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**Paper presented in the Open Frontiers  
panel at the plenary session "XXVI IUSSP  
General population Conference", at San  
Salvador de Bahía, Brazil**

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## SHOULD FRONTIERS BE OPENED TO INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION?

Beyond the geographic vicinity, few are the real characteristics shared by the different borders of the world. "Frontiers" hardly could be considered as homogeneous regions, even within the same border could exist important differences on her parts. Following this logic is difficult and impractical to answer on an absolute and general way such an open question. Due to that we have preferred to answer a specific case, in order to try to show that the model of management followed in these borders is at least wrong. The case selected by us is about both Mexican frontiers, with the strongest world economy at North with the U.S.A. and the southern border shared with Guatemala. Both differences illustrate by themselves the unfeasibility of general conclusions.

In any case, the example analyzed allow us to conclude that:

1. It is a wrong model of management
2. Without migration control, the impact is negative and stops development

3. Under the current conditions, borders among those countries, even considered as allies, could be classified as conflict zones
4. The opening should be as a process
5. The opening should be done on a step by step basis and on occasions a region by region basis
6. The hypothesis of borders as homogeneous regions should not be assumed
7. The opening process shouldn't be ruled by ideology, but from the variables associated with development
8. The borders opening must not be confused with a total political migration relaxation or of the migration policy management. Which means, it is important to control and manage the migration flows, but doing it from the border results risky and non-useful.

Even though this presentation was done in August 2001, before the terrorist actions in the U.S.A. on September 11, that same year, this text was redacted on a later date after those raids; it is impossible to ignore their impact in the border regions. Those events modify the structure of borders' management. As a consequence of such aggressions, there is a resurgence of frontiers as guarantors of national security and country sovereignty (particularly but not only for the U.S.A.), which undoubtedly will have effects on the control of the role of international migration flows. In brief, it is likely a stronger border inspection to refrain enemies to enter into a nation. It is also expected that besides the probable success with this strategy to

achieve the proposed objective, migratory international flows will suffer from such increased control.

### **General Description**

Economic factors on border regions are the background of reference to develop from within their own vocation, imposed by their neighboring characteristics. As an example, the Mexican northern border localities are spread along the divisor line, as if trying to get closer to the powerful neighbor; on the southern frontier, important localities are spread far from the border line (see map 1).

Meanwhile, in the northern border a highly concentrated economy exists in the manufacturing industry, betting on consumption of the neighboring society; on the southern border case, the population percentage participating on those activities is minimal (see map 2).

Some immediate consequences of these differences, when approaching the richer country, in the case of the northern boundary, against the poorer southern border, are reflected directly in the welfare and life level of the population involved. Maps three and four, from the percentage indicator of population with car and with computer at home, respectively; show these differences.

By the same token, these different development models, which profit from the border's economic factors, show the growth of bordering localities. Meanwhile, at the northern border case such model is a

magnetic induction for migrant population; at the southern boundary, the case is the opposite, with a rejecting role (see map 5).

### **The Border Control and its Impacts**

For border control purposes about population mobility, the United States southern boundary, that is Mexico's northern frontier, has chosen a rigid model. Specially during the nineties decade, distributing about 8,000 agents for the border patrol, for the 1,989 miles (see figure 1); building walls at the strategic more intensive crossing points and developing specific control for non authorized migration flows. Meanwhile, Mexico has relaxed all its controls around the boundary line, increasing it on inner domestic inspection and retention points. The photos on picture 1 show by themselves, the differences among both frontiers.

Figures 2 and 3 show that the real and only visible impact of the rigid control mechanisms is the redirection and redistribution of migratory flows. In other words, under the measure of the structural factors of the migratory international process (supplementary labor markets, family and social networks, etc.) remain unchanged, border control has an impact on short term only. Meanwhile, the migratory flows readapt themselves to the new control mechanisms. It is paradoxical that the decade of the strongest control, was the decade of the highest growth of undocumented migration into the U.S.A.

Notwithstanding, is no use to affirm that the rigid border control was almost meaningless for the migratory flows. At least, in the Mexico-U.S.A. boundaries, whether intentionally or not, a clear impact was the increase on the vulnerability of the potential migrants. Derived on risks for their physical integrity, due above-mentioned controls and the absence of a migratory policy that reflects the conditions of attraction and expulsion of migrants from both economies (Mexico and U.S.A.). Migrants try to cross as undocumented through far regions without such controls, remote from urban areas and without infrastructure, inhospitable zones risking their lives.

