

GAO

Briefing Report to Congressional Requesters

April 1986

ILLEGAL ALIENS

Limited Research
Suggests Illegal Aliens
May Displace Native
Workers





UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

PROGRAM EVALUATION
AND
METHODOLOGY DIVISION

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The Honorable Alan K. Simpson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration
and Refugee Policy
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee
on Immigration and Refugee Policy
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

In your October 22, 1985, letter, you asked us to implement our preliminary plans to assess and synthesize existing studies dealing with the effects of illegal aliens on the U.S. labor market. As you requested, we report here on the first of the three questions we will be addressing in our study: Do illegal alien workers displace (that is, take jobs away from) native or legal workers? For this report, we do not address questions concerning other labor market effects, such as changes in wages, working conditions, and business environments. These effects could contribute to displacement by making jobs less attractive to other workers, for example, or they could offset displacement by increasing the total number of jobs available.

Our major finding here is that illegal alien workers appear to displace native or legal workers. This finding is a qualified one, because the research we used to reach it was limited and suffered from important methodological weaknesses. The information that would allow a conclusive answer to this question is not presently available.

We reviewed two types of research in our efforts to obtain this information. The first type consisted of descriptive studies from which possible displacement effects--that is, displacement because of the presence of illegal alien workers in the labor force--can be inferred. The second type consisted of studies on actual displacement effects--that is, the link between the employment of native and legal workers and the presence of illegal alien workers. In all, we synthesized information from 51 studies.

The most common form of "possible effect" study contained descriptive information on the characteristics of a sample of illegal workers, including occupation and industry or sector. Our synthesis of the data shows that although illegal alien workers studied were overrepresented by Mexicans from the Southwest, and although many were working in agriculture, illegal workers were found in all major categories of industry and occupation. Their presence in agriculture decreased and in other sectors of the economy increased as they became more settled. This suggests the possibility of widespread displacement of native or legal workers.

With regard to the "actual effect" studies, we found only 3 of the 12 relevant studies useful for our displacement question. But in these, too, the limited data suggest that displacement does occur. In 1 study that compared immigration and unemployment rates over time, the authors reported no displacement effects; from our reanalysis of the reported data we found that, on the contrary, the data could suggest displacement. The 2 other studies showed that some employers prefer and directly recruit illegal workers. Thus, data from both types of study are consistent with the finding that illegal alien workers probably displace native workers.

To complete this evaluation synthesis, we searched computerized data bases, asked experts to tell us of relevant studies, circulated our list of studies to numerous researchers and advocates on both sides of the issues under study, interviewed other experts, and obtained further information from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). We pooled the data from all relevant "possible effect" studies to derive our summary data. We treated the "actual effect" studies individually. For both, we rated the quality of the evidence and included the ratings in our data analysis. We describe our methodology in greater detail in appendix I.

As requested by your office, in the interest of time, we did not ask for comments on a draft copy of this report from INS or the authors of the studies we reviewed. As we arranged with your office, we are sending copies of this report to all members of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy and the House Committee on the Judiciary. Copies will be made available to others who request them. Please call me (202-275-1854) or Dr. Lois-ellin Datta (202-275-1370) if you need further information.



Eleanor Chelimsky
Director

C o n t e n t s

	<u>Page</u>
BRIEFING REPORT	5
Background	5
Is displacement possible?	6
Has displacement occurred?	13
Summary	17
APPENDIX	
I Objectives, scope, and methodology	21
II Bibliography	28
TABLE	
1 The countries and continents of origin of illegal aliens: A comparison between studies of illegal aliens and national estimates	7
2 The U.S. geographical location of illegal aliens: A comparison between studies of illegal aliens and national estimates	9
3 U.S. industries employing illegal aliens: A comparison between INS data and studies of illegal aliens	11
4 U.S. occupations of illegal aliens: A comparison between two data sources	12
5 Mean ratings of employer preference for subgroups of workers in three occupations in San Diego	17
I.1 Quality considerations for case studies on illegal aliens	23
I.2 Quality considerations for other studies on illegal aliens	24

FIGURE

1	Estimated changes in unemployment rates in a city as a result of increasing immigration rates in the city by 10 percent in 1961-76	14
2	Average unemployment rates for sampled cities in 1961-76	15

BRIEFING REPORT

BACKGROUND

The chairman and ranking minority member of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy asked us to assess the state of knowledge and synthesize the findings of available research on the effects of illegal aliens on the U.S. labor market. We found that three policy questions underlay the debate on these effects:

1. Do illegal alien workers displace (that is, take jobs away from) native or legal workers?¹
2. Do illegal alien workers depress wages and worsen the working conditions for native and legal workers?
3. Is the presence of illegal alien workers in an industry associated with a declining business environment?

In this report, we summarize our findings on the first question, which we divided into two subquestions:

--Is displacement possible given the characteristics of illegal alien employment?

--Has displacement actually been demonstrated?

Forty-six studies on possible effects approached the issue of displacement indirectly. They described the employment-related characteristics of illegal alien workers that indicated the types of workers who might be displaced or the labor markets where displacement might occur. These studies were descriptively useful, but most of them did not document observed instances of actual displacement. Seven of the 46 studies with descriptive information and 5 other studies on actual displacement were more direct, examining, for example, whether jobs vacated by apprehended illegal workers were filled by native or legal workers.

