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Since January 2017, after US President Donald Trump implemented policies designed to discourage migrants from coming to America, US border authorities have claimed early success. The most common metric cited to demonstrate the decline has been US Border Patrol apprehensions of migrants (http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/09/politics/border-crossings-apprehensions-down-trump/index.html) along the 3,000 kilometers of the US-Mexico border. Although apprehensions have indeed fallen under the Trump Administration to (https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration)early 1970s levels, this continues a descent that began when former President Obama was in office, which in 2016 reached the lowest apprehension levels in almost 50 years (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/14/mexico-us-border-apprehensions/).

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about migrants who have died or gone missing while transiting the US-Mexico border. As a recent report from the International Organization on Migration (IOM) highlights (https://www.iom.int/news/migrants-crossing-us-mexico-border-dying-faster-rate-2017-un-migration-agency), 232 migrants have died crossing into the US from Mexico through the end of July 2017—including ten found in a cargo truck in San Antonio, Texas—which reflects an increase from 204 during the same seven months last year. In the early 1970s, when approximately the same number of apprehensions occurred, deaths along the US-Mexico border rarely happened. The Border Patrol and activist groups first started keeping statistics on dead and missing migrants in the mid-1990s, when mass casualties resulting from route shifts away from urban and into rural areas were first reported in the Arizona deserts and in Texas both in and north of the Rio Grande.

The steady decline in Border Patrol apprehensions and sustained tragedies on the US-Mexico border raise two important questions. Why are more migrants dying in attempts to enter the United States while simultaneously fewer people are being arrested? And what can policymakers learn from comparing this era back to the 1970s, when—as American border officials are so keen to remind us—significantly fewer people were apprehended entering the US without documents?

PROHIBITION BRINGS THE BORDER PATROL

Charged with preventing people from entering the United States between ports of entry, the US Border Patrol was established in May 1924 as part of the growth in US federal law enforcement in response to Prohibition. With alcohol banned in the US until 1933, Border Patrol agents mostly policed for illegal shipments from Canada and Mexico. Although the Border Patrol had nominal administrative responsibility for migration control, most of the 750-800 agents on duty were assigned to Detroit, El Paso, Los Angeles, or San Antonio rather than on the physical border. Agents also lacked authority to detain migrants, since neither crossing the US border nor working without papers were criminalized at the time.

In 1940, when the Border Patrol doubled to 1,500 agents—where it would remain for over 40 years—migration control remained a low priority. From 1942 to 1964, the Bracero Program legalized Mexican migrant labor (http://braceroarchive.org/about) through a series of binational agreements. In the 1950s and 60s, the Border Patrol's mission was considered so anodyne that agents were commonly detailed out to other US federal agencies for activities ranging from assisting the Army during the Cuban Missile Crisis to civilian aircraft hijacking prevention (https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/history).

Practically speaking, migration control was not a sustained Border Patrol mission until 1952, when Congress first decreed that anyone in the United States without legal documents was subject to arrest, detention, and deportation (https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/history). While Border Patrol agents expanded their physical presence to the national border, and occasionally enforced immigration laws in large interior sweeps, they typically did so alongside other US federal agents or military forces. The best known was in 1954, when 50,000 migrant workers were deported to Mexico on barges during what the US government officially called 'Operation Wetback'.

IMMIGRATION REFORM AND THE UNITED FARM WORKERS

Despite the 1952 law and subsequent crackdowns targeting Mexican migrant workers, the Border Patrol remained small. After the Bracero Program ended in 1964, Border Patrol agents increased patrols, arrests, and deportations closer to the physical border. Although by the mid-1960s the organization's focus leaned towards migration control, it would take a Mexican-American activist, an oft-misunderstood labor movement, and an additional immigration law before Border Patrol agents substantively increased apprehensions.

While labor leader Cesar Chávez and his United Farm Workers are venerated by many as reformers, the late organizer's ambitions contributed to many of today's harshest immigration laws. Chávez was one of the Bracero Program's most vocal opponents, arguing that migrant labor depressed wages and restricted farmworkers rights. Chávez influenced the Bracero Program's 1964 repeal, as well as the passage of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965, which restricted Mexican visas into the US to 120,000—the first-ever Mexican labor quota. This coincided with a downturn in Mexico's post-World War II economy, whose two-decade boom was then called the "Mexican Miracle."

By July 1, 1968, when the 1965 immigration law took effect, the United Farm Workers had become darlings of the American political left. Chávez, who had by then organized a successful grape harvest strike, had been endorsed by Robert F. Kennedy and numerous labor activists. Journalists often compared the nonviolent vegan to Mahatma Gandhi (https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=217_0_3_0).

Unfortunately for migrant workers, the UFW were aggressively anti-immigrant. From 1968 on, as the UFW organized strikes throughout border states, walkouts coincided with belligerent anti-migrant rhetoric. In 1970, during the largest farmworker strike in US history, UFW activists swept migrant communities throughout California (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salad_Bowl_strike), threatening to report migrants to the Border Patrol if they remained in the US, and promising violence if they crossed the picket line. In 1973, Chávez led what the UFW called a 'wet line' (https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=217_0_3_0) along the Arizona-Mexico border, which was the first instance of organized anti-immigrant border activism. This dubious distinction would pass from the UFW's Mexican-American labor activists to the Minutemen Project's white nativists in the early 21st century.

From the late 1960s until the mid-1970s, the combined effects of the UFW's labor activism, a quota-based immigration law, and Mexico's economic downturn explain the Border Patrol's increased aggression. In 1965, the Border Patrol reported 44,161 apprehensions on the US-Mexico border. By 1968, when the Immigration Reform Act became law, apprehensions exceeded 100,000. By 1973—the era most often compared to today—border arrests approached 500,000. "Mexicans fleeing the collapse of the Mexican Miracle crossed the border without inspection or entered with false documents," writes Kelly Lytle Hernández in *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. "Accordingly, U.S. Border Patrol apprehension rates along the U.S.-Mexico border began to climb."

THE TRAGIC PATH AHEAD

Considering history in today's context, it is presumptuous for any policymaker to assume to know why migrants—either then or now—transit international borders under extralegal circumstances. Each of the 232 people who died crossing into the US in 2017 had their own reasons for their journeys. This past March in Tijuana, a 63-year-old man told me how he had been caught and deported twice in the last five years attempting to visit his children—who, being undocumented, were unable to travel to Mexico. Three months ago, a South Texas resident in his forties was considering smuggling options for his Mexican girlfriend, as his US-based work prevented their companionship. Describing migration as mere economics, as statistics often do, reduces the dignity of each personal quest.

Even so, current statistics and historical reflection point towards grim conclusions. Because of border militarization and increased labor restrictions, US apprehensions of migrants from Mexico will likely fall well below 1970s levels in the coming years. The Border Patrol is almost fifteen times the size (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Border_Patrol) of what it was in the 1970s, and policymakers continue to call for increasing resources (although, as this excellent piece explains (https://www.wola.org/analysis/four-common-misconceptions-increasing-size-border-patrol/), such arguments are rapidly defying logic).

Most sadly, migrants will likely continue dying while attempting to enter the US at constant or increasing levels. As scholars who study human smuggling have demonstrated worldwide, raising controls on migration has the corollary effect of increasing the migrant's demand for smugglers. Despite policy mantras for the Border Patrol to gain "full operational control," human smuggling —both amateur and professional—will both grow and endure. These prognostications, while troubling, reinforce the ongoing call for nations claiming to support human rights to reform processes for labor mobility and end the failed and tragic criminalization of pursuing the simplicity of happiness.

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