

Before and after the visa imposition: Mexican immigration to Canada, 2003-2013

Ian Van Haren
Department of Sociology, McGill University
ian.vanharen@mail.mcgill.ca

Claudia Masferrer
Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales, El Colegio de México
cmasferrer@colmex.mx

Abstract

Before 2009, Mexicans did not require visas to visit Canada. This changed when the Canadian government imposed a visa requirement to respond to “bogus refugee claims”. We use administrative immigration records from Statistics Canada’s Permanent Resident Landing File (PRLF) data to understand changes in Mexican immigration to Canada before and after 2009. We study composition by immigrant class of entry to highlight increases in particular streams of economic migration and humanitarian migration. We investigate changes in socio-demographic characteristics and settlement patterns within Canada and highlight how immigrants from Mexico differ from immigrants from other regions of the world. Results are discussed in the context of recent research on visa impositions and migration flows, changes in Mexican migration to the US, changing economic migration policy, and temporary labour migration. The restricted individual-level data available in the PRLF allow for a detailed understanding of changes not possible using other data sets.

Introduction

Due to the large volume and long history of migration from Mexico to the United States (US), the study of Mexican emigrants has focused on the US as destination. Mexico-US migration has transformed itself over time, but today almost twelve million Mexicans live in the US (25 percent of the total foreign-born population) with 5.8 million Mexicans lacking authorization status (Passel and Cohn 2016) and a large share being low-skilled migrants (Hagan, Hernandez-Leon and Demonsant 2015). The Canadian case reveals a very different story. Mexican population in Canada is smaller than in the US, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a proportion of the foreign-born population. Contrary to the US, the undocumented population is almost non-existent, not only for Mexicans but for immigrants from all over the world (Basok 2000). Mobility between Mexico and Canada is a much recent phenomenon (Mueller 2005), and Mexicans in Canada are positively selected on education, and have similar levels of education as the rest.

Before 2009, Mexican citizens were not required to obtain a visa before travelling to Canada. However, in July 2009, the Canadian government imposed a visa requirement on Mexican citizens, arguing for a large number of “bogus refugees” (CIC 2009). In 2008, nine thousand Mexicans arrived claiming for asylum and refugee status. Since 2005, Mexico had become the top country for asylum claims in Canada, but since the 1990s Mexicans started arriving to Canada applying for refugee status (Escalante 2004). While this policy directly affected Mexican tourism and travel to Canada, our paper investigates whether permanent migration was also affected by the visa imposition. Canada lifted the visa requirement for Mexican visitors in December 2016. Canadian immigration policy provides mechanisms to migrate from abroad and land with a permanent resident status for economic, family reunification, and humanitarian reasons. Studying

recent Mexico-Canada migration provides an opportunity to analyze the impact of visa impositions on migration patterns.

Recent studies of migration have emphasized the important role of state regulations on migration decisions. Czaika and de Haas (2017) and Helbling and Leblang (2018) find that increasing visa restrictiveness decreases migration between countries. Our paper focuses specifically on migration from Mexico to Canada. This provides not only insights of the diversity of migrants from Mexico in different destinations to the US, but also informs on the discussion of the effectiveness of Canadian migration policy.

Canadian Migration Policy

In Canada, immigration is regulated by the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Canada's migration legislation focuses on high-skilled migration and other types of economic migration visas to a much greater extent than the US, where migration legislation is focused on family reunification (Boucher and Gest 2018; Boyd 2014). Canada also has immigration programs for immediate family members (spouses, children, and—in some cases—parents), refugees and protected persons, and a program to provide permanent residence to individuals who qualify on the basis of humanitarian and compassionate grounds. In recent years, the Canadian government has been very active in migration governance, frequently changing policies, legislation, and priorities (Paquet and Larios 2018).