The appendixes to this report describe our objectives, scope, and methodology and give a bibliography of the studies we reviewed. The bibliography includes 85 reports because more than one publication was issued for some of the 51 basic data sources.

¹Illegal alien workers include aliens who enter the country illegally and obtain employment as well as aliens who enter legally with temporary visas that prohibit their working while in the United States.

IS DISPLACEMENT POSSIBLE?

The presence of illegal aliens in a labor market is an obvious condition for the displacement of native or legal workers by illegal aliens in that market. Their presence raises the possibility that they will compete with other workers for jobs and that displacement will occur. To address the question of possible displacement, we reviewed 46 empirical studies on the characteristics of illegal aliens and their employment. These studies addressed four subquestions:

1. What is the nationality of illegal aliens?
2. Where geographically are illegal aliens located while in the United States?
3. What U.S. industries employ illegal aliens?
4. What occupations do illegal aliens hold in the United States?

Care is needed in interpreting the data we present. We report the number of illegal aliens who have been studied in each of a variety of categories in tables 1 through 4 (beginning on page 7). This should not be confused with a national estimate of the illegal alien population. We believe that Passell and Woodrow (1984) gave the best national estimate of illegal aliens settled enough in 1980 to have addresses that could be used for their enumeration, but the 1980 data do not reflect illegal immigration since then.²

The studies of illegal aliens described them poorly on country of origin and geographical location in the United States. Most of what is known about illegal aliens is based on Mexicans living in the Southwest. Relatively little is known about illegal aliens from other parts of the world and in other parts of the country. Despite the limited focus of existing studies, illegal aliens have been found in all major categories of industry and occupation, although many are in agriculture and manufacturing. (We use the term "industry" broadly, as the Bureau of the Census does, to include the agricultural sector.) This suggests that the possibility of widespread displacement is greater than formerly believed.

Nearly all illegal aliens studied were Mexicans

Forty-two of the 46 studies we reviewed provided information on country or continent of origin (see table 1). Our analysis of this information indicated the following:

²Bibliographic citations are given in full in appendix II.

Table 1

The Countries and Continents of Origin of Illegal Aliens:
A Comparison Between Studies of Illegal Aliens
and National Estimates

<u>Country or continent</u>	<u>Studies of illegal aliens</u>		<u>National estimates^c</u>
	<u>Large studies^a</u>	<u>Small studies^b</u>	
Mexico	100.0%	83.5% (34)	55.0%
Cuba, Dominican Republic	0	1.4 (5)	2.2
Canada	0	<0.1 (1)	1.2
Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago	0	2.0 (3)	4.9
El Salvador, Guatemala, other Central America	0	6.9 (6)	8.6
South America	0	4.2 (5)	6.2
Europe	0	1.3 (2)	7.3
Asia	0	0.6 (3)	10.4
Africa, Oceania	0	0.1 (7)	4.2
 Total illegal aliens ^d	 --	 15,052	 2,057,000
No. of studies	3	38	1

^aEach study had 10,000 or more observations or gave population estimates for one category of illegal aliens.

^bEach study had fewer than 3,000 observations. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of studies reporting any illegal aliens in a category.

^cEstimates are from J. S. Passell and K. A. Woodrow, "Geographic Distribution of Undocumented Immigrants: Estimates of Undocumented Aliens Counted in the 1980 Census by State," International Migration Review, 18:3 (1984), 642-71.

^dThe total for large studies cannot be meaningfully summed because these studies include samples and population estimates. The total for small studies is the number of illegal aliens actually studied for whom country or continent of origin could be determined. The total for national estimates is the number of illegal aliens counted in the 1980 census.

- 3 large studies focused exclusively on Mexicans;
- the small sample studies (reporting 3,000 observations or fewer) also concentrated on Mexicans; more than 83 percent of all illegal aliens studied were Mexicans;³ and
- a national study estimated that Mexicans composed about 55 percent of the illegal alien population in 1980 (Passell and Woodrow, 1984). A comparison of the findings from the sources indicated above with this national estimate (which is more representative of "settled" illegal aliens) implies that other studies have overrepresented illegal aliens from Mexico and underrepresented illegal aliens from other countries or continents.

Most illegal aliens studied were in California and Texas

Forty-two of the 46 studies we reviewed provided information on illegal aliens' geographical location in the United States (see table 2). Our analysis of this information indicated the following:

- The 2 large studies that focused on "temporary" illegal aliens from Mexico identified illegal aliens primarily in California and Texas. Illegal aliens from these two states accounted for almost 90 percent of the total number studied. The remainder of the illegal aliens were from Arizona, Illinois, and New Mexico.
- Small sample studies (reporting 3,000 observations or fewer) concentrated on illegal aliens in California, New Jersey, and Texas. These illegal aliens accounted for more than 90 percent of the total number studied.
- A national study estimated that in 1980 about half the U.S. illegal alien population was in California (Passell and Woodrow, 1984). Other states in which large numbers of illegal aliens were estimated were Illinois, New York, and Texas. A comparison of the findings from the sources mentioned earlier with these estimates (which are more representative of "settled" illegal aliens) indicates that the other sources overrepresented illegal aliens in a few states and underrepresented or ignored illegal aliens in most other states.

