Long Abstract

"Tracking beyond borders: Mexican Family Life Survey experience"

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1. Background

Mexican migration to the United States has grown in the past 15 years to levels comparable to the Great Migrations a century ago (Hanson 2006) and migration has become the most important engine of population growth for the United States (Kent and Mather 2002). At the same time, for Mexico the impact of international migration to the United States on its population dynamics is becoming more relevant than in previous decades. According to projections estimated by the National Council of Population of Mexico (CONAPO) migration to the United States will reduce population growth rates from 1996 to 2010 in about 0.5% and 0.35% for males and females, respectively, age 15 to 44 (CONAPO, 2004). The tendency on this flow will not ebb in the near future. The most recent estimates suggest that today 1 in every 10 Mexicans live and work in the United States, and by 2050 that number will increase to 2 out of 10 (Passel 2006)[1]. Conversely, foreign born population living in the United States comprise 13% or 37 million of the total U.S. population, and Mexicans comprise more than 30% or around 12 million (Passel et al 2004; Passel 2006; Van Hook, Bean and Passel 2006).

Traditionally, migration flows to the United States were characterized mostly by movers from rural areas, primarily low skilled males in working age. Sending states comprised Guanajuato, Michoacan and Jalisco, while receiving states included mainly California and Texas. Mexican laborers were employed in the agricultural sector, and migration was temporal and circular (Massey 1997; Leite et al, 2003).

By the end of the 1980s until mid 1990s, the immigration policy reform implemented in the United States –i.e., the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA)- in addition to the adoption of new economic arrangements between Mexico and the United States –i.e., the North American Free Trade Agreement- altogether constituted a set of structural modifications that altered the nature of migration flows and intensified them. Empirical evidence suggests the following patterns in recent Mexican migration to the United States: (1) migrants are more likely to become permanent settlers; (2) undocumented migration continues to increase; (3) new sending and receiving states have surged; (4) heterogeneity of migrants has increased (more females and children, as well as urban origin individuals comprise new migration flows); and, (5) employment opportunities for migrants have broaden (Massey 1997; Leite et al, 2003; Zuñiga & Hernández-León 2005). Recent migration flows entail a new demographic composition with characteristics that differ in several

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[1] These estimates are necessarily conservative, for they were made considering a US population of 280 million.

from the previously studied migration flows mostly from rural areas (Massey & Fussell 2004).

Given the high dynamism of recent migration flows, a panel study that includes international migrants as participants is highly desirable. Nonetheless, panel studies of these characteristics lack in the literature. One powerful reason might be that migrants are hard to follow and interview, especially if they are undocumented. We successfully refute such argument with our study.

In this paper, we present some evidence on how tracking was possible in the Mexico-U.S. case, based on the experience of the Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS). The MxFLS is a prospective panel study, nationally representative, multi layered and multi thematic, initially designed to last 10 years with participants being interviewed in waves every three years. One unique feature of the MxFLS is that it was designed to track and interview those baseline respondents who migrated from Mexico to the United States. The decision to track migrants to the United States was considered with the intention of minimizing attrition rates of the sample, given the increasing and high migration rates observed in recent years.

The paper consists of four sections. In section one we revise previous efforts to characterize migrant populations, and present a new study design that overcomes many of the limitations of existing designs by tracking migrant populations across national borders. In section two, we present the protocols and strategies implemented to find and interview our participants who migrated to the United States. In section three, we present an event history analysis to examine the main determinants affecting the timing to interview of the MxFLS movers sample to the United States between 2002 and 2005. In section four we present descriptive statistics of the MxFLS migrant sample, as well as of the changes in several welfare indicators of migrants between the first wave (MxFLS-1) and the second wave of MxFLS (MxFLS2-MUS). We conclude pointing out areas where improvements can be made in MXFLS-3, to be carried out in 2009.

2. Data and Methods

The research will use data from the first and second wave of the MxFLS, and of chronological data recorded during the fieldwork of the strategies implemented per migrant to obtain an interview. Our analytical sample comprises 854 MxFLS-1 respondents who moved to the United States between 2002 and 2005.

Using survival analysis we investigate survival probabilities of the timing for an interview and the influence of respondents' characteristics at baseline, interviewers' characteristics and fieldwork strategies on the timing to obtaining an interview. On a daily basis, we identify the risk set as the pool of migrants still not interviewed and calculate the proportion of this group that leaves every day. The estimated proportions are hazard probabilities, and they indicate the probability that a migrant will be interviewed in that day, given that he or she has not been interviewed. Entries to the risk set are fixed at the date when the fieldwork in the United States started, in

November 1, 2005. Respondents exit the risk set the date of the interview. The file includes a chronological summary per respondent of all the strategies, applied over time, to obtain the interview, as well as characteristics of the interviewer and the respondent.

Our statistical strategy is divided in three stages. First, we begin by estimating Kaplan-Meier estimators of survival rates, i.e. rates at which respondents are not interviewed, stratifying by sex, rural/urban origin, marital status, interviewers' gender, having received a *despensa* or a monetary incentive, number of visits to the household in Mexico, answered calls in the United States and having visited the migrant in the United States. This analysis allows identifying differences in the timing to interview by groups, and by strategies.

Second, we conduct a multivariate analysis of the hazard rate by including into the model as independent variables the strategies employed to obtain an interview, interviewers' and respondents' characteristics. The models include information collected in 2002 regarding socio-economic and demographic characteristics of individuals such as age, gender, marital status, rural/urban origin, household size and log per capita expenditure. In addition, all the models incorporate the gender of the interviewer as a covariate. Four time-varying covariates capture the different strategies implemented in Mexico: in-kind incentives (i.e., *despensas)*, monetary incentives, visits and follow up calls to the household in Mexico. Two time varying covariates capture the strategies implemented in the United States: phone calls to migrants living in the United States and visits to migrants in the United States.

3. Implications

We present a panel study design that effectively tracks and interviews migrants even if they cross national boundaries, with a rate of success of 91%. This was accomplished by a combination of heavy use of social and human capital and telecommunication technologies, such as small portable computers to instantly share information with teams across borders, satellite telephony communications to contact families across borders, and a careful design of communication between teams across borders.

The MxFLS-MigUS is a unique panel that will permit the study of Mexico-U.S. migration under a dynamic framework. The panel will contribute to improve our understanding of migrant selectivity, return migration, the connection between health and migration, the relation of migrants with their households in the sending region, the assimilation process in the United States of undocumented migrants, among other processes. MxFLS-MigUS will allow researcher to analyze the complete process of migration considering both the sending and receiving society.

4. References

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