

# IMMIGRATION & LABOR UNIONS

Since its founding, U.S. has always been a nation of immigrants. 1990-2000 saw highest legal and illegal immigration in decades, an estimated 12 million illegals, 57% from Mexico (Pew Center).

Answer these 2007 public opinion poll questions about immigration:

On the whole, do you think immigration is a good thing or a bad thing for this country today?

Do you think state governments should or should not issue driver's licenses to illegal immigrants?

Do you favor or oppose these parts of a possible new immigration bill:

Imposing new fines on businesses that hire illegal immigrants?

Increasing border security by building a fence along part of the U.S. border with Mexico and by hiring and training more border patrol agents?

Allowing illegal workers who arrived in the U.S. to apply for permanent U.S. residency if they return to their home country within eight years and pay additional fines?

# “Amnesty” for Illegal Immigrants?

Many U.S. businesses (farms, restaurants, Wal-Mart) depend on low-wage immigrant labor. They politically back federal regulatory institutions that will maintain the steady in-flow of such workers.



Pres. Bush proposed a major **institutional change** – Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act – with provisions for illegals already here ultimately to obtain citizenship. But conservatives wanted tougher border security first. Bill defeated in June when Senate failed to reach 60 votes for cloture.

Immigration reform likely to remain contested issue in 2008 elections:

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the issue of immigration?” (August 2007)

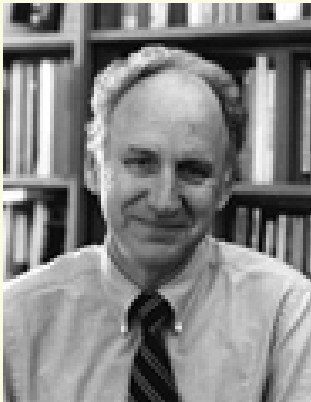
“Which political party -- the Democrats or the Republicans – do you trust to do a better job handling immigration issues?” (May 2006)

PARTY	APPROVE	DISAPPROVE
Republicans	41%	47%
Democrats	29%	66%
Independents	23%	64%

Republicans	34%
Democrats	48%
Neither	14%

# Institutional Theories of Orgs

Institutional theories of orgs emphasize conformity to common structural forms and practices prevailing within a social system. Institutions have **legitimacy** – normative and moral beliefs about proper and acceptable org'l authority (= legitimate power).



Institutions are “multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources. ... They are relatively resistant to change.”

W. Richard Scott. 2001. *Institutions and Organizations*

**Taken-for-granted assumptions:** Widely held beliefs that orgs which conform to common structures & practices should be rewarded with financial resources, high prestige & public support.

What taken-for-granted assumptions do you hold about the social & economic benefits of the U.S.'s relatively open immigration policies? What are potential or actual harms?

# Types of Institutions

Scott developed a three-pillar typology of **institutional elements**:

**Regulative:** rule-setting, monitoring, and enforcement of conformity, ultimately through coercive sanctions for violations

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952  
Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986  
Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE)



**Normative:** values and norms that define desirable goals and the most appropriate (legitimate) ways of achieving these ends

What expectations about legitimate & illegitimate ways to enter U.S., hold jobs, obtain benefits (schooling, welfare, driver's license)?

**Cultural-cognitive:** shared conceptions of social reality and frames through which common meanings are constructed

What do these artifacts & symbols mean: Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty; "A shining city on a hill;" English as official language vs. bilingual education; Arnold Schwarzenegger for President!?

# AN IMMIGRATION DEBATE

Opposing teams develop points for a pro- vs. con-debate about reforming or reinforcing U.S. immigration institutions. Prepare both to defend your position and to rebut those of your opponents. Consider, and add to, topics such as:

Impacts on American cultural unity

Threats to security from crime & terrorism

U.S. image in the international system



Economic benefits from a steady flow of diverse young populations into an aging country

American democratic ideals, values, norms

Tolerance/unfairness toward disfavored nationalities

Language barriers to immigrant assimilation

Asylum for politically & religiously persecuted refugees

# NAFTA - A Regulatory Institution

In 1994, President Clinton signed the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), eliminating agriculture trade barriers. Other Mexican & Canadian tariffs and quotas phase out over 14 years.



- Low tariffs & high exports enabled Mexico to recover quickly from its 1994 “peso crisis”
- By 1999, U.S. provided 75% of Mexico’s agriculture imports; unable to compete, many poor Mexican farmers sought work in the U.S.