Canada is unique in offering permanent residence upon arrival to most immigrants. While other countries like the US and many European countries often require migrants to remain in the country on a temporary status for a certain period of time before obtaining Permanent Residence, Canada provides Permanent Residence (PR) on arrival to qualified economic migrants, family class migrants, and to refugees resettled from overseas. However, persons who make an asylum claim must wait in Canada for their claim to be heard (and approved) by the Immigration and Refugee Board before applying for PR. The Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) category is also for individuals residing in Canada. Permanent residents have access to different rights from migrants with temporary resident status in Canadian legislation. One such right is the possibility for PRs to obtain citizenship after three years residence in Canada.

In addition to the aforementioned options for receiving permanent residence, there are a number of options for remaining in Canada on a temporary basis. In some cases, working or studying in Canada can lead to PR. The number of temporary foreign workers in Canada has increased, and in an effort to improve economic integration of migrants, respond to short-term labour market needs, and encourage settlement across the country; legislative changes to make it easier for migrants with work experience in Canada to obtain PR were introduced and strengthened from 2008-2014 (Boyd 2014; Ferrer, Picot, and Riddell 2014). While these changes focused on “high-skilled” migrants, they also included increased possibilities for migrants with lower skill or education levels to obtain PR if they respond to specific labour-market needs.

For family and humanitarian migration, the federal government regulates entry criteria. In contrast, economic migration programs vary between provinces. Quebec has complete control over all economic migration. Other provinces have both a blend of federal programs and provincial nominee programs that respond to province-specific needs (Paquet 2016). The provinces were able to select a larger number of economic migrants in the latter years of our study, as part of the aforementioned goal of increasing settlement to locations outside of Canada's three largest cities.

This paper will show that the settlement patterns within Canada of immigrants from Mexico and from other countries changed over time, as an increasing proportion of economic migrants chose to reside in provinces where there was not a large pre-existing co-ethnic community. However, this trend is also noted in family

and humanitarian migration; programs where migrants are not selected on the basis of a regional migration program.

When studying the impact of legislative changes on migration, processing backlogs and delays play an important role in any calculations. For immigration visas, there are often significant delays between the time an application is submitted and the time it is finalized. Therefore, legislative changes enacted in 2008 may not effect who qualifies for immigration for a few years. The PRLF database does not indicate when applications were made, preventing us from confirming which legislation was in effect at the time of the application.

Mexican migration to Canada

Since 1967, Mexican agriculture workers arrive to Canada every year to work, go back for few months to Mexico and return to Canada under the Seasonal Agriculture Workers Program (SWAP) (Verduzco 2008). In 2015, for example, around 23 thousand Mexicans arrived under with a Temporary Foreign Workers Program, mostly under the SWAP but others for non-agricultural jobs. Less than 10 thousand arrived to study and around 2 thousand high skilled migrants arrived under the International Mobility Program. That same year, around 3 thousand Mexicans obtained permanent resident status (Giorguli, García-Guerrero and Masferrer 2016). While the majority of the migration flow from Mexico to Canada arrives under a temporary status for work or study, a sizeable community of Mexicans have permanently migrated and obtained PR status or citizenship.

Results from Canada’s 2016 census indicate that there are 95,410 persons residing in Canada who were born in Mexico. More than six out of ten Mexican-born individuals were Canadian citizens (Statistics Canada 2018). The census also asks for ethnic origin: 128,480 individuals indicate their ethnic origin is Mexican, though 58% of these respondents listed more than one ethnic origin (Statistics Canada 2017).

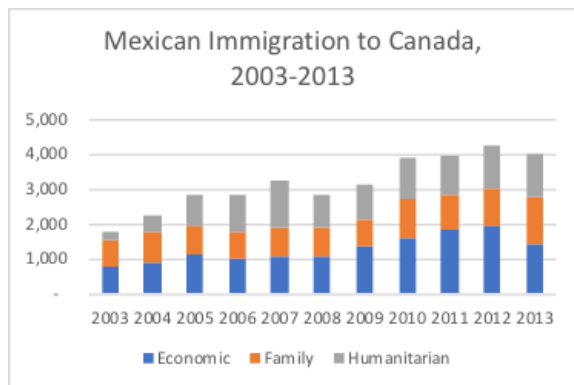


Figure 1. Data from PRLF.