Maps six and seven show how the Tijuana-San Diego region, site of the so-called Gatekeeper Operation. The number of migrants deaths on their intents to cross into the U.S.A. in 1995, when the operation started, to 1999 when the operation was running fully, has increased and redistributed regionally, far from the operative control area. On the same manner, for the rest of the border, maps 8 and 9 refer to 1999 and 2000 years show the increase in deaths of migrants due to the stronger control.

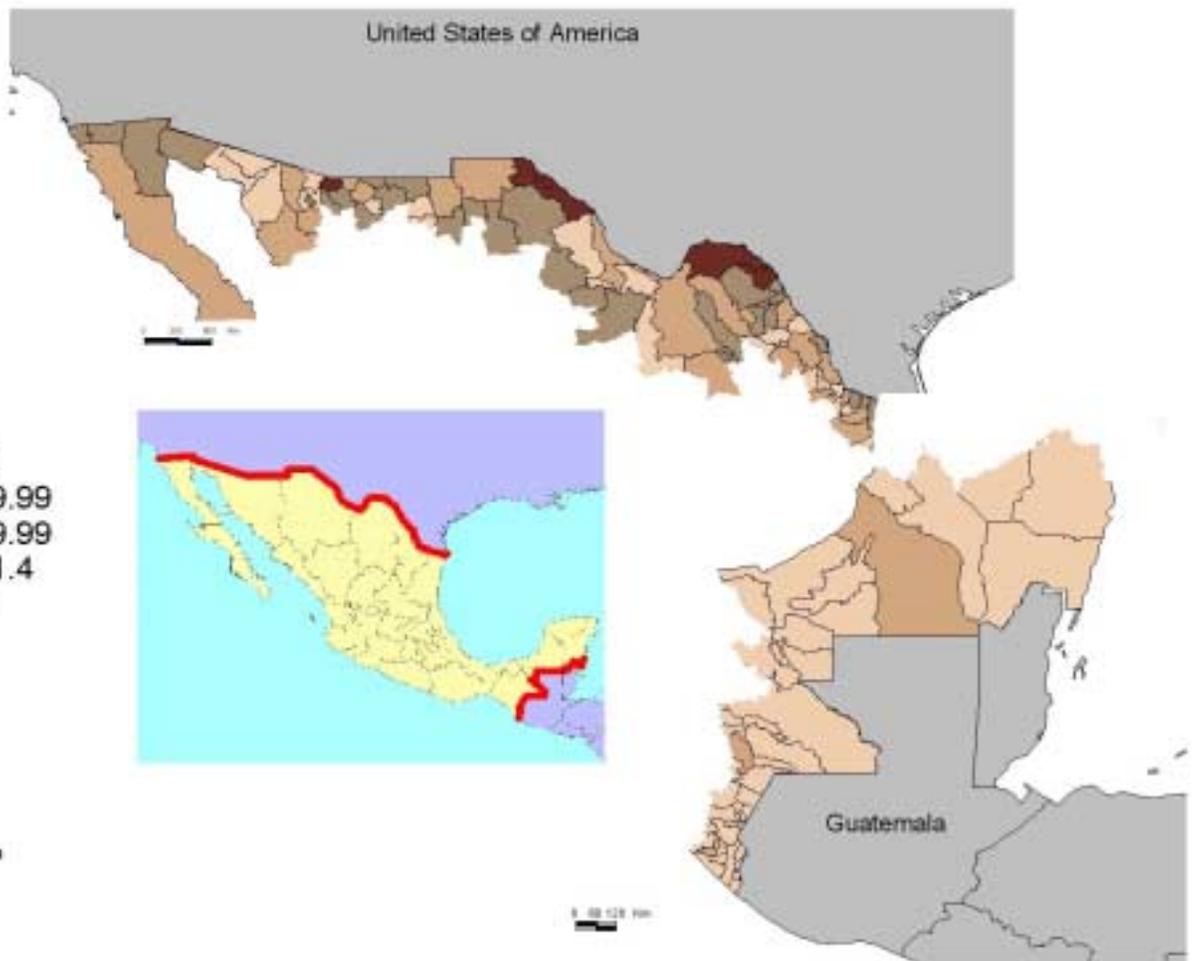
The fact that a government put on risk the life of human beings, has been interpreted as an international violation of human rights of the migrants, increasing pressures on the U.S. government and tensions among relations between two countries that are partners and friends. After ignoring during long time such reclamation and pressures, the initial answer of the U.S. wasn't to relax the border, but a modification of the border patrol, on such a way that this body's

functions add now salvation for migrants, under the program “Safety in the border”.

