600	47	-54
Texas	1,125	1,640	1,760	64	17
New York	675	910	805	30	-15
Florida	620	755	745	17	-2
Illinois	490	585	515	12	-10
New Jersey	305	455	450	19	-1
Georgia	250	390	360	17	-4
North Carolina	220	315	315	12	-
Arizona	295	425	255	16	-24
Virginia	145	210	250	9	5
Washington	155	205	245	6	6
Maryland	110	195	240	11	6
Colorado	155	220	180	8	-5
Nevada	120	210	175	11	-5
Pennsylvania	75	130	160	7	5
All other states	1,260	1,830	1,980	71	21

Source: Center for Migration Studies. The figures in column 1 are consistent with estimates in Warren and Warren (2013).

Population Change, 2008 to 2015

The estimates in the previous section show that most areas of origin and states of residence shifted from net gains in the undocumented population in 2000 to 2008 to net losses in 2008 to 2015. In this section, we examine population change *within* 2008 to 2015. Estimates of two significant aspects of undocumented population change are shown here for the first time.

1. Separate estimates of arrivals and departures[9] for 2008 to 2015.

   From 2008 to 2015, about 3.1 million arrived (joined the undocumented population) and 3.5 million left this population (Table 3). For Mexico, nearly twice as many left the population (1.7 million) as arrived (900,000). Departures also exceeded arrivals from South America and Europe during the period. For Central America, Asia, and Africa, arrivals were higher than departures, and thus the population from those areas increased. Note, however that population growth was lower in 2008 to 2015 than it was in 2000 to 2008 for all three of these areas.

2. Percentage of the 2008 population that had left the population by 2015.

   In just seven years, nearly *half* of the population from the Caribbean, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania were no longer in the undocumented population (Table 3). The percentages for these six areas range from 42 to 58 percent. The percentages for Mexico and Central America are considerably lower, at 25 and 16 percent, respectively. Possible reasons for the relatively lower percentages for Mexico and Central America are discussed in a later section.

Arrivals and Departures by Area of Origin

Table 3 shows estimates of arrivals and departures for 2008 and 2015 for major sending areas. Almost as many undocumented persons arrived from Asia as from Mexico — 885,000 compared to 900,000. However, departures from the undocumented population from Mexico exceeded those from Asia by slightly more than one million (Table 3). The higher *number* leaving the population from Mexico reflects a much larger population at risk of leaving, as evidenced by the lower *percentage* that left the undocumented population from Mexico compared to the population from Asia (Table 3).

The differences in the percentages shown in Table 3, column 5, are the result of a number of factors, and none of them have been estimated individually. The variation in the rates primarily reflects differences in voluntary emigration, removal by DHS, conditions in the area of origin, and differences in eligibility for adjustment to lawful status.[10] For example, the relatively low departure rate of 16 percent for Central America likely reflects low emigration rates due to adverse conditions in that area.

9 As noted above, "departures" or losses from the undocumented population can occur in four ways: voluntarily emigration, adjustment to lawful status, removal by DHS, or (in a relatively small number of cases) death. Separate estimates are not available for each of the four ways of leaving the undocumented population.

10 Of course, as with all of the numbers and percentages shown in this paper, sampling variability and non-sampling error can affect the data.

Table 3. Change in the Undocumented Population, 2008 to 2015, by Area of Origin

Numbers in thousands, rounded independently.