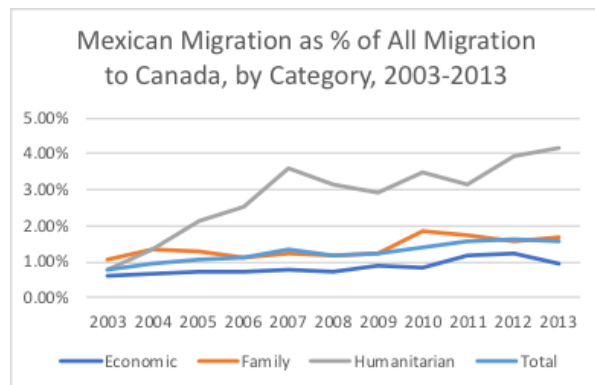


Figure 2. Data from PRLF

From 2003 to 2013, a general increase in the number of Mexicans who received Permanent Resident status can be observed. These increases are most notable in the number of economic immigrants and humanitarian immigrants, as shown in Figure 1. Overall, Mexicans represented over 1% of all immigrants to Canada, though they represented around 3-4% of all humanitarian or refugee migrants from 2007-2013 (see Figure 2).

Research Focus:

To build on previous understandings of how the Canadian government manages migration and the changing migration patterns of Mexicans in Canada, this paper focuses on two related questions. First, we analyze

how immigration from Mexico compares to immigration from other regions of the world. Given the claims and assumptions that some make of the character of Mexican migrants, we investigate the data to see how the profiles of Mexican immigrants compare to other immigrants. Second, we investigate the trends observed in Mexican migration to Canada before and after the 2009 visa imposition. This discussion contributes to recent scholarship on visa policies on migration flows by presenting a specific case study with detailed data on the diversity within a specific migration flow. Third, we focus on regional settlement patterns to understand how Mexicans adapted to changes in Canadian legislation and found new locations for residence.

Data and Methods

To address our research questions we use the Permanent Resident Landing File (PRLF) data, an administrative data file with basic information from the time of landing for all new Permanent Residents to Canada from 2003-2013. These individual-level data include the country of citizenship, immigration category, date of arrival, province of intended residence, and some basic demographic characteristics. The data provide information on an immigrant's characteristics on the day they arrived in Canada. The data do not include any measures of long-term integration (such as the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) from Statistics Canada) and they do not indicate how long the PR remained in Canada. The data also do not allow for assessing family groups. However, the individual-level data allow for detailed understanding of compositional changes in Mexico-Canada migration not possible using other data sets that lack information on the category of immigration and date of landing. Access to the restricted individual-level data was possible at the Statistics Canada Research Data Center at McGill University.

We compare five broad categories of migration: family reunification, the skilled worker program, other economic migration, refugees and protected persons, and migrants already in Canada receiving PR through the Humanitarian and Compassionate migration category. Aggregating the migration categories in this way allows for a comparison of the skilled worker program to all other economic migration programs, including Provincial Nominees, Canadian Experience Class, and business migrants. It also allows for H&C cases to be separated from persons who received status as a protected person, either through refugee resettlement or as a recognized refugee in Canada following an asylum claim.

At times, our analysis focuses on working-age adults. Focusing on immigrants aged 25-59 allows us to further study differences in education level and the gender composition of different migrant populations.

While Tables 1 and 2 show descriptive statistics that compare different sub-sets of immigrant populations; the Graphs presented at the end of this extended abstract are produced from a multinomial logistic regression analysis for intended province of destination. This analysis controls for differences in gender, age structure, year of arrival, and education category in order to analyze how Mexicans changed their provincial settlement patterns over time, compared to all other immigrants in similar categories. We excluded resettled refugees, business migrants, and other sub-categories of immigrants where the number of Mexicans is very low. This was done to ensure greater comparability.