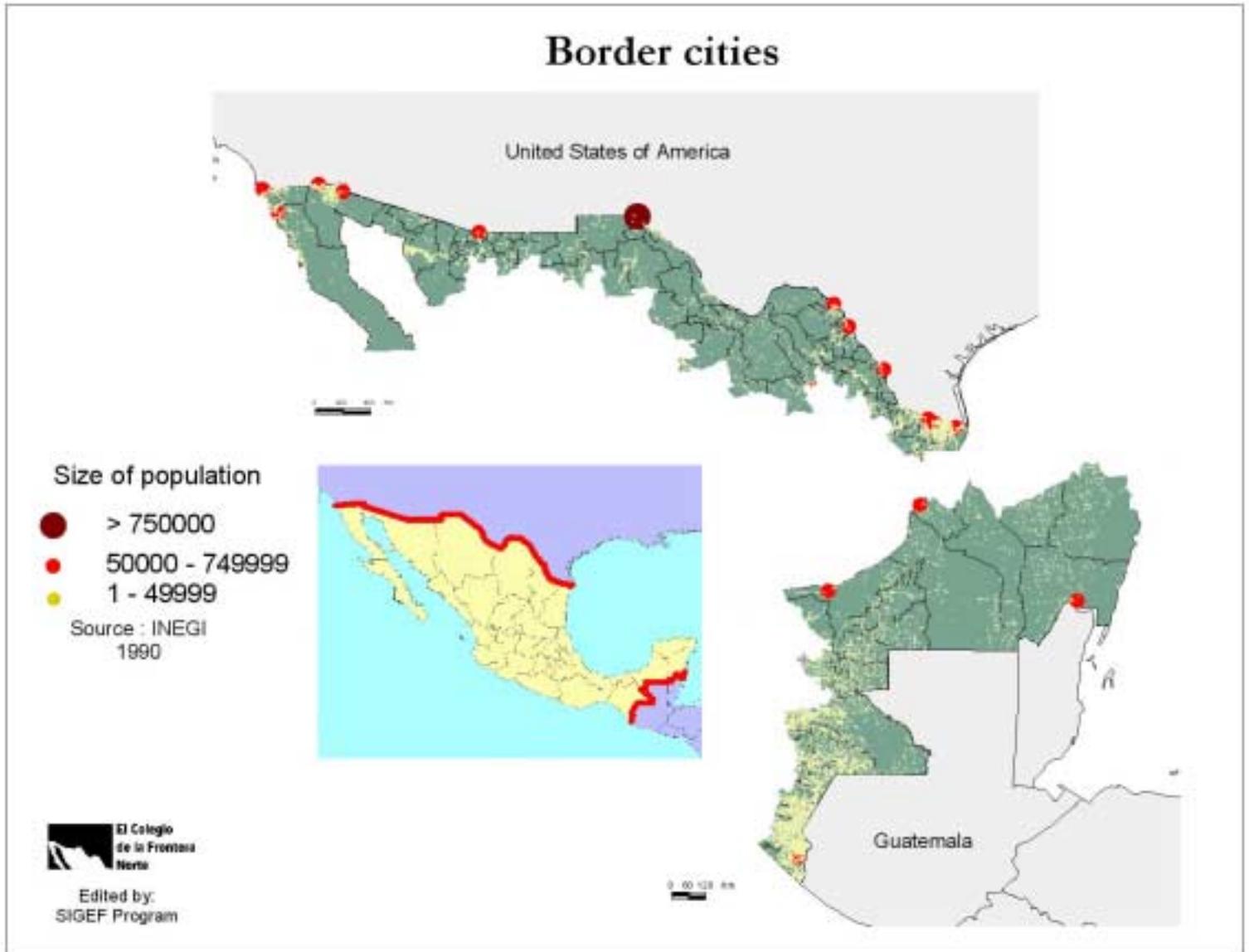
Notwithstanding, as mentioned, the attacks on September 11, modified even the speech about boundaries. Even as non true, common citizens believe that the enemy comes from abroad and came through their borders, as undocumented or illegal alien, claiming a rigid control on the border to protect its sovereignty and national security. Under these conditions, this is not the best moment to talk about the opening of frontiers, without considering security factors that the integration process seemed to ignore.