³Our method of aggregating results across studies is discussed in appendix I.

Table 2

The U.S. Geographical Location of Illegal Aliens:
A Comparison Between Studies of Illegal Aliens
and National Estimates

<u>State</u>	<u>Studies of illegal aliens</u>			<u>National estimates^d</u>
	<u>Ranney and Kossoudji^a</u>	<u>Bustamante and Martinez^b</u>	<u>Small studies^c</u>	
California	51.4%	65.9%	64.3% (22)	49.8%
New York	0	0	4.2 (10)	11.4
Texas	38.2	22.7	14.9 (12)	9.0
Illinois	10.4	0	0.5 (2)	6.6
Florida	0	0	1.8 (4)	3.9
New Jersey	0	0	12.4 (4)	1.8
Virginia	0	0	0	1.7
Maryland	0	0	0	1.6
Arizona	0	9.1	0.3 (3)	1.2
Washington	0	0	0.2 (2)	1.1
Colorado	0	0	<0.1 (1)	0.9
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0.8
Oregon	0	0	0	0.7
Washington, D.C.	0	0	0.2 (2)	0.7
New Mexico	0	2.3	0	0.6
Other	0	0	1.2 (3)	8.2
Total illegal aliens ^e	200,717	22,122	14,495	2,057,000
No. of studies	1	1	39	1

^aS. Ranney and S. Kossoudji, "Profiles of Temporary Mexican Labor Migrants to the United States," Population and Development Review, 9:3 (1983), 475-93.

^bJ. A. Bustamante and G. Martinez G., Mexican Undocumented Immigration, Beyond Borders but Within Systems (Tijuana, Mexico: Centro de Estudios Fronterizos del Norte de Mexico, 1980.)

^cEach study had fewer than 3,000 observations. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of studies reporting any illegal aliens in a category.

^dEstimates are from J. S. Passell and K. A. Woodrow, "Geographic Distribution of Undocumented Immigrants: Estimates of Undocumented Aliens Counted in the 1980 Census by State," International Migration Review, 18:3 (1984), 642-71.

^eThe totals are, for Ranney and Kossoudji, an estimate from Mexican survey data on noncommuting, temporary migrants who reported their U.S. destinations in 1978; for Bustamante and Martinez and small studies, the numbers of illegal aliens actually studied whose state location could be determined; for national estimates, the illegal aliens counted in the 1980 census.

Illegal aliens work in all major categories of industry

Two sources of information on the employment of illegal aliens--INS and 35 of the 46 studies we reviewed--independently showed the presence of illegal workers in all major industries (INS groups apprehensions into only the four categories indicated in table 3). Although INS apprehensions are largely of illegal alien workers in agriculture and related industries, a substantial number are workers in manufacturing, construction, and service. The majority of the illegal alien workers who were studied were employed in agriculture and manufacturing.

However, some were employed in every major industrial category. The presence of illegal workers in any specific category was documented by at least 7 independent studies. Estimates of the distribution of the more "settled" illegal Mexican workers showed much less concentration of illegal aliens in agriculture; these data indicate that the largest proportion worked in manufacturing but some worked in every major category (Bean et al., 1984).

The information sources differed in the relative numbers of illegal aliens they identified for each industry. The differences seem to reflect their particular orientations:

--INS Border Patrol apprehensions largely represent "temporary" or "sojourner" workers.

--INS Investigations apprehensions represent a mixture of workers, but they tend to reflect generally more recent illegal aliens "settled" in the interior of the United States.

--34 small sample studies (less than 3,000 observations each) of illegal alien workers represented both "settled" and "temporary" workers. Some of these studies focused only on the illegal aliens working in a particular industry. The majority of the studies concentrated on Mexican illegal aliens in the Southwest.

--Bean, Browning, and Frisbie (1984) reported 1980 census data on the distribution of Mexican-born noncitizens, two thirds of whom were believed to be illegal aliens across industries. It is likely that these data represent "settled" illegal aliens.

Although the data are weak, they imply that settled illegal workers are less likely than temporary illegal workers to work in agriculture.

Table 3

U.S. Industries Employing Illegal Aliens: A Comparison Between INS
Data and Studies of Illegal Aliens

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Apprehensions^a</u>		<u>Studies of illegal aliens</u>	
	<u>INS Border Patrol</u>	<u>INS Investigations</u>	<u>Small studies^b</u>	<u>Bean et al.^c</u>
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining	77,091	3,749	2,134 (22)	2,503
Construction	8,207	7,926	396 (13)	1,295
Manufacturing	16,088	14,095	2,655 (21)	6,302
Service	5,931	8,797	985 (18)	2,870
Other	d	d	623 (17)	3,545
Transportation, communication, public utilities	d	d	61 (7)	324
Wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate	d	d	562 (17)	3,221
Total illegal aliens	107,317 ^e	34,567 ^e	6,793	16,515
No. of studies	1	1	34	1

^aUnpublished fiscal year 1985 data from INS on apprehensions of employed illegal aliens.

^bNumbers in parentheses are the numbers of studies reporting any illegal aliens in a category. Each study had fewer than 3,000 observations.

