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What is driving immigrants from El Salvador to Las Vegas? (2000-2010)

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine if death rates due to crime or unemployment drove immigrants from El Salvador to migrate to Las Vegas between the years of 2000 to 2010. This study will be most directly based on the research conducted in the study *Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010*, conducted by the Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center's study focuses on finding an estimation on the number of undocumented immigrants that have entered the United States, the number of immigrants that are in the United States workforce, and the trends regarding what states and what cities immigrants are deciding to reside.

The importance of my research proposal is that immigration as a topic tends to be biased based on the political climate. Research should be unbiased and should allow a platform where all of the facts surrounding a particular topic can be found. This will allow a deeper discussion surrounding the topic of Salvadoran immigrants in Las Vegas, Nevada, instead of discussing whether immigration is right or wrong based upon an individual's moral reasoning. It is crucial that we focus on facts and that researchers are committed to unbiased research for the betterment of understanding the necessity of immigration policy reform. Through my research, I hypothesize that there will be a direct correlation to the number of immigrants in Las Vegas from El Salvador due to high unemployment and high homicide rates.

Methods

A majority of the research studies conducted, surrounding immigrants from El Salvador, are focused on the categories: psychological health, nutrition, and remittance practices between Salvadoran families in the United States and the Salvadoran families in El Salvador.

Some of the most instrumental data collected on the immigration statistics in Las Vegas have been from Audrey Singer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Metropolitan policy program. Singer has written extensively on the topic of immigration hubs and immigration trends in the United States. Singer presented Las Vegas Global Suburb? Migration to and from an Emerging Immigrant Gateway at the Global Immigrant Gateways Workshop in January 2006, in which she presented the data that Las Vegas has quickly emerged to become one of the most unionized cities in the United States, as well as, become one of the fastest growing cities during the 1990-2000 decade. Among the information presented, Singer discusses that in 2000, Las Vegas had the largest growth in its foreign born population with 247.9% growth.

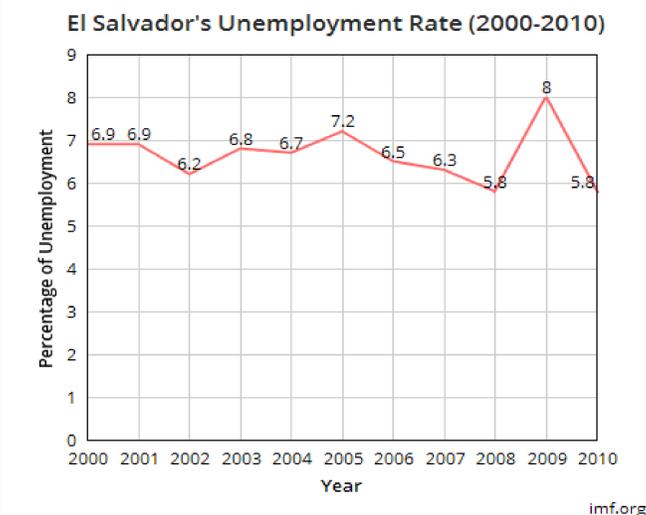
Literature Review

Unemployment:

Due to the changes in local economies over the span of a decade, some of the incoming immigrants from El Salvador have shifted into moving to other metropolitan areas in the Eastern United States. Immigration as a result of the reunification of families and natural disasters are important components when considering why Salvadorans are immigrating to the United States, because these occurrences skew much of the data correlated in driving factors that cause Salvadorans to want to migrate to the United States. Many scholars note that El Salvador's Civil War, which lasted from the late 1970's to the early 1990's, has played a large role in migration into the United States from El Salvador, but now it seems that the most determining factors in new immigrants coming into the United States stems from the country's poor economy and gang violence surrounding El Salvador's two most prominent gangs, Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th street gang.

The unemployment rate was 6.9% beginning in 2000, with a drop in unemployment to 5.8% in 2008, then a significant increase in unemployment at 8.0% in 2009 (Imf.org). Salvadorans sent an upwards of 3.6 billion dollars in remittance to El Salvador, making a large amount of El Salvador's economy reliant on the money sent by Salvadoran immigrants living in the United States.