Preliminary Results

Table 1 compares Mexican immigrants to immigrants from other regions of the world and summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 2.75 million immigrants who arrived in Canada during the eleven years studied in this paper. We note that Mexican immigrants are more likely to be aged 25-39 when compared to other groups and more likely to settle in Quebec than Ontario. We see that the majority of working-age adults from Mexico have at least one university degree, which places them ahead of other migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. As Figure One also demonstrated, there is a balance in the types of

immigrant visas used by Mexicans similar to other Latin Americans but in contrast to immigrants from other regions of the world.

Table 1: Selected demographic characteristics of immigrants to Canada by citizenship/region and age at arrival, 2003-2013

	Mexico	NTCA	ROLA	US	Europe	Asia & Pacific	Africa & ME	Total
ALL IMMIGRANTS:								
% Female	52.5	51.0	52.4	51.5	50.0	53.0	48.5	51.5
Age (% by category):								
0-17	19.9	27.8	24.1	36.8	22.1	23.4	26.9	24.4
18-24	9.9	15.8	11.7	7.6	8.6	11.1	10.8	10.6
25-39	54.7	38.9	41.9	29.1	46.0	40.0	43.4	41.5
40-59	14.3	14.2	18.8	21.1	18.6	19.5	15.6	18.4
60+	1.3	3.2	3.5	5.3	4.8	6.1	3.3	5.0
Migration Category (%):								
Family	29.1	33.9	31.4	47.3	24.0	28.9	17.3	26.6
Skilled Worker	29.1	11.3	34.4	30.4	50.2	37.5	50.6	41.3
Other Economic	11.0	21.9	4.8	11.1	17.6	25.3	8.2	18.2
H&C	11.5	9.8	7.8	6.1	3.4	1.7	2.6	3.0
Protected Persons	19.2	23.0	21.6	5.0	4.8	6.6	21.3	10.9
Province of Intended Residence (%):								
ON	30.8	36.6	48.0	48.0	38.7	49.7	40.7	45.8
QC	35.1	20.1	37.3	10.3	27.2	6.8	36.2	19.0
BC	16.2	12.2	4.3	21.8	13.9	21.6	6.7	15.8
AB	12.7	13.3	6.7	11.2	9.7	11.6	8.2	10.2
RoC	5.2	17.7	3.7	8.7	10.4	10.2	8.2	9.2
N, 2003-2013	34,910	13,030	231,860	91,320	399,610	1,399,470	573,300	2,753,040
IMMIGRANTS AGED 25-59:								
% Female	53.1	51.0	52.2	52.7	48.9	53.8	46.7	51.4
Migration Category (%):								
Family	30.5	30.9	27.5	62.6	22.4	24.5	16.3	23.9
Skilled Worker	31.1	12.9	39.3	19.8	53.3	41.7	55.1	45.1
Other Economic	10.8	21.4	5.0	11.5	16.5	26.5	7.7	18.6
H&C	11.5	12.7	9.1	5.7	3.4	1.8	3.1	3.3
Protected Persons	16.1	22.3	19.1	0.4	4.3	5.4	17.7	9.1
Education Category (%):								
Secondary or less	26.2	58.7	33.9	26.7	22.8	25.4	29.3	26.8
Some postsecondary	22.5	20.4	26.9	19.4	26.6	18.6	20.4	21.0
Bachelors or more	51.2	21.1	39.1	53.9	50.6	56.0	50.3	52.2
N, 2003-2013	24,080	6,920	140,680	45,840	258,040	831,610	338,380	1,650,440

Note: Stateless individuals and persons whose citizenship was not provided are included in total. Number per category and numbers used to calculate proportions rounded to nearest 10 in accordance with Statistics Canada data release guidelines. NTCA = El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. ROLA = Latin America & Caribbean excluding Mexico and NTCA. RoC = The other six provinces and three territories in Canada.