^cEstimates are from F. D. Bean, H. L. Browning, and W. P. Frisbie, "The Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Mexican Immigrant Status Group: Implications for Studying Undocumented Mexicans," International Migration Review, 18:3 (1984), 672-91. Numbers are based on a 5-percent sample of 1980 census data on non-U.S. citizens born in Mexico, two thirds of whom are estimated to be illegal aliens.

^dData not available.

^eTotals are events, not individuals.

Illegal aliens hold jobs in all major occupational categories

Thirty-five of the studies we reviewed provided information on the U.S. occupations of illegal aliens. These studies identified illegal workers in all major occupational categories (see table 4). Although substantial numbers of the illegal workers who were studied held farm and "operative" positions (operating machines, for example), many also worked in crafts and services and as nonfarm laborers. The numbers of illegal aliens in other occupations such as the professions, management, sales, and clerical work were smaller. However, their presence in these occupational groups was supported by at least 7 independent data sources.

Table 4

U.S. Occupations of Illegal Aliens:
A Comparison Between Two Data Sources

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Ranney and Kossoudjia</u>	<u>Small studies^b</u>
Professional and technical work	2,072	191 (11)
Management and administration	1,100	72 (9)
Sales	3,407	124 (7)
Clerical work	1,336	186 (8)
Crafts	25,412	1,076 (11)
Operative	27,231	2,244 (13)
Labor excluding farms	21,282	825 (12)
Farming including farmers, management, and labor	105,961	1,910 (17)
Service excluding private households	22,789	1,307 (18)
Private household service	13,380	589 (15)
Total illegal aliens	223,970	8,524
No. of studies	1	34

^aS. Ranney and S. Kossoudji, "Profiles of Temporary Mexican Labor Migrants to the United States," Population and Development Review, 9:3 (1983), 475-93. The numbers of illegal aliens and their total are estimates based on Mexican survey data for noncommuting, temporary migrants to the United States who reported their U.S. occupations.

^bNumbers in parentheses are the numbers of studies reporting any illegal aliens in a category. Each study had fewer than 3,000 observations. The total is the number of illegal aliens studied.

The relative distributions of illegal aliens across occupations were remarkably similar in the sources shown in the table and may reflect their similar orientations:

- Ranney and Kossoudji (1983) reported Mexican survey data on the U.S. occupations of noncommuting migrants, more than 90 percent of whom were illegal aliens or illegal alien workers. These were largely "temporary" workers. (The survey was conducted in a way that maximized the opportunity to interview agricultural workers.)
- The majority of 34 small sample studies (less than 3,000 observations each) focused largely on Mexican illegal aliens in the Southwest, representing both "settled" and "temporary" workers. Some of the studies focused only on the illegal aliens working in a particular industry.

Although the distribution of illegal aliens across occupations might change substantially if more representative samples of illegal aliens were included, the basic finding that they held jobs in every major category would not change.

HAS DISPLACEMENT OCCURRED?

While the studies on possible displacement indicated where displacement might occur, they did not document actual instances of displacement. That the illegal alien population is hidden makes its documentation difficult. To address the question of actual displacement, we reviewed the 12 studies that attempted to assess directly the effects of illegal alien workers on the employment of native or legal workers. These studies collectively addressed these three subquestions about actual displacement:

1. Do aggregate unemployment rates change in relation to immigration levels?
2. Are legal workers displaced by illegal workers because of employers' recruitment and hiring practices?
3. Can employers replace illegal workers with legal workers?

The research on these three subquestions is inconclusive but consistent with the possibility that displacement occurs. Of 12 studies, 9 had both avoidable and unavoidable methodological problems that limited their usefulness. Three studies were useful for the purposes of our report, but 2 of these collected data only in southern California, and the third examined effects prior to 1977. Taken together, the 3 studies suggest that

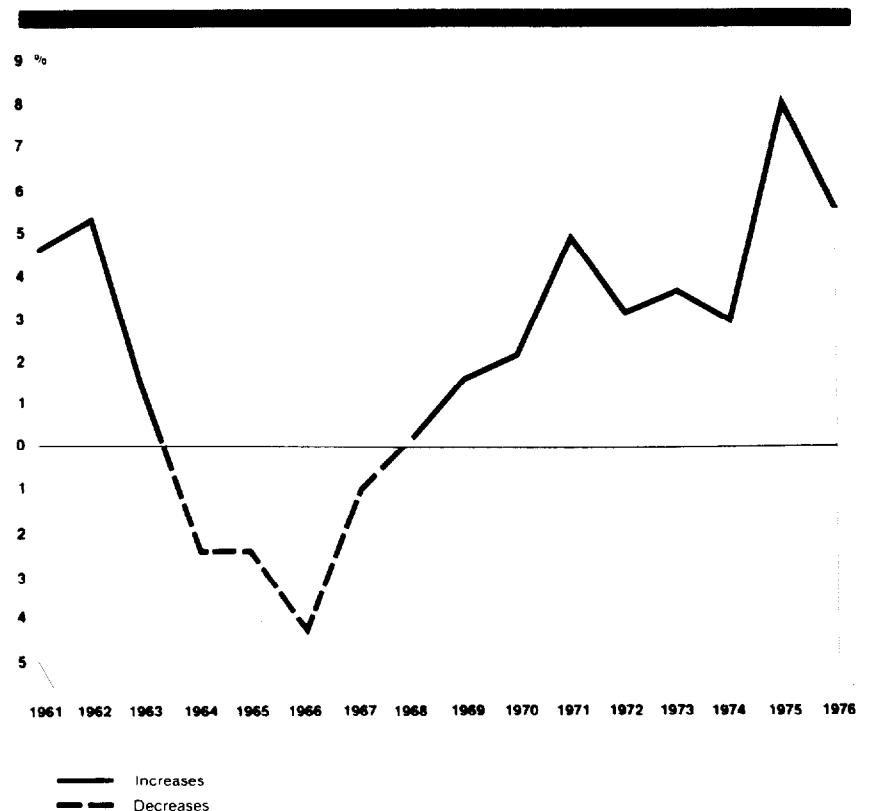
- immigration rates could affect unemployment rates and
- some employers prefer and recruit illegal workers.