**A controversial regulatory institution, NAFTA affected 1992-96 elections:**

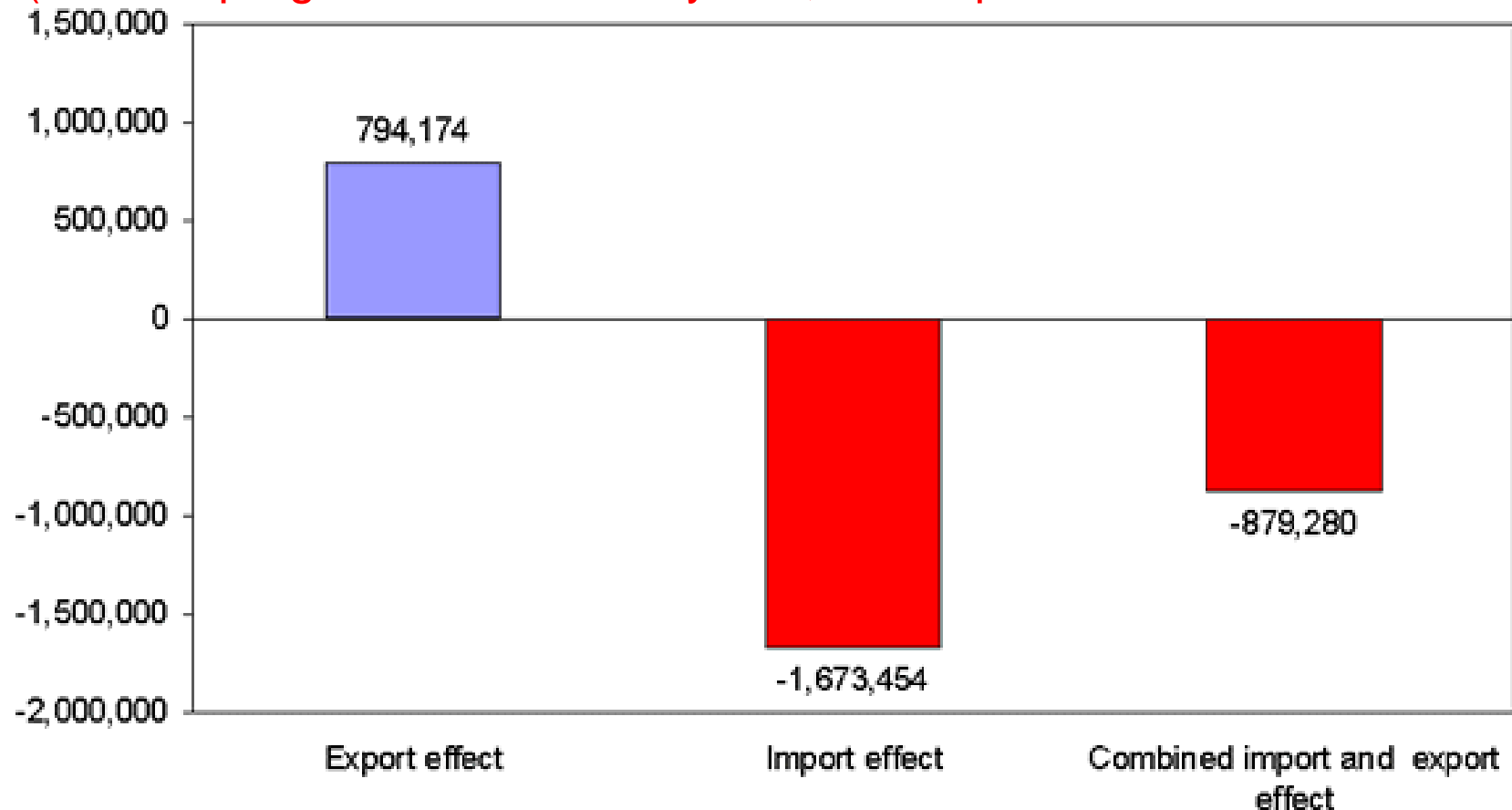
- Labor unions, Democrats & Perot against: Huge job losses
- Republicans & Clinton favored: U.S. business investment would cut immigration by creating Mexican jobs at much higher wages

NAFTA spurred rapid industrialization of the U.S.-Mexican border, transportation and pollution problems. **What evidence of net job growth/loss, trade deficit, narrowing of U.S.-Mexico wage gap? How much of doubled Mexican illegal immigration due to NAFTA?**

# “A Giant Sucking Sound” ?

## Jobs gained or lost due to U.S. NAFTA trade, 1993-2002

(Federal programs certified only 209,000 displaced workers for training)