Area or country of origin	Undoc. pop. in 2008 *(1)*	2008 to 2015: Net arrivals *(2)*	2008 to 2015: Left the undoc. pop.* *(3)*	Undoc. pop. in 2015 *(4)*	Percent that left the pop. from 2008 to 2015 *(5)=(3)/(1)*	Average annual pop. change *(6)=(2)-(3)/7*
All countries	**11,460**	**3,100**	**3,515**	**11,045**	**31%**	**-60**
Mexico	6,590	900	1,680	5,810	25%	-111
Central America	1,345	485	220	1,615	16%	38
Caribbean	485	220	220	485	46%	-
South America	775	230	330	680	42%	-14
Europe	380	125	205	300	54%	-12
Asia	1,500	885	650	1,740	43%	34
Africa	300	215	175	340	58%	6
Oceania	21	10	10	21	50%	-

Source: Center for Migration Studies. Columns 1 and 4 are estimates derived by CMS. Column 3 = [population in 2008] - [population in 2015 that *arrived before 2008*]. Column 2 = Column 4 – Column 1 + Column 3.

* Undocumented residents can leave the population in four ways: emigrate voluntarily, adjust to lawful status, be removed by DHS, or (a relatively small number) die.

The lower percentage for Mexico compared to other areas could signify low emigration rates, but there is another important factor to consider. Very few undocumented residents with a close family relationship to a US citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR) that would qualify them for a visa can adjust to LPR status in the United States, if they entered without inspection (Gubernskaya and Dreby 2017, 421, 425; Kerwin and Warren 2017, 307). This restriction applies to the majority of undocumented residents from Mexico and, to a lesser extent, those from Central American countries. As a result, many undocumented beneficiaries of *approved* visa petitions opt to remain in the United States, rather than return home for consular processing, thus foregoing their opportunity to gain immigration status (Kerwin, Meissner, and McHugh 2011). By contrast, undocumented residents who entered legally and overstayed a temporary visa (i.e., nearly everyone not from Mexico or Central America) *are* permitted to adjust status.

Trends in Population Change, 2008 to 2015, by Area of Origin

This section argues that even though the estimated populations of some Central American and Asian countries appear to be increasing, in most cases the estimated growth is either (1) not as high as it was in the 2000 to 2008 period, or (2) is the result of imprecision in the data and estimation procedures. Examples of the latter include asylum seekers being counted as

undocumented arrivals from Central America and undocumented residents returning to the United States from China in 2015 after leaving the United States for a few years.

The following graphs illustrate changes in undocumented populations from specific areas or countries in the 2008 to 2015 period. Figure 3 shows population trends separately for Mexico and for all other countries. Figures 4, 5, and 6 address trends in two areas of the world — Asia and Central America — with still-growing undocumented populations in the United States.

In addition to showing the decline in the population from Mexico in the 2008 to 2015 period, Figure 3 shows that the undocumented population from the rest of the world has remained generally stable since 2008. The trend lines in Figure 3 provide evidence that growth of the undocumented population did not resume as the economy recovered.