We can make no inference on the question of whether natives do in fact fill jobs left vacant by illegal workers because of the lack of adequate studies.

Immigration rates could affect unemployment rates

One measure of native worker displacement is the extent to which changes in unemployment levels are related to the presence of illegal alien workers in the labor market. This measure assesses the aggregate effect of illegal alien workers and can account to some extent for jobs added to the economy and jobs lost by other workers. However, to assess this kind of effect directly, it is necessary to know how many illegal workers entered the labor market. This is unknown, and we found no studies that assessed the effects of illegal workers on unemployment. We did identify 3 studies of the effects of legal immigrants on unemployment. These studies were relevant to our displacement question to the extent that illegal workers have effects similar to those of legal immigrant workers. Only 1 of the studies was useful for our purposes.

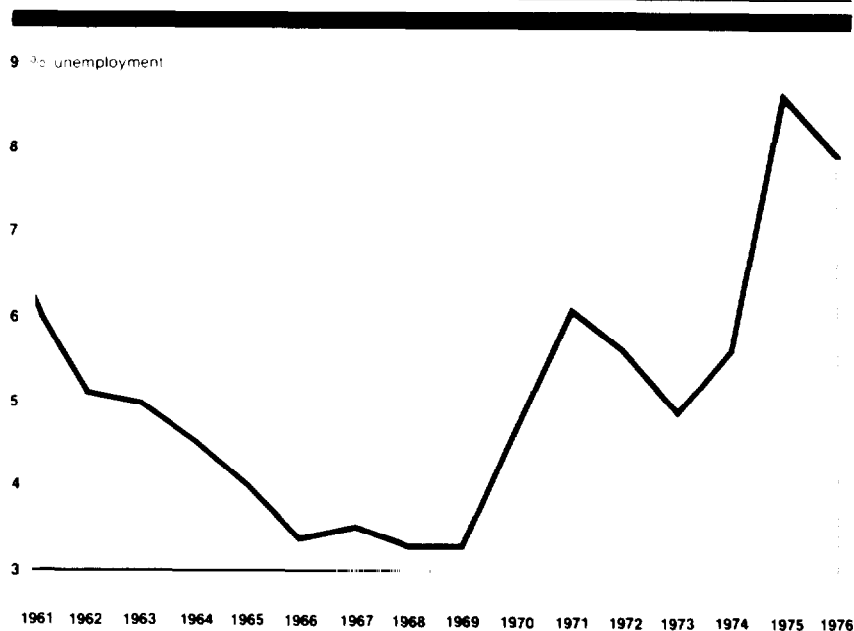
Figure 1: Estimated Changes in Unemployment Rates in a City as a Result of Increasing Immigration Rates in the City by 10 Percent in 1961-76



Source: Adapted From J. Simon and S. Moore, "The Effect of Immigration upon Unemployment: An Across-City Estimation," University of Maryland, College Park, Md. 1984, pp. 19-20

This study investigated the effect of immigration on unemployment rates in cities with large numbers of immigrants from 1961 to 1976 (Simon and Moore, 1984). For 12 of the 16 years, higher immigration rates in a city were related to increases in local unemployment rates, as figure 1 shows. However, for 4 of the years (all prior to 1968), higher immigration rates in a city were related to decreases in local unemployment rates. This pattern of effects appears to be related to average local unemployment rates in those years. The pattern of local unemployment rates from 1961 to 1976 shown in figure 2 is remarkably similar to the pattern shown in figure 1. A comparison of the two figures shows that immigration was associated with decreases in unemployment in years when unemployment rates were low. When unemployment rates were high (from 5 to 9 percent), immigration was associated with increases in unemployment. The exact number of jobs lost or gained in a given year cannot be estimated reliably from the data. Simon and Moore's unpublished report concluded that these data show random variation in effects. They did not display the data across years as we do in figures 1 and 2, which show orderly rather than random variation.

Figure 2: Average Unemployment Rates for Sampled Cities in 1961-76



Source: Adapted From J. Simon and S. Moore, "The Effect of Immigration upon Unemployment: An Across-City Estimation," University of Maryland, College Park, Md., 1984, p. A-1.