Table 2 shows how the Mexican population obtaining PR in Canada changed before and after the visa imposition in 2010. While there are a number of similarities between the two time periods (2003-2009 and 2010-2013), we note a few interesting differences. First, in absolute numbers, we see an increase in the number of Mexicans who qualified for migration through “Other Economic” programs and the Humanitarian and Compassionate visa program after the visa requirement was imposed. Second, we observe a greater proportion of Mexican immigrants with no post-secondary education in all categories in the years following the visa imposition. This change is most notable in the significant increase in migrants who qualified for Economic migration outside of the Skilled Worker program. Finally, we also observe that after the visa was imposed, there was a large increase in the proportion of migrants who intended to reside in Alberta across all migration categories.

Table 2: Selected demographic characteristics of Mexican immigrants to Canada, before and after the 2009 visa imposition

	<u>Family</u>		<u>Skilled Worker</u>		<u>Other Economic</u>		<u>H&C</u>		<u>Protected Persons</u>	
	<i>before</i>	<i>after</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>after</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>after</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>after</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>after</i>
IMMIGRANTS AGED 25-59										
% Female	61.7	57.6	47.5	48.4	50.9	46.1	56.9	50.0	53.9	55.6
Education Level (absolute numbers):										
Secondary or less	1340	1290	160	240	150	780	430	610	770	540
Some postsecondary	1000	650	490	290	110	340	390	510	1090	560
Bachelors or more	1790	1270	4030	2300	310	920	340	480	570	340
Education Level Distribution (%):										
Secondary or less	32.4	40.2	3.4	8.5	26.3	38.2	37.1	38.1	31.7	37.5
Some postsecondary	24.2	20.2	10.5	10.2	19.3	16.7	33.6	31.9	44.9	38.9
Bachelors or more	43.3	39.6	86.3	81.3	54.4	45.1	29.3	30.0	23.5	23.6
N	4130	3210	4670	2830	570	2040	1160	1600	2430	1440
ALL IMMIGRANTS										
Province of Intended Residence (%):										
ON	39.5	33.0	27.6	22.4	14.3	13.4	41.0	42.6	34.2	31.0
QC	18.4	23.0	49.9	53.1	6.6	1.0	32.4	27.8	56.9	52.2
BC	20.4	19.2	15.6	13.3	28.6	29.5	15.0	12.6	6.3	7.3
AB	12.9	18.1	6.2	9.9	20.9	39.4	6.9	14.8	2.1	8.6
RoC	8.7	6.6	0.9	1.3	30.8	17.1	4.6	2.2	0.5	0.8
N	5640	4520	6330	3840	910	2920	1730	2300	4270	2450