Figure 3. Population Trends for Mexico and All Other Countries: 2008 to 2015

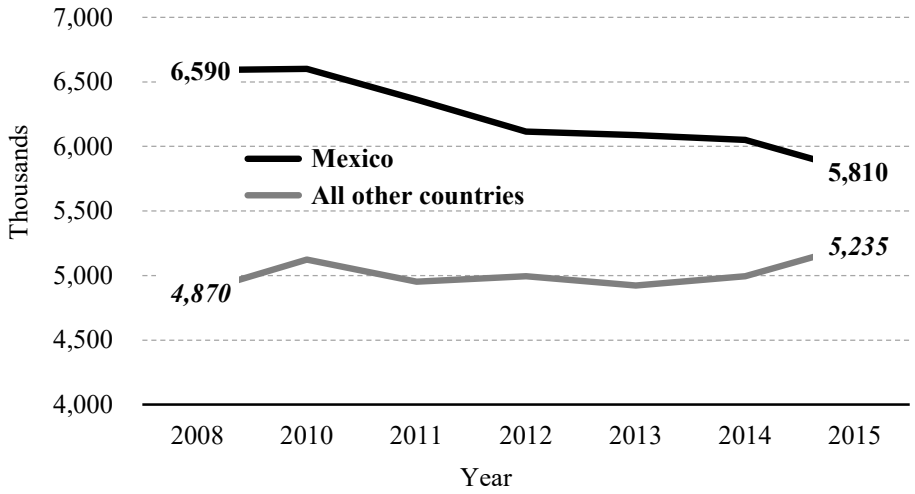
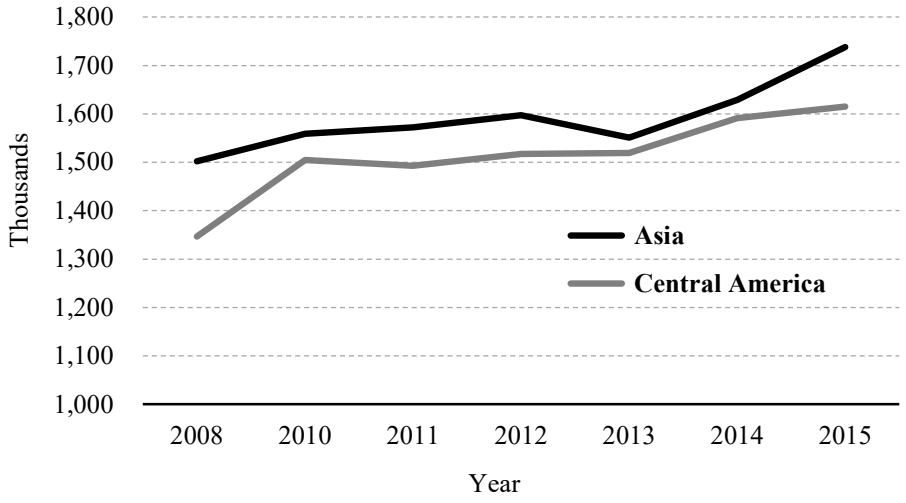


Figure 4 shows trends in the undocumented population from Asia and Central America during the 2008 to 2015 period. Even though the population from both areas has continued to increase in recent years, average annual growth for both Asia and Central America was lower in the 2008 to 2015 period than it was in the 2000 to 2008 period, as shown in Table 1.

The undocumented population from Central America was stable at about 1.5 million each year from 2010 to 2013 (Figure 4). It is questionable whether the increases in 2014 and 2015 shown for Central America in Figure 4 actually represent increased undocumented immigration. According to a recent report by the Center for Migration Studies citing CBP (2016), ". . . a growing percentage of border crossers in recent years have originated in the Northern Triangle states of Central America" (Warren and Kerwin 2017, 125). As CMS and others have argued, many of these migrants "are fleeing pervasive violence, persecution and poverty, and a large number do not seek to evade arrest, but present themselves to border officials and request political asylum. Many are de facto refugees, not illegal border crossers" (ibid.).

Figure 4. Population Trends for Asia and Central America: 2008 to 2015



Next, we disaggregate the trend line in Figure 4 that includes all Asian countries to determine which countries are contributing the most to undocumented population growth. Figure 5 shows population trends for 2008 to 2015 for Asian countries, but China and India have been combined and separated from all other Asian countries. As Figure 5 shows, the total population of Asian countries, after separating out China and India, has been stable at about 900,000 each year since 2008 (Figure 5). India and China combined accounted for 40 percent of the undocumented population from Asia in 2008. By 2015, India and China's share (combined) was approaching half of the undocumented population from Asia.

Figure 5. Trends for China and India Combined Compared to All Other Asian Countries: 2008 to 2015