Our reanalysis of the data suggests that there is a possible interaction between general labor market conditions and the effect of immigration on job displacement which Simon and Moore did not consider. That is, when employment opportunities are relatively few, increased immigration increases unemployment, but the opposite occurs in periods with many employment opportunities. In addition, there may be other relationships between immigration rates and local labor market conditions that the study did not detect. This could occur if, for example, immigrants moved to areas with many employment opportunities. Such a relationship could indicate a more complex effect than that implied by figures 1 and 2 or no effect at all. The simplest interpretation of our reanalysis is that immigration rates could affect unemployment, but our analysis does not prove such a relationship.

Although 2 additional studies addressed unemployment effects, they were not useful for our purposes. We discuss our criteria for classifying studies as useful or not in appendix I.

Some employers prefer and directly recruit illegal aliens

A second approach to the assessment of displacement is to examine the loss of job opportunities because of employer recruitment and hiring practices. The use of informal networks (recruiting or hiring new workers through referrals from current workers, for example) can displace workers by removing their opportunities to compete directly for jobs. This kind of effect is difficult to assess, but the assessment is possible if proper assurances of confidentiality and anonymity are given in order to obtain the cooperation of employers and workers who make up the networks. We identified 4 studies that examined the de facto displacement of native or legal workers by illegal alien workers. Only 2 of these were useful for our purposes.

One study reported that selected restaurant and agricultural employers in the county of San Diego, California, indicated a higher preference, on the average, for illegal alien (that is, undocumented) workers than for other kinds of workers (Nalven and Frederickson, 1982). As table 5 indicates, undocumented workers were highly preferred as kitchen crew and farm workers, the average ratings across employers standing at 8 or higher on a 9-point scale. Employers rated Anglo and black workers as least preferred. There was no evidence of employers' preference for undocumented workers in surveyed electronics manufacturing firms. A few employers in agriculture and the restaurant industry acknowledged using closed network recruiting that facilitated the employment of illegal alien workers, but this cannot be generalized beyond the firms that were studied. The number of employees represented in the studied firms was not reported.

At least one contractor in the citrus industry in Ventura County, California, recruited illegal workers directly from a

Table 5

Mean Ratings of Employer Preference
for Subgroups of Workers in Three
Occupations in San Diego^a

<u>Worker subgroup</u>	<u>Restaurant: kitchen crew</u>	<u>Agriculture: farm worker</u>	<u>Electronics: assembler</u>
Undocumented (illegal)	8.0	8.1	0
Hispanic	7.5	7.4	6.3
Asian	7.4	7.8	7.3
Anglo	6.5	5.0	6.3
Black	6.4	b	4.8
No. of employers	11	14	12

^aHighest rating is 9.0.

^bNo rating given.

Source: J. Nalven and C. Frederickson, The Employer's View: Is There a Need for a Guest-Worker Program? (San Diego: Community Research Associates, 1982), pp. 31, 40, and 52.

Mexican "sending" region not used for recruitment by other firms in the industry (Mines and Anzaldua, 1982). These illegal workers displaced legal workers, many of whom were Mexican immigrants and their descendants, although some of the displaced workers may also have been working illegally in the United States.

Employers' replacement of illegal workers is unknown

A third way to assess the direct effect of illegal alien workers is to determine whether native or legal workers take and retain jobs vacated by illegal workers. This approach provides evidence of the displacement of individual workers but does not consider jobs added to the economy because of the presence of illegal alien workers. It is very difficult to measure this kind of effect, because the best source of information is the employers who obtain little benefit from cooperating in such a study. Six studies examined whether employers could or did replace illegal workers with native or legal workers, but all 6 were not useful for our purposes.

SUMMARY

Our synthesis and assessment of the available research (51 studies) shows that although information is limited, illegal alien

workers appear to displace (or take jobs away from) native or legal workers. Our review of two types of research led to this finding: descriptive studies, from which we inferred possible effects, and studies that examined actual effects. The studies of both types were limited in their coverage and scope and suffered from important methodological weaknesses. The data that would be needed to provide a conclusive answer to the displacement question are not presently available.

Our synthesis of data in 46 studies of possible effects suggests widespread displacement of native or legal workers. We found that although illegal alien workers studied were overrepresented by Mexicans from the Southwest, and although many were working in agriculture, illegal workers were found in all major categories of industry and occupation. Their presence in agriculture decreased and in other sectors of the economy increased as they became more settled.

The available research on actual displacement (12 studies, 5 of which were not among the 46 possible-effects studies) is inconclusive. Only 3 of the relevant studies were useful for our purposes, but all 3 were consistent with the possibility of displacement. The data from 1 study suggested that workers may be displaced by new immigrants when overall employment opportunities are few. However, these data do not go beyond 1977 and their implications have not been empirically tested. Two other studies indicated that displacement occurs because of employers' preference for and recruitment of illegal alien workers, but the data were restricted to southern California. We can make no inference regarding whether native workers fill jobs left vacant by illegal workers, because of the lack of adequate studies on the question.