# Map 1

## Population in border and adjacent municipalities that work in manufacture



## Map 2



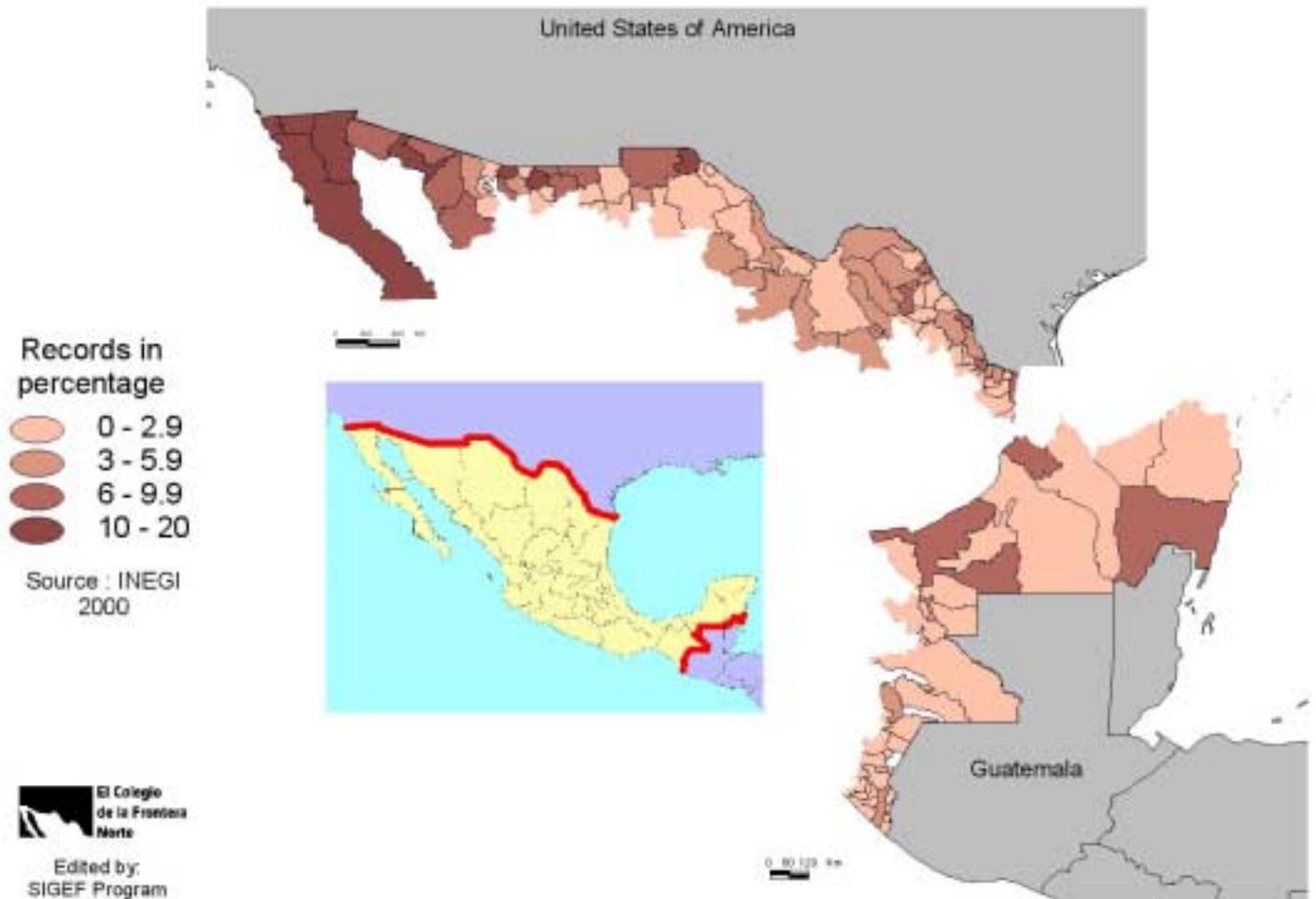
# Map 3

## Houses that own car in border and adjacents municipalities



## Map 4

### Houses that own computer in border and adjacents municipalities