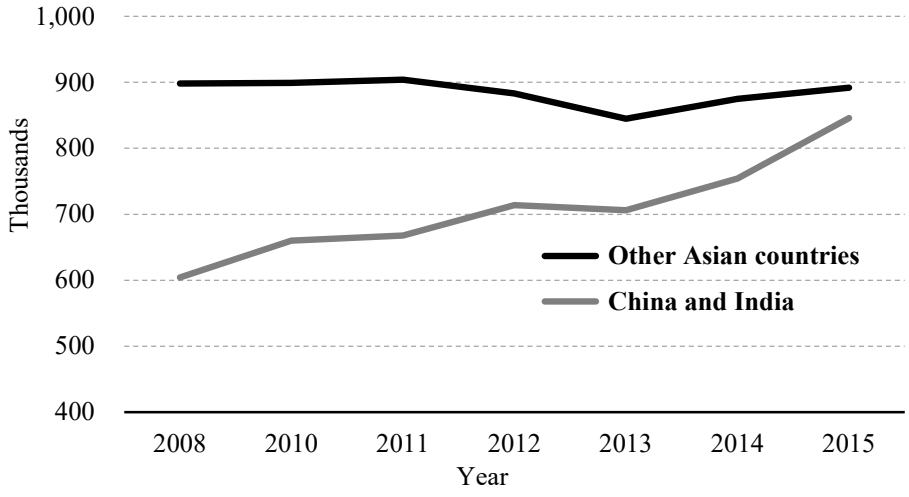
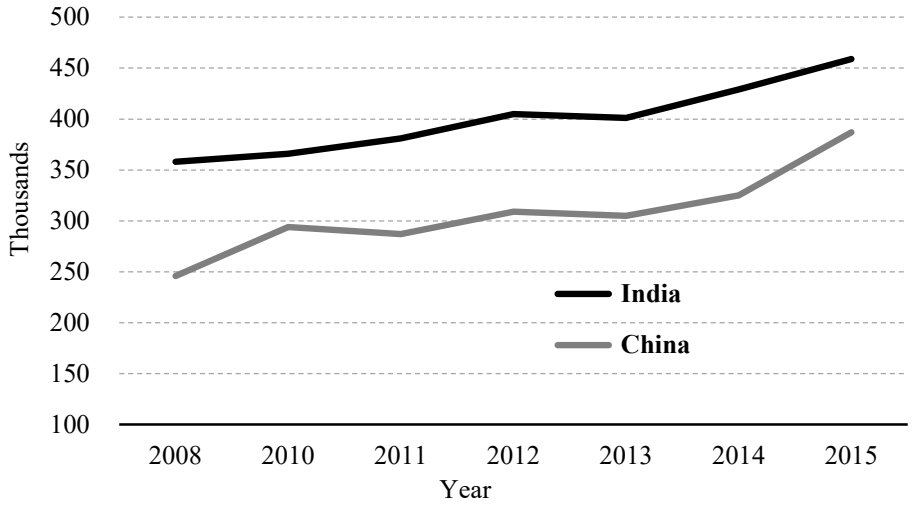


Figure 6 shows population trends separately for India and China for 2008 to 2015. The population from both countries increased during the 2008 to 2015 period, with India growing by an average of 14,000 per year and China growing by 20,000 annually (Table 1).

Although the population from India has increased since 2008, annual growth is still less than it was in the 2000 to 2008 period. That leaves China as the only large sending country that had higher population growth in 2008 to 2015 compared to 2000 to 2008.[11] As such, the trend in population growth from China received extra scrutiny, as described below.

Figure 6. Population Trends for India and China: 2008 to 2015



Even though the estimated population from China increased by about 50,000 from 2008 to 2010, it held fairly steady from 2010 to 2013 at approximately 300,000 per year (Figure 6). Additional analysis revealed that at least half of the increases from China in 2014 and 2015 (20,000 and 62,000, respectively) were the result of the arrival of undocumented residents *who lived in the United States previously* and returned to the United States in 2014 and 2015. The procedure for deriving this type of estimate is shown in Table 4.[12]

11 The population from El Salvador grew faster in 2008 to 2015 than it did in 2000 to 2008, but there is uncertainty about the percentage of recent arrivals from Central America that are actually undocumented immigrants, as opposed to asylum seekers. The estimation procedure used to derive these estimates does not distinguish between recently arrived undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers. As a result, asylum seekers are erroneously included in these and other estimates as undocumented residents.