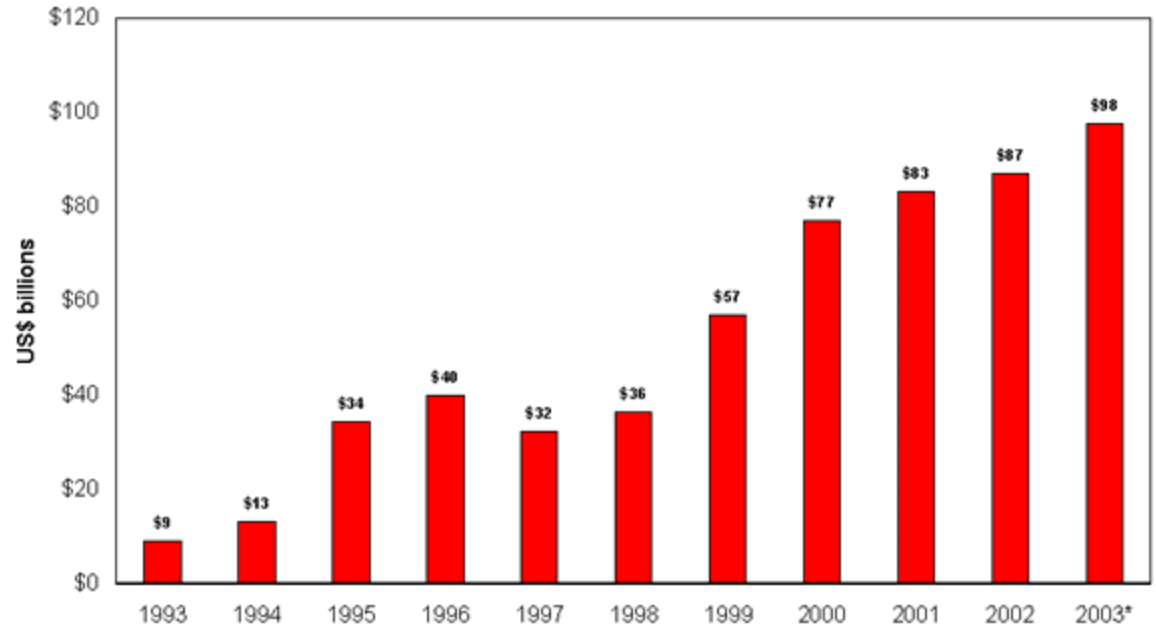
Source: EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau Data.



# Surging Trade Deficits

The U.S.'s trade gap with Mexico & Canada rose sharply under NAFTA, giving ammunition to the many critics who called it a bad deal for U.S. – environmentalists, family farmers, social-justice movements, consumers, labor unions, ...

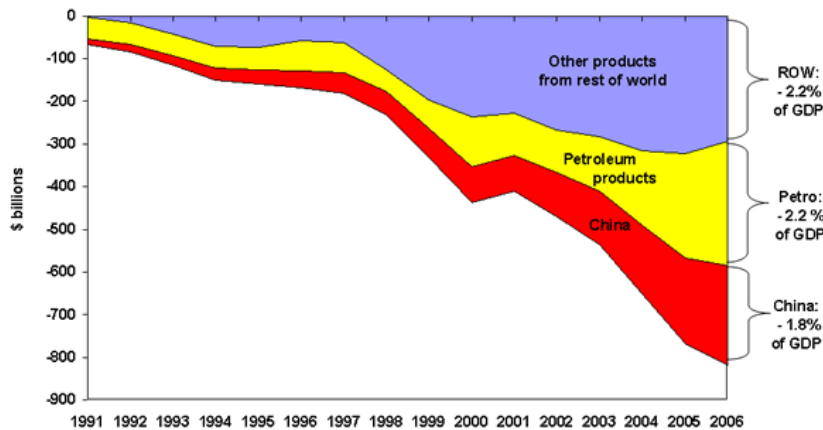
U.S. NAFTA trade deficit surging again



\*Estimated

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce and Census Bureau

China and petroleum products are growing share of U.S. merchandise trade deficit\*



\* Census basis  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau and EPI analysis.

But, in the context of surging U.S. trade deficits with the entire world, isn't NAFTA just a tiny part of a much larger problem?

Or maybe no problem at all?



## Was NAFTA Worth It?

Rapid growth of *maquiladora* manufacturing institution on the border after NAFTA – 2,143 to 3,703 plants from 1993-2000.