# Map 5

## Net rate of migration



Records in percentage

- 240.74 - -79.29
- 79.29 - -0.01
- 0 - 9.9
- 10 - 94.12

Source : INEGI  
2000

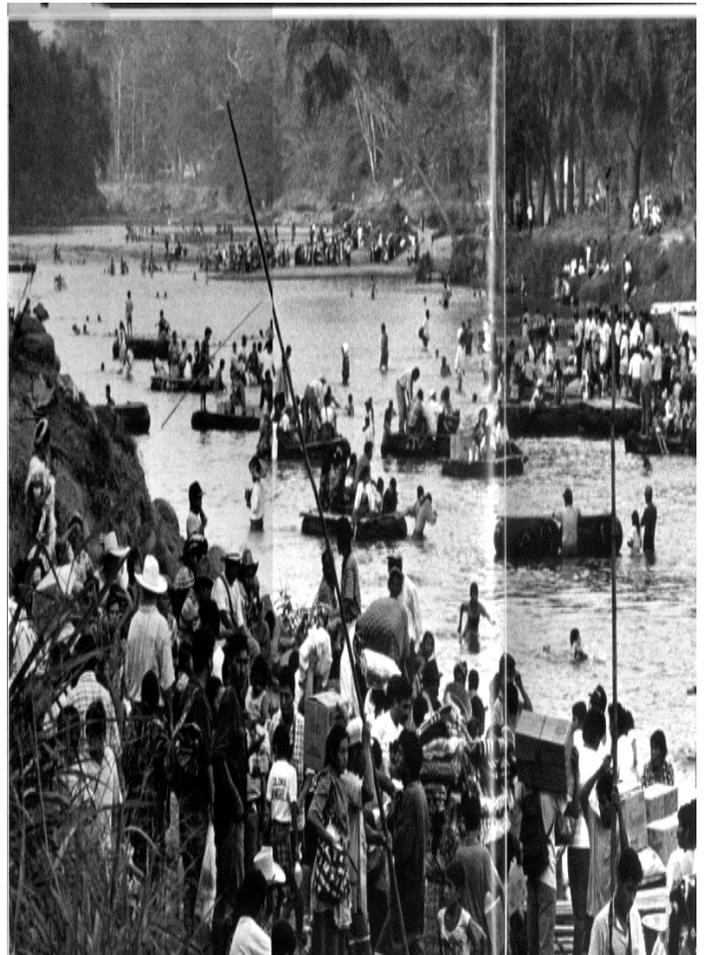


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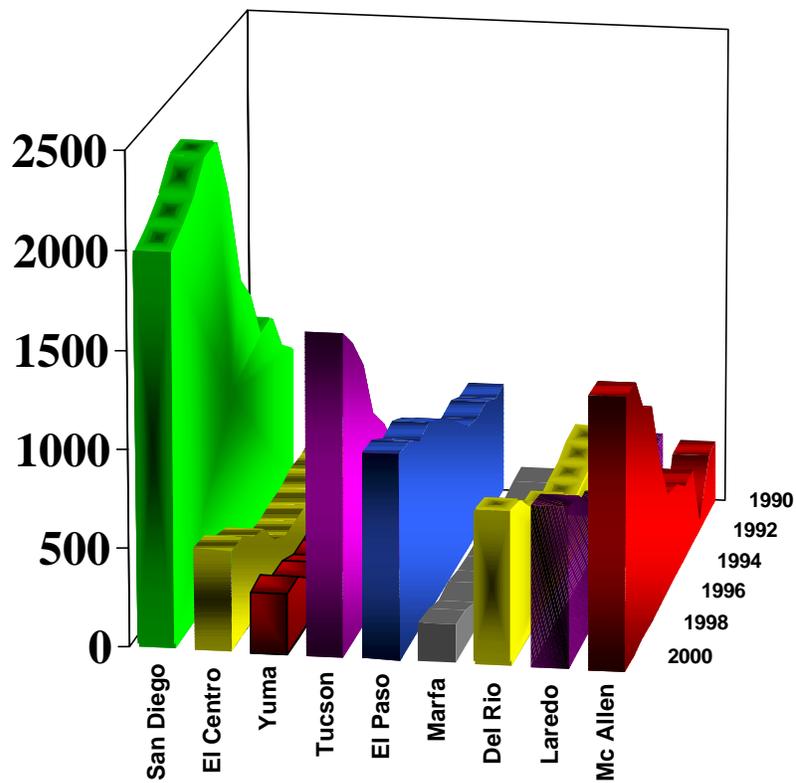
## Picture 1