12 Table 4 includes only undocumented residents who reported that they arrived in the 2008 to 2012 period. Demographic logic specifies that an entry cohort — in this case those who arrived in 2008 to 2012 — should *decrease* every year after arrival. A total of 110,000 were counted in 2014, and about six percent would be expected to leave the population by 2015 (Table 4). That means about 103,000 (item 2 in Table 4) should have been counted in 2015. Instead, 144,000 were counted in 2015. The excess of 41,000 is the estimated number of undocumented residents who originally moved here in the 2008 to 2012 period, left the United States, and returned in 2015.

Table 4. Estimating Former Undocumented Immigrants Returning to the United States from China in 2015

1.	Undocumented population in 2014, entered 2008 to 2012	110,000
2.	Expected population in 2015 (2=1 x .94*)	103,000
3.	Undocumented population in 2015, entered 2008 to 2012	144,000
4.	Returning former undocumented residents in 2015 (4=3-2)	41,000

Source: Center for Migration Studies.

* The "loss rate" of .94 in item 2 was derived by dividing the 43 percent departure rate for Asia in Table 3, column 5, by seven years. The result is 6 percent per year.

The estimate of 41,000 in Table 4 represents about two-thirds of the growth of the population from China in 2015. In summary, the undocumented population from China was stable from 2000 to 2013, and at least half of the growth in 2014 and 2015 was due to the return of undocumented residents who had moved here previously, left the United States, and returned.

Changes in Overstays and EWIs from 2008 to 2015

Very little statistical information is available about the number or trends in the overstay or EWI populations. Information about arrivals and departures from these populations is presented here for the first time. The Appendix includes a brief description of the methods used to derive the estimates and provides a reference to a more detailed description of the methodology.

As Table 5 shows, almost *twice* as many overstayed as entered without inspection in the 2008 to 2015 period — 2.0 million overstays compared to 1.1 million EWIs. The trend line for "All other countries" in Figure 3 above shows that this disparity is not the result of increasing numbers of overstays. The "All other countries" population, mostly overstays, was steady at approximately 5 million from 2008 to 2015; the population from Mexico, mostly EWIs, declined by about 780,000, as shown in Table 1.

A higher number and percentage of overstays than EWIs also left the population from 2008 to 2015 (Table 5). However, even though more overstays than EWIs left the 2008 population in this seven-year period, the overstay population still grew by an average of 20,000 per year, while the EWI population declined by an average of 80,000 per year. The percent of the total undocumented population that were overstays increased from 41 percent in 2008 to 44 percent in 2015.

Table 5. Change in the Undocumented Population, 2008 to 2015, by Mode of Entry

Numbers in thousands, rounded independently.

Mode of entry	Undoc. pop. in 2008 *(1)*	2008 to 2015 period: Net arrivals *(2)*	2008 to 2015 period: Left the undoc. pop.* *(3)*	Undoc. pop. in 2015 *(4)*	Percent that left the pop. from 2008 to 2015 *(5)=(3)/(1)*	Average annual change *(6)=(2)-(3)/7*
Total	**11,460**	**3,095**	**3,510**	**11,045**	**31%**	**-60**
EWIs	6,775	1,080	1,640	6,215	24%	-80
Overstays	4,690	2,015	1,870	4,830	40%	20
Percent overstays	41%	65%	53%	44%	-	-

Source: Center for Migration Studies. Columns 1 and 4, estimates derived by CMS. Column 3 = [population in 2008] - [population in 2015 that *arrived before 2008*]. Column 2 = Column 4 – Column 1 + Column 3.

* Undocumented residents can leave the population in four ways: emigrate voluntarily, adjust to lawful status, be removed by DHS, or (a relatively small number) die.