*Maquila* – Import duty-free U.S. materials; cheap labor finishes (\$1.47/hr); pay duty only on value-added exports back to U.S.



But, Mexico's economic gains were only modest and temporary. The *maquilas* are now competing against lower-wage East Asian labor. Record numbers of jobless Mexicans continue to flood across the border.

“Thousands of other Mexican businesses have gone under in the face of foreign competition. ‘We are at a watershed,’ says Jaime Serra Puche, Mexico’s chief NAFTA negotiator. ‘Either we take the steps to become a true North American country or we just become a big Central American country.’”

(Smith & Lindblad 2003)

What new socioeconomic institutions could help Mexico to cross over the bridge from developing to developed nation?

# Exporting Even the Good Jobs?

New global institutions are outsourcing even white collar & high-tech jobs. **EX:** 24/7 Customer.com of Bangalore, India, whose college-educated workers earn just 10-20% of U.S. wages.



- How did U.S. Y2K fears enable English-speaking computer programmers to realize “The Great Indian Dream”?
- Did 2000 bursting of Dot.com bubble provide cheap fiber optic cables for job outsourcing?
- Is institutionalizing protection of U.S. jobs a realistic solution?
- Should Congress enact laws to prevent all federal contracts from being filled through offshore outsourcing?
- Should we limit number of visas allowing foreign employees to work in the U.S.? Then where will we find hi-tech workers?
- Will Americans gain good new jobs when prospering Indian and Chinese firms purchase goods & services from U.S. firms?

# Looking for the Union Label

Unions advocate protecting U.S. workers from foreign competition, oppose free trade & overseas job outsourcing



AFL-CIO petitioned Bush Admin to pressure the Chinese government to increase wages and improve working conditions. More than 700,000 U.S. workers lost jobs over 10 years “as a direct result of violations of workers’ rights by the Chinese government,” said AFL-CIO Sec-Treas. Richard Trumka (3/17/04).

But, labor unions lost political power after 1930-40s New Deal, as federal institutions (e.g., the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act) restricted union control over employees and rights to negotiate collective bargaining contracts. Many other factors responsible, especially:

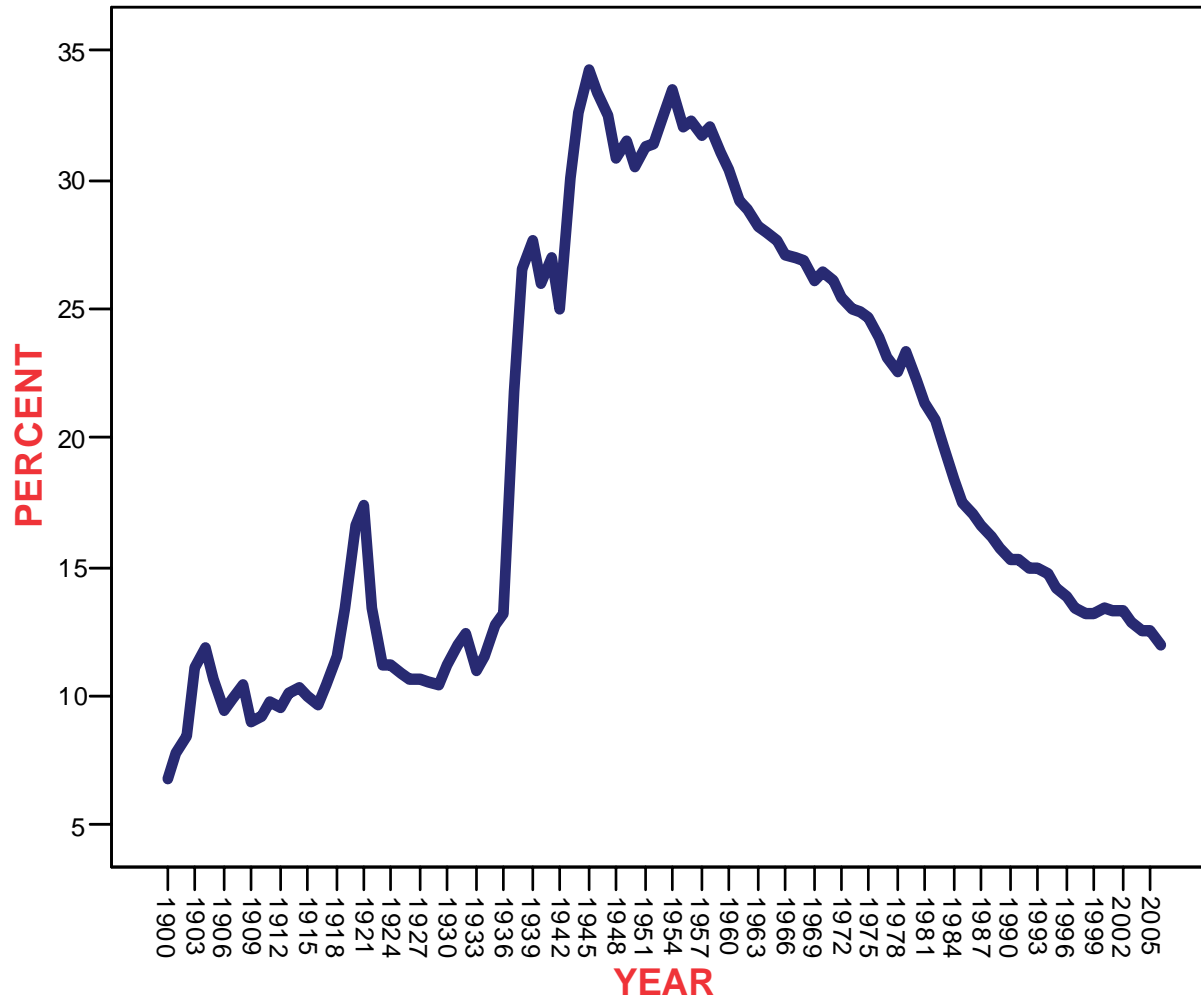
- Disappearance of manufacturing jobs to oversea plants
- White collars & techies see unionization as unappealing
- Aggressive firm campaigns to prevent or decertify unions
- Strong Republican party support for pro-business policies