### Border control in Mexico – US Border and Mexico -Guatemala Border

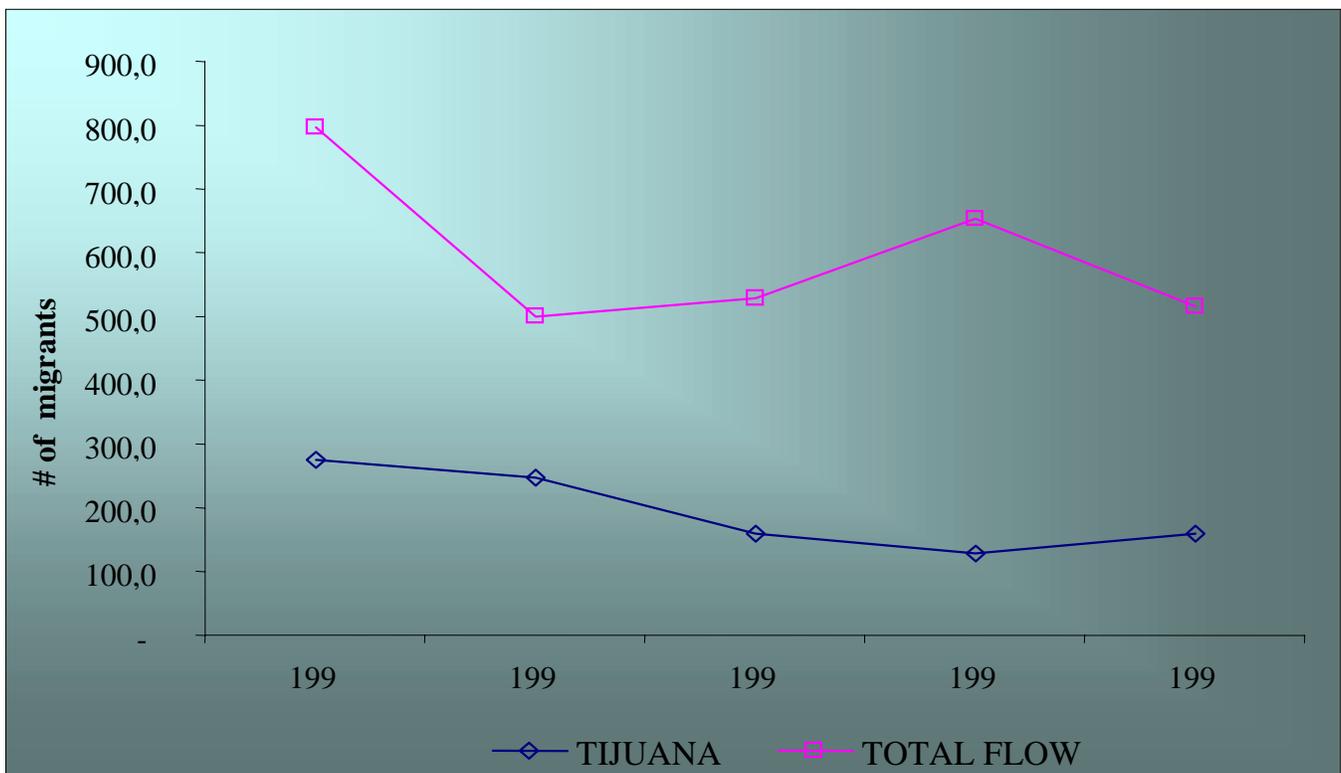


# Graph 1

## Evolution of the Border Patrol along the United States – Mexico Border (Number of agents)

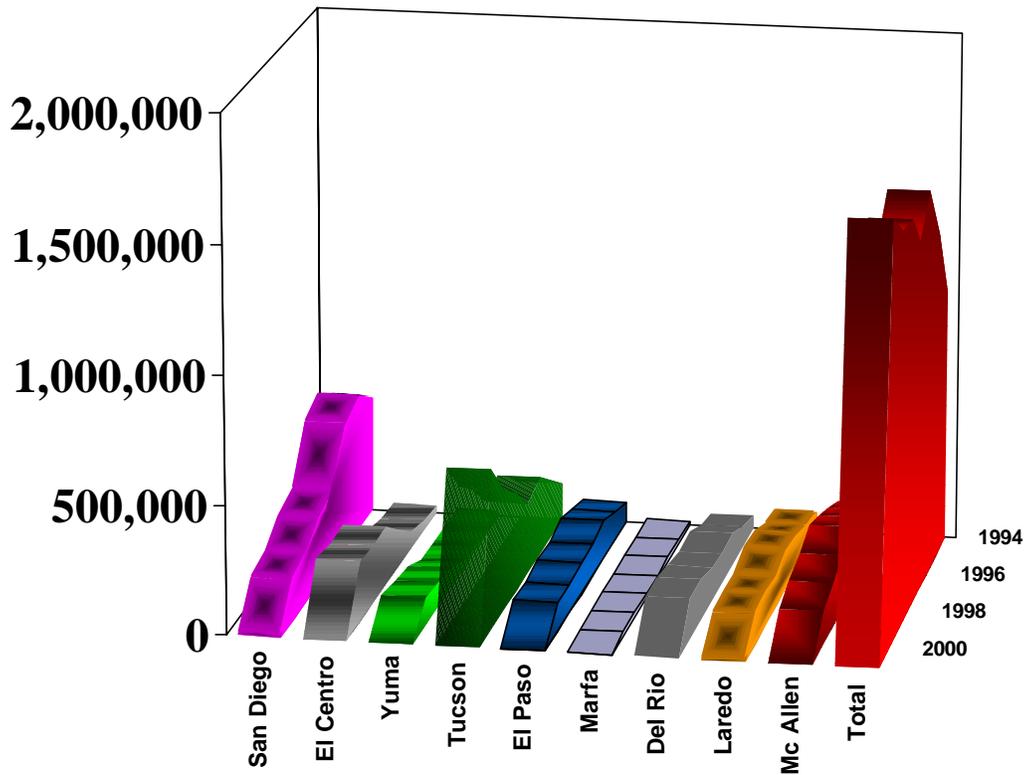