The differences in the percentages that left the population (Table 5, column 5) are difficult to assess until more detailed information becomes available. An important question is: How do each of the three[13] ways of leaving the population — removal by DHS, voluntary emigration, or adjustment to lawful status — contribute to these differences? Removals contribute more to the departure percentage of EWIs than for overstays; Mexico accounted for 71 percent of all removals by DHS[14] in the 2008 to 2015 period. Excluding removals from the data in Table 5 would increase, not decrease, the difference in the estimated departure rates for the two types of populations. As noted, most undocumented EWIs that qualify for a visa cannot adjust status in the United States. This accounts for some of the differences in the percentages in Table 5. However, even after taking that into account, the large difference in the percent that left the population most likely indicates that overstays emigrate at higher rates than EWIs.

The differential effects of emigration rates and adjustment of status on the overstay and EWI populations are illustrated in Table 6. The total populations from Honduras and the Philippines were similar in 2008, about 270,000 each (Table 6). Both countries received about 125,000 net arrivals in the 2008 to 2015 period. Notice, however, that the population from Honduras grew by 88,000 in this period, while the population from the Philippines declined by 19,000. The large difference in population change occurred because 143,000, or 54 percent of those here in 2008, had left the population from the Philippines by 2015, while only 39,000, or 14 percent, had left the population from Honduras.

13 Mortality is not likely to be a factor in generating the difference in the percentages in Table 5 because these are relatively young populations with low mortality rates, and there is no reason to expect any difference in the rates.

14 Source: DHS (2017, Table 41).

Table 6. Change in the Undocumented Population from the Philippines and Honduras, 2008 to 2015

Numbers in thousands, rounded independently.

Area or country of origin	Undoc. pop. in 2008 *(1)*	2008 to 2015 Net arrivals *(2)*	Left the undoc. pop.* *(3)*	Undoc. pop. in 2015 *(4)*	Percent that left the pop. from 2008 to 2015 *(5)=(3)/(1)*	Population change from 2008 to 2015 *(6)=(2)-(3)/7*
Philippines	267	124	143	247	-54%	-19
Honduras	275	127	39	363	-14%	88

Source: Center for Migration Studies. Columns 1 and 4, estimates derived by CMS. Column 3 = [population in 2008] - [population in 2015 that *arrived before 2008*]. Column 2 = Column 4 – Column 1 + Column 3.

These significant differences in population change for the Philippines and Honduras — two countries with similar beginning populations and net arrivals — are likely the result of at least three factors: (1) some portion of the 2015 population from Honduras actually are asylum seekers, not undocumented residents; (2) relatively more undocumented residents from the Philippines were able to adjust to lawful status; and (3) the voluntary emigration rate probably is higher for the Philippines than for Honduras.

The finding that 40 percent of the entire overstay population left the undocumented population within seven years is significant. It means that the excess of overstays compared to EWIs in recent years is not likely to lead to more population growth, but could well portend additional population decline, as illustrated in the case of the Philippines in Table 6.

Not permitting EWIs who qualify for a visa to adjust status in the United States increases the size of the undocumented population. It also increases the length of residence in this country, which leads to increased ties to the United States. As of 2015, 80 percent of the undocumented population from Mexico and Central America had arrived before 2008; only half of those from the rest of the world (nearly all overstays) had arrived before 2008.

Conclusions

The era of undocumented population growth ended nearly a decade ago. The population from Mexico has declined steadily for the past seven years, dropping by almost a quarter of a million in 2015 alone. This report provides demographic details that explain the transition from rapid growth (nearly 400,000 in 2000 to 2008) to zero or negative change in the 2008 to 2015 period. It also includes new estimates of overstays and EWIs that show that overstays greatly exceeded EWIs in the 2008 to 2015 period and that overstays leave the undocumented population at considerably higher rates than EWIs.

The report establishes that, contrary to conventional wisdom, the Great Recession played little, if any, role in the transformation to zero population growth. Further, growth is not likely to resume. The main conditions that stopped population growth — increased scrutiny

of air travel after 9/11, a decade and a half of greatly increased efforts to reduce illegal entries across the southern border, large numbers leaving the undocumented population each year, and improved economic and demographic conditions in Mexico — continue to obtain and will act to check any possible resumption in growth.