Figure 1



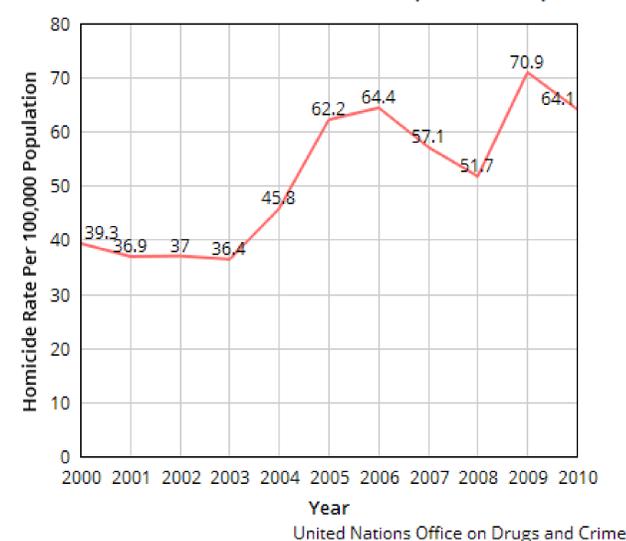
Homicide rates:

Many researchers point to the rising gang violence and infamous homicide rates as a deciding factor to emigrate. It is believed that the growing homicide rate correlated with gang violence is causing many Salvadorans to move to the United States, to not only escape poverty, but the constant threat of death. Currently the small Central American country is considered one of the deadliest peacetime countries in the world.

Inevitably with the large amount of crime and violence occurring in El Salvador immigration is still increasing in the United States. In combination with the high levels of unemployment, both unemployment rates and homicide rates correlate in an emerging rate of immigrants coming from El Salvador.

Figure 2

El Salvador's Homicide Rate (2000-2010)



Why Las Vegas?:

By 2000 researchers were beginning to notice a change in immigration patterns, specifically noting that the largest amounts of changes to immigrant populations in the Western United States were occurring outside the state of California. Las Vegas provides both a large opportunity for immigrants to work in low-skilled labor markets and also provide a lower cost of living in comparison to large gateway cities like Los Angeles. *Migration within the United States: Role of Race-Ethnicity* discusses "immigrant minorities in general have moved to the suburbs in greater numbers and made greater inroads to the middle class. Coincident with this has been a rise in housing costs in some gateway states (especially California), where there is competition for affordable housing as well as for employment. In fact, there is an increase in housing values in areas of high immigration" (Frey, 2005).

Results

Homicide rates and unemployment rates were used as reasoning for migrating from El Salvador, because violence and poverty are seemingly the most determining factors as to why immigrants move to the United States, and leave their homeland. This applies not only to Latin American immigrants, but immigrants from every country imaginable. Surprisingly though in reviewing the statistics on homicide rates and unemployment rates with the American Community Survey yearly samples in Nevada, the data did not provide enough evidence to depict a specific reason for the migration to Las Vegas. There was no correlation between the homicide rates and unemployment rates contributing to the number of immigrants from El Salvador in Las Vegas. To my surprise the number of immigrants from El Salvador was at its highest in the ACS sample during 2008, which is when I expected the number of Salvadorans to be its lowest in Las Vegas since the economy was at its lowest point. The homicide rate in El Salvador had peaked in 2009 as well as its unemployment rate which reached eight percent, but the number of El Salvadorans in the sample from ACS was at its lowest with an estimate 15,868 Salvadorans in Nevada. The highest number of immigrants from El Salvador in Nevada was at its highest in 2008, while El Salvador's unemployment rate was at its decade low and homicide rate was at a five year low.

Conclusion

Through research, I found a weak correlation between the spike in immigration in 2008 and El Salvador's homicide and unemployment rates. Migration to Nevada was at its highest in 2008, but both El Salvador's homicide and unemployment were at its lowest in 2008. While I found the data to be confusing and opposite of what I thought my results would be, the data does not take into account the perspective that immigrants had of Las Vegas during the 2008 recession. A factor to take into account is that the homicide and unemployment rates could have an effect one or two years in migration patterns. Since many immigrants move to Las Vegas from major gateway cities, it would take a longer timeline to adequately understand the effects crime and unemployment had on immigrants from El Salvador moving to Las Vegas. Las Vegas may not have been the most suitable place for immigrants looking for low skill occupations during the 2008 - 2010 time period and could have chosen to reside in other metropolitan gateway cities that provide more stable employment opportunities. It is important to note that the effects of violence and unemployment could have had a lagging effect that would directly increase the amount of national migration to the United States for one to two years, or even longer for gateway cities like Las Vegas it could potentially take longer.