**Graph 2**  
**Migrants from Mexico to the U.S.**

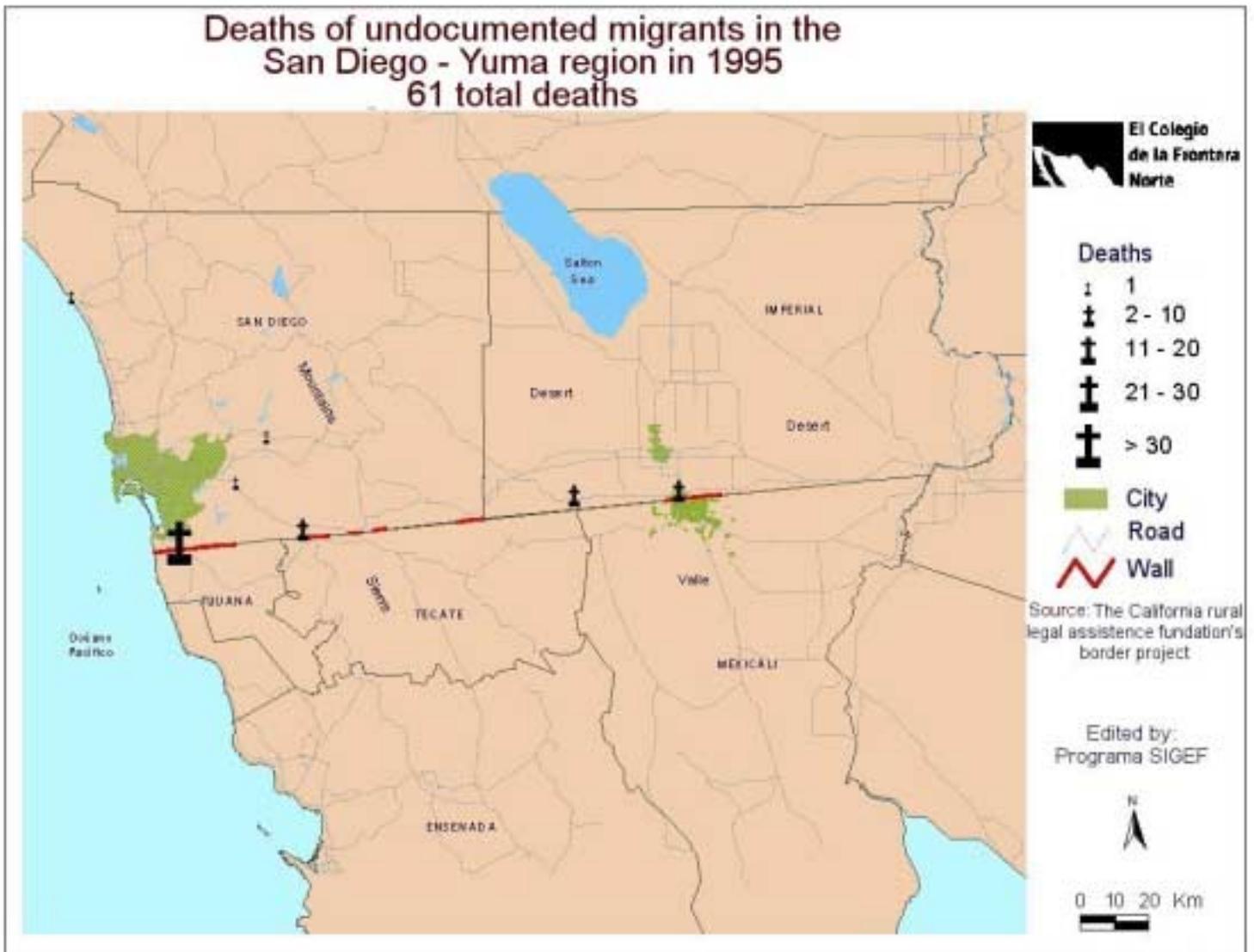


### Graph 3

## Detention of undocumented migrants by the Border Patrol of the Mexico – U.S. Border by sector



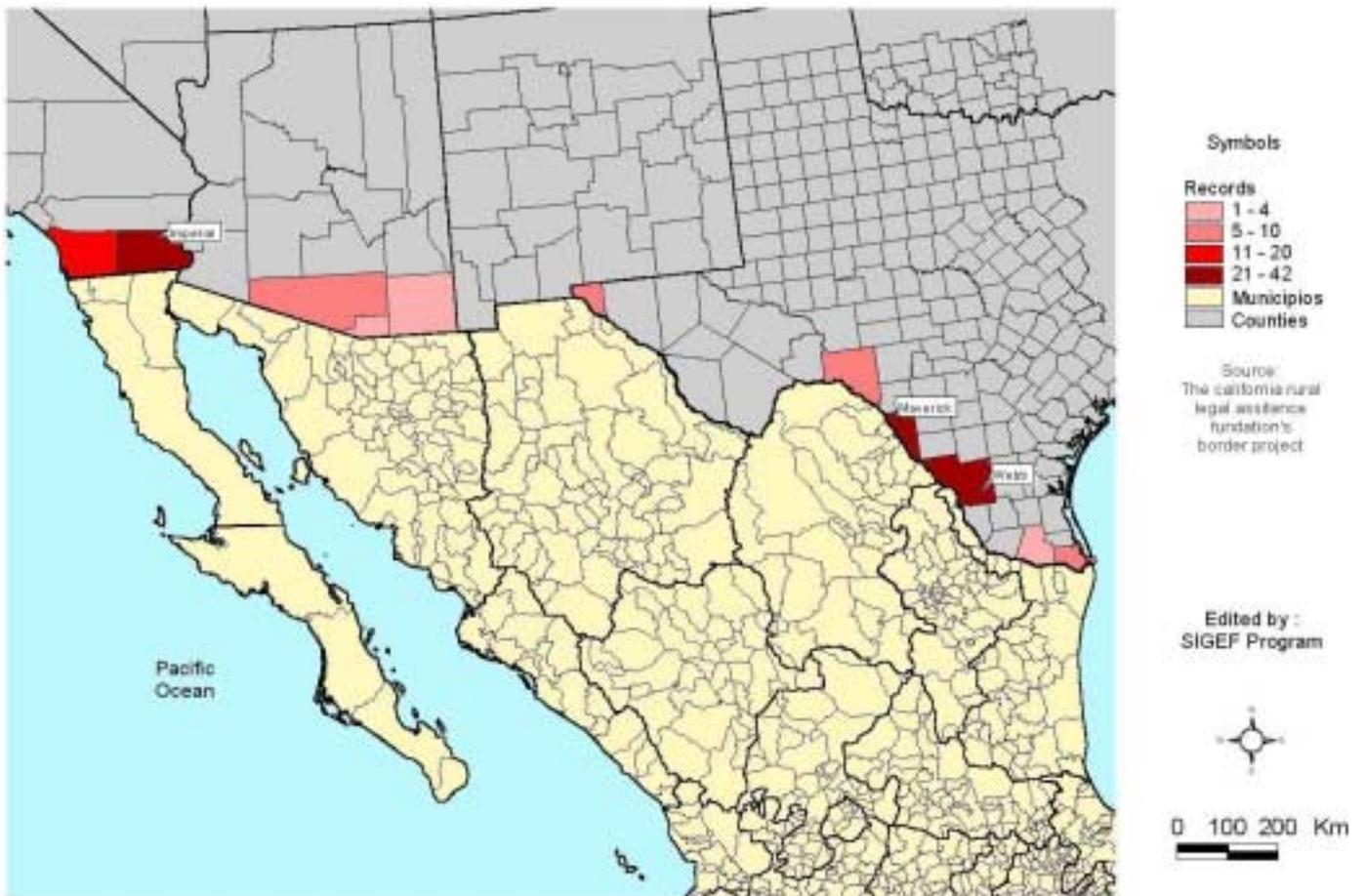
# Map 6





# Map 8

Deaths of undocumented migrants in the  
Mexico - United States border in 1999  
148 total deaths



# Map 9

Deaths of undocumented migrants in the  
Mexico - United States border in 1999  
148 total deaths