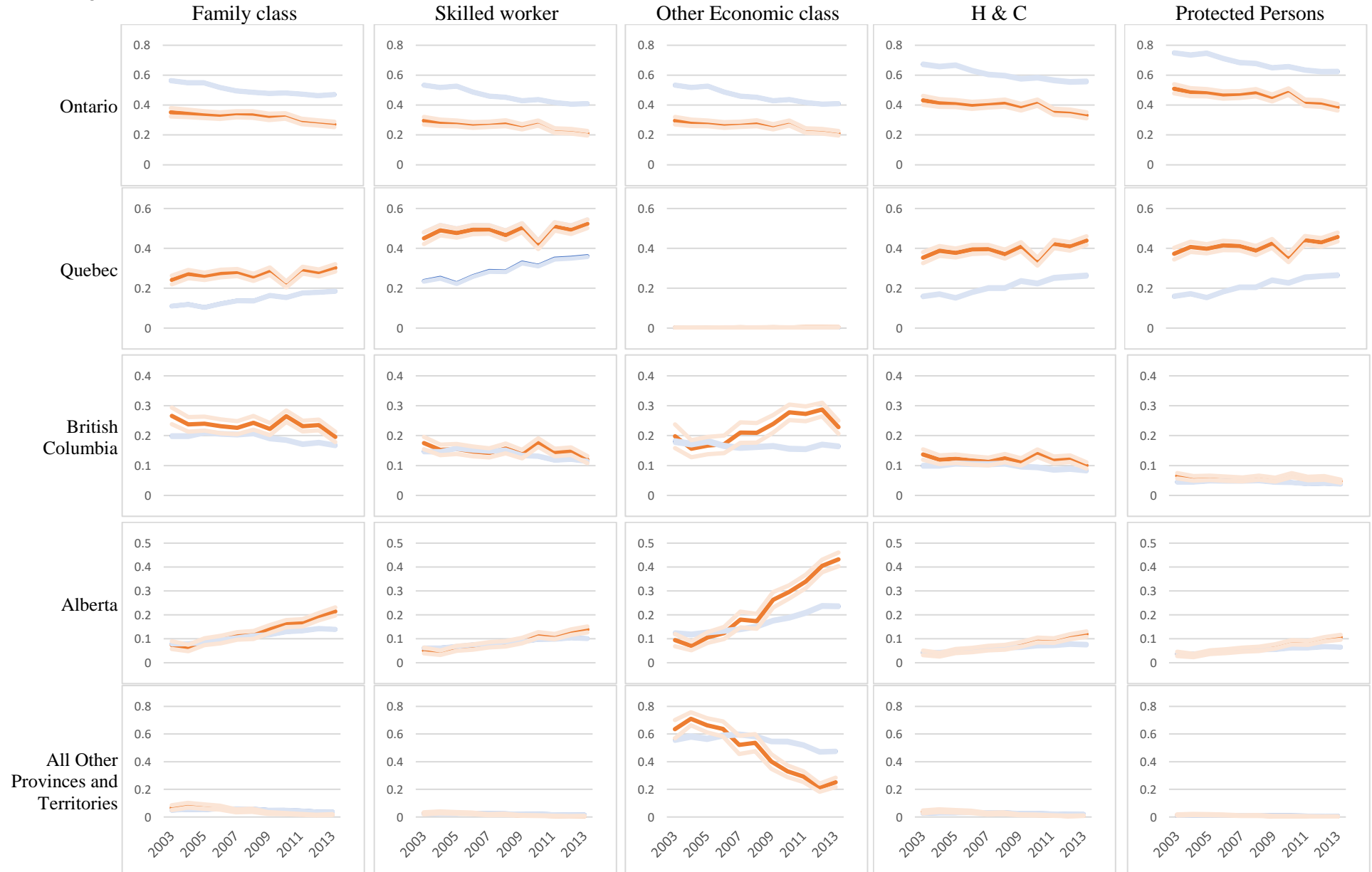
Note: Before is from 2003-2009, after is 2010-2013. This accounts for some processing time delays. All numbers rounded to 10. RoC = The other six provinces and three territories in Canada.

Figure 3 presents predicted probabilities from our multinomial logistic regression on province of destination by immigrant category. We observe some changes over time, as Alberta becomes a more popular destination for Mexican immigrants at a faster pace than immigrants from other countries. This change is particularly notable in the “Other Economic” category and offsets a decrease in “Other Economic” migration to smaller provinces and territories. Mexicans are more likely to settle in Quebec and British Columbia than other immigrants; though the proportion increases in Quebec but decreases in BC over the eleven years of our study. A decrease is also noted in Ontario, where Mexicans have been less likely to settle than other immigrants.

Final remarks

Overall, our results show that Mexican permanent resident flows over the period 2003-2013 changed in composition after the visa imposition in 2009, but migration continued and increased in volume. We find differences by province that speak more to the local economic, social, and political conditions that attract migrants, as well as local actors that are important for integration (immigrant and refugee settlement agency services, existence of a pan-ethnic community) and provincial immigration policies that facilitate migrants to be granted a permanent residence status. It seems that once migration starts going and social networks build up, flows will continue even after immigration control is put in place. But, contrary to other contexts like the US, migration occurs in an orderly fashion. We cannot assume that the visa imposition, or any migration policy, will be the cause of a change in the migration flows. Policies usually work as causes and consequences, and it's likely that changes were already in place before the visa. In future steps of this paper, we will work to highlight how the local context shaped these migration flows and how Mexicans differed to other immigrant groups. Understanding who arrived, where and when they settled is a first step for understanding integration patterns and outcomes of a population we know little of: Mexicans in Canada.