An important purpose of our study was to identify gaps in the available research that impede answering the policy questions. At this point in our work, we have distinguished five gaps:

1. Few studies have been made of illegal alien workers of non-Hispanic origin, and the study of Hispanic groups other than Mexican has been limited.
2. There are few studies on illegal alien workers in states other than California and Texas.
3. We found no studies of the effect of illegal alien workers on unemployment levels in the 1980's and inconclusive tests of effects in earlier years.
4. Studies of displacement by employers' preference for illegal workers outside California are lacking, and we found no useful studies on this type of displacement outside southern California.

5. The studies are inadequate on the issue of whether native workers do or do not fill jobs left vacant by illegal workers.

For this report, we did not address questions concerning other effects of illegal alien workers on the labor market, such as the depression of wages and working conditions or changes in the business environment. These effects could contribute to the possibility of displacement by making jobs less attractive to native workers or increasing the preference of employers for illegal workers, or they could offset potential displacement by increasing the total number of jobs available. We will report on these issues later.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives for this report were to identify, evaluate, and synthesize available research studies on the potential displacement of native or legal workers by illegal aliens. We searched for two kinds of studies: (1) studies on possible effects, with descriptive information on illegal alien employment in the United States, and (2) studies on actual effects that attempted more directly to assess the displacement of native workers by illegal aliens. Research on other labor market effects of illegal workers--notably, effects on wages, working conditions, and business environment--is not included in this review.

The general evaluation synthesis methodology that we used is described fully in our paper entitled The Evaluation Synthesis (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, April 1983). This methodology has three main features:

1. It attempts to identify the universe of empirical work, including unpublished and draft manuscripts.
2. It combines findings across studies, taking research characteristics and data quality into account.
3. It provides an indication of what is known, what is unclear, and where the knowledge gaps are.

Our application of the methodology for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing studies is summarized below.

IDENTIFY RESEARCH

We began our search for relevant research literature with a broadly focused examination of six computerized bibliographic files: ABI/Inform, Economic Literature Index, and Sociological Abstracts (which cover business topics) and NTIS, PAIS, and Social Scisearch (which cover technical reports, mostly governmental). Our search terms were intentionally broad, because we wanted to find as many relevant documents as possible. The search of each file was generally restricted to documents published after 1975.

The computerized searches yielded more than 1,500 references, many with abstracts. Two staff members screened these references and reduced them to the 230 items that appeared the most relevant to our general topic: the effects of illegal aliens on the labor market. The documents were then collected from libraries, authors, and others.

Documents were scanned and classified into two main categories: legal immigrants and illegal aliens. The documents on legal immigrants were scanned, and only empirical studies of unemployment effects were classified as relevant. The documents on illegal aliens were read more closely by three staff members

and classified into three main categories: general policy and background discussions, research, and reviews of research.

Next, our staff members reviewed the bibliographies of the research studies and reviews to identify other studies that might have been missed by the computerized searches. The staff members also made a special search of immigration-related journals and informally contacted several experts to identify work in progress and unpublished literature. The experts included Richard Mines, David North, Demetri Papademetriou, and Lidio Tomasi, all members of GAO's immigration panel; Leo Chavez and other staff of the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego; and Donald Huddle of Rice University. We mailed our bibliography to other knowledgeable researchers, policy analysts, and policymakers for their review, and we were able further to identify newly completed and ongoing studies.

We then coded research reports by the labor market effect they addressed: displacement, wages and working conditions, or business environment. Our search yielded a total of 85 research documents relevant to our displacement question. Many of these were multiple publications based on a single study and data source. We grouped reports into a final set of 51 studies.

EVALUATE STUDIES

A team of three evaluators participated in the evaluation phase of our review. In this phase, the research studies we had identified earlier were assigned to the evaluators for the assessment of research characteristics and data quality. We instructed the evaluators to rate separately each of four possible components of a study: (1) descriptive data on illegal aliens, (2) descriptive data on contrast groups (such as unemployed native or legal workers), (3) descriptive data on industries employing illegal workers, and (4) analyses of displacement.

The evaluators gave two ratings for each possible descriptive component of a study and three ratings for analyses of displacement. The two ratings for descriptive data were for the amount of methodological information provided in a study and the degree of an evaluator's confidence in the reliability of the reported data. These two ratings and a third--the extent to which the reported effect could be attributed to the presence of illegal alien workers--were given for analyses of displacement.

All ratings were on a 7-point scale, 1 indicating either no information on a study method or a method so flawed that the data are probably wrong and 7 indicating detailed information on a study method or an appropriate method with attempts to minimize endemic problems. In addition to providing these overall ratings, the evaluators wrote brief justifications for each rating. In the cases in which more than one evaluator reviewed a specific

Table I.1Quality Considerations for Case Studies
on Illegal AliensDesign issues

- Is the case study application clearly described? Was it appropriate?
- Was the time span of the study long enough to address the core issues fairly?
- Is the basis for case selection presented? Was it appropriate?

Data collection issues

- Are the methods of data collection presented? Were they appropriate?
- If more than one investigator collected the data, how were the investigators selected, trained, and supervised?
- Are information sources described clearly and fully? Were they appropriate?

Issues in data base formation
and data analysis techniques

- Are the procedures for the formation of the data base described?
- Are the techniques of data-gathering and data-processing explicitly described?
- Were there interpretation differences, and, if so, how were they resolved?