# Eroding Union Density

Union density (percentage of employees) fell after its 1948 peak

Is unionization decline heading toward less than 10% of labor force?

Percentage of Employees Who Are Union Members



# Labor Unions as Institutions

Labor unions are peculiar institutions – voluntary associations with democratically elected leaders, yet exercising coercive economic power over private firms and their employees. Corruption and mob ties damage many unions' public images.



Until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, most Americans viewed unions as illegitimate & illegal weapons that undermined efficiency in the labor market.

The 1930s sit-down strikes in auto and steel industries won rights to collective bargaining and check-off of union dues (“closed shop”).

In recent decades, public support for many institutions has fallen sharply: in the 2004 General Social Survey, only **15%** of respondents had “a great deal of confidence” in organized labor; **19%** in major companies; **30%** in banks and financial institutions; but scientific community = **43%**; military = **59%**.

Are U.S. labor unions in danger of de-institutionalization?

# Union Remobilization

To reverse downward spiral, Bronfenbrenner & Hickey outline a strategy to produce higher rate of successful union campaigns

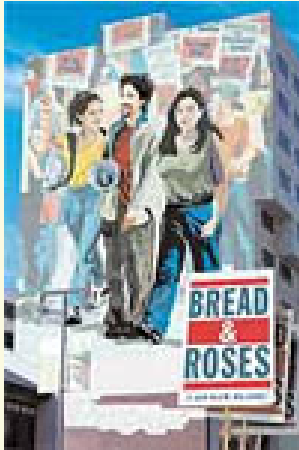


These tactics are based on Service Employees Int'l Union's "Justice for Janitors" campaign that won many recognition elections & increased SEIU membership while other unions plummeted.

## COMPREHENSIVE UNION ORGANIZING STRATEGY

1. Adequate and appropriate staff and financial resources
2. Strategic targeting – researching the company before campaigning
3. Active and representative rank-and-file organizing committees
4. Active participation of member volunteers
5. Person-to-person contact inside and outside the workplace
6. Benchmarks & assessments to monitor union support, for moving ahead
7. Issues which resonate in the workplace and in the community
8. Creative, escalating internal pressures involving workplace members
9. External pressure tactics outside workplace, locally to internationally
10. Building for the first contract during the organizing campaign

## *Bread and Roses*



*Bread and Roses*, starring Pilar Padilla and Adrien Brody, is a dramatization of the SEIU's campaign to organize Los Angeles office cleaners in the 1990s, many of whom were illegal immigrants. Watch these excerpts about one organizer's efforts.

What grievances do the workers have against their employer?

Which elements of the comprehensive union organizing strategy does union organizer Sam apply in his efforts to convince the building's janitors to unionize?

Which tactics seem to succeed in convincing the janitors to unionize? Why aren't they effective with some workers?

In what other industries might this strategy be successful – e.g., unionizing sales clerks, computer programmers, ...?