Figure Three: Average predicted probabilities from Multinomial Logistic Regression on province of destination by immigrant class of entry, for Mexicans (red) and immigrants from other countries (blue), 2003-2013



Source: PRLF. Multinomial Logistic Regression. Notes: Other economic includes Provincial Nominees and Canadian Experience Class—programs that are not available in Quebec. Resettled refugees excluded to increase comparability between groups.

References

- Basok, Tanya. 2000. "He Came, He Saw, He Stayed. Guest Worker Programmes and the Issue of Non-Return." *International Migration* 38(2):215–38.
- Boucher, Anna and Justin Gest. 2018. *Crossroads: Comparative Immigration Regimes in a World of Demographic Change*. Cambridge University Press.
- Boyd, Monica. 2014. "Recruiting High Skill Labour in North America: Policies, Outcomes and Futures." *International Migration* 52(3):40–54.
- Czaika, Mathias and Hein de Haas. 2017. "The Effect of Visas on Migration Processes." *International Migration Review* 51(4):893–926.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2009). Canada imposes a visa on Mexico. *News Releases, 2009., Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ottawa* (<http://www.cic.gc.ca/EnGLIsh/departement/media/releases/2009/2009-07-13.asp>).
- Escalante, Sebastian. (2004). Disrupting Mexican refugee constructs: Women, gays and lesbians in 1990s Canada. In B. Messamore (Ed.), *Canadian migration patterns from Britain and North America*. Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa
- Ferrer, Ana M., Garnett Picot, and William Craig Riddell. 2014. "New Directions in Immigration Policy: Canada's Evolving Approach to the Selection of Economic Immigrants." *International Migration Review* 48(3):846–67.
- Giorguli Saucedo, Silvia, Garcia-Guerrero, Víctor M., & Masferrer, Claudia. (2016). *A migration system in the making: Demographic dynamics and migration policies in North America and the Northern Triangle of Central-America*. Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales: El Colegio de México.
- Hagan, Jacqueline M., Hernandez-Leon, Ruben, & Demonsant, J.-L. (2015). *Skills of the "Unskilled" Work and Mobility among Mexican Migrants* (1 ed.): University of California Press.
- Helbling, Marc and David Leblang. 2018. "Controlling Immigration? How Regulations Affect Migration Flows." *European Journal of Political Research* 0(0).
- Mueller, Richard. (2005). Mexican immigrants and temporary residents in Canada: Current knowledge and future research. *Migraciones Internacionales*, 3(1), 32-56.
- Paquet, Mireille. 2016. *La Fédéralisation de l'immigration Au Canada*. Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Paquet, Mireille and Lindsay Larios. 2018. "Venue Shopping and Legitimacy: Making Sense of Harper's Immigration Record." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 1–20.
- Passel, Jeffrey S., & Cohn, D. Vera. (2016). Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Hold Steady Since 2009. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.
- Statistics Canada. 2017. Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables: Ethnic Origin, both sexes, age (total), Canada, 2016 Census – 25% Sample data,

(<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/imm/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=31&Geo=01>).

Statistics Canada. 2018. Data tables, 2016 Census: Citizenship (5), Place of Birth (272), Immigrant Status and Period of Immigration (11), Age (12) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2016 Census - 25% Sample Data. (<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=110525&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=120&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF>)

Verduzco, Gustavo. (2008). Lessons from the Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program in Canada: An opportunity at risk. In Agustín Escobar & Susan Martin (Eds.), *Mexico-U.S. Migration Management: A Binational Approach* (pp. 217-236). Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.