Reporting issues

- Are methodological strengths and limitations identified clearly?
- Are the arguments for various resolutions of the evaluation question presented?
- Does the case study identify the factors explaining the phenomena observed and state clearly whether the identification of these factors was based on insight and recognition or on quantitative techniques?

Table I.2Quality Considerations for Other Studies
on Illegal AliensDesign issues

- Was the study design appropriate?
- Were the procedures used to draw the sample adequate for the type of sample?

Measurement issues

- What was the relationship between the measured variables and the study objectives?
- Were the measured variables reliable and valid?
- Were measurement instruments (including pilot testing) developed adequately?

Data collection issues

- Were data collectors selected adequately?
- Was the training of data collectors appropriate and adequate?
- Were the procedures for ensuring the reliability of data collectors during data collection adequate?

Analysis issues

- Was the analysis plan or approach appropriate?
- Were statistical procedures used appropriately?
- Was the amount of analytic detail adequate?

Reporting issues

- Were the conclusions drawn from the data and analysis appropriate?
- Is the statement of study limitations appropriate? If not, what were the specific limitations?

study, we developed final ratings for individual studies by averaging the ratings across evaluators.

To standardize the criteria used by different evaluators to assess studies, we modified a set of general guidelines for methodologically evaluating studies. These general guidelines were developed earlier by our Program Evaluation and Methodology Division. Our adaptation of the guidelines for reviewing studies on illegal aliens is given in tables I.1 and I.2 on pages 23 and 24. Our modification reflects our attempt to account for endemic methodological problems across studies that concern illegal aliens. In particular, we advised evaluators not to consider the representativeness of samples of illegal aliens in their evaluations. Illegal aliens are a hidden population and it is impossible to sample randomly from this population or to know how representative a given sample might be. Since all studies share this feature, we decided to evaluate studies on the controllable features of their designs and methodologies. We advised evaluators also not to consider sample size in their evaluations of samples of illegal aliens. Across studies, sample sizes varied from a few observations to over 10,000. Our rating system could not adequately indicate the relative weights that should be given to samples with such extreme limits. Therefore, we decided to weight individual studies by their sample sizes in our synthesis of findings.

To further standardize the criteria, we selected two studies for critique by all three evaluators. The members of the evaluation team discussed how they derived each rating and resolved all their disagreements in ratings. Our final guidelines for evaluating studies reflect the team's consensus on how ratings should be made.

SYNTHESIZE STUDIES

In the synthesis of study findings, we used different methods for data on possible displacement effects and data on actual displacement effects. For the former, we aggregated results across studies. For the latter, we treated studies independently.

Possible effects

For the synthesis of studies on possible effects, we considered four characteristics of illegal alien workers and their employment:

1. country of origin,
2. U.S. residence or location,
3. U.S. industry of employment, and
4. U.S. occupation.

Our categories for country of origin were those used by Passell and Woodrow (1984), and we used the 50 states for U.S. residence and location. We used 1970 census industry and occupation codes. We chose 1970 codes because many of the studies were based on data collected in the 1970's.

For each article, we coded the number of illegal aliens identified in each category for all four characteristics. If a study identified a characteristic but did not enumerate the sample size, we coded the minimum value of 1, to indicate that at least one illegal alien was identified in that category. We then aggregated observations across studies to determine the number of illegal aliens studied by category. We aggregated large (more than 10,000 observations) and small sample studies separately. The few studies that gave only population estimates were reported individually. Our method of aggregation, when applied to the total number of illegal aliens studied, yields proportions for categories that give weights to studies that are directly proportional to their sample sizes.

We did not include secondary citations of INS statistics in our aggregation. These tended to be local and out of date. Instead, we obtained recent national statistics from INS directly.

After aggregating results, we performed a robustness analysis by deleting results from studies with ratings that were low--less than 3 on the 7-point scale--on amount of information or confidence in data reliability. There was virtually no change in results. This is largely because studies with low ratings typically did not enumerate sample sizes. These studies were weighted accordingly in our computation of overall rates. The results we report are from all studies.

Actual effects

We grouped studies on actual effects by the type of effect they addressed:

- effects on aggregate unemployment rates,
- displacement effects caused by employers' recruitment and hiring practices, or
- effects on individual workers (that is, an employer's ability to replace illegal workers with native or legal workers).

We classified studies not useful for our purposes if either our rating on amount of methodological information or our confidence in the reliability of study results was less than 3 on the 7-point scale. Studies classified not useful because of insufficient information reported only results and gave little or no detail on how the data were acquired or reported summaries of

results and gave no statistical support for the summaries. Studies classified not useful because of low confidence in data reliability used unreliable methods, such as hearsay, to identify illegal alien workers or used inappropriate statistical procedures to support inferences (for example, cross-sectional or single-period data to support cause-and-effect inferences that implied a temporal sequence).

Studies on displacement caused by employer preferences and effects on individual workers were also rated not useful if the rating for the attribution of the results to illegal aliens was less than 3. The attribution rating was not used to classify studies on aggregate unemployment effects. All studies of this type looked only at the effects of legal immigrants in general, and conclusions based on them are therefore limited. We included them in our review because they were relevant to the extent that the effect of illegal workers on the labor market is similar to that of legal immigrants.

All other studies were classified useful. Our interpretations of the results of these studies were made independently from those of their authors.

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