Even though the *estimated* populations from some Central American and Asian countries are still increasing, in many cases they actually are growing slowly, if at all. For example, many of the arrivals from the Northern Triangle states of Central America are asylum seekers but are included in most estimates of undocumented migration because adequate statistics are not available to remove them from this population. Much of the apparent growth in the population from China in 2014 and 2015 is not due to new arrivals but to the return to the United States of undocumented immigrants who arrived in earlier years.

The cessation of population growth is a significant milestone in the history of undocumented immigration to the United States. It is time to recognize that zero population growth is here to stay and that it is very much in our self-interest to seize this opportunity to reform the US legal immigration system in order to preserve and extend these gains.

Appendix

A. Estimation of the Undocumented Resident Population

CMS used the procedures below (Steps 1 to 5) to derive estimates of the undocumented resident population in 2010. The same steps[15] were followed to derive estimates for 2008 and for each year from 2011 to 2015. The classification of noncitizens as undocumented residents was done at the microdata level, and the estimates described here were compiled from those detailed data sets. Warren (2014) provides a detailed description of the methodology and compares the CMS estimates based on this methodology to estimates derived using the residual method.

Step 1. The first step in the estimation procedure was to compile data from the 2010 ACS for all noncitizens who entered the United States from 1982 to 2010. It was assumed that nearly all undocumented residents are in the category "noncitizens who entered the US after 1981." Very few who entered before 1982 would still be residing here as undocumented residents in 2010 because: (1) a large percentage of those who entered before 1982 obtained legal status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA);[16] and (2) those who entered before 1982 and did not apply for legalization have had more than 25 years in which to leave the undocumented resident population — that is, to adjust to legal status, be removed, leave voluntarily, or die.

15 Actually, the country-by-country selection ratios for 2010, computed in Step 3, were used in Step 4 for every year; independent population controls were computed *only* for 2010.

16 IRCA went into effect in 1987. Two groups were eligible for legalization, each with their own residency requirements: legalization applicants who continuously resided in the United States since before January 1, 1982, and Special Agricultural Workers (SAWs) who had 60 days of seasonal agricultural work experience in qualifying crops from May 1985 to May 1986. About 1.6 million legalization applicants and 1.1 million SAW applicants were approved (Warren and Kerwin 2015b).

Step 2. A series of edits, referred to as "logical edits,"[17] were used to identify and remove as many legal residents as possible based on responses in the survey.

Step 3. Separate population controls were estimated for 145 countries or areas for undocumented residents counted in the 2010 ACS. For each country or area, the ratio of the population control to the logically edited population (from Step 2) was computed.

Step 4. The country-by-country ratios derived in Step 3 were used to make final selections of individual respondents in the ACS to be classified as undocumented residents.

Step 5. The estimates of those counted in the ACS (from Step 4) were adjusted for undercount.

B. Estimation of Overstays and EWIs

Estimates of overstays for this report are based partly on estimates of overstays, by country of origin for 2015 released by DHS (2016). Those estimates were derived primarily from the Arrival Departure Information System (ADIS), which tracks the arrival and departure of temporary visitors admitted for business or pleasure. Additional details about the methodology used to estimate overstays is included in a CMS report released earlier this year (Warren and Kerwin 2017). Estimates of EWIs were computed by subtracting estimates of overstays from CMS estimates of the total undocumented population for 2008 and 2015.

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17 The term logical edit refers to the process of determining probable legal status by examining survey data; for example, respondents were assigned to the legal category if they worked in occupations that generally require legal status, had the characteristics of legal temporary migrants, were immediate relatives of US citizens, received public benefits restricted to legal residents, were from countries where most arrivals would be refugees, or were age 60 or older at entry.

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