

**Valuable Community Members:
The Overlooked Economic and Fiscal
Contribution of Undocumented Immigrants to
Bridgeton, New Jersey**

**A CATA Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an effort to challenge the negative perception of undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton, New Jersey, and American society more generally, the Farmworker Support Committee of South Jersey (CATA) conducted an economic study of undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton in July 2006. The findings overwhelmingly demonstrate that as consumers and renters and employees of businesses in and around the City of Bridgeton undocumented immigrants contribute substantially to the health of the local economy. At least 2,400 undocumented immigrants who live in Bridgeton either work somewhere in the city, in a nearby South Jersey town, or in Pennsylvania. These undocumented workers annually contribute between \$25.7 and \$29.6 million to the local Bridgeton economy with their purchase of groceries and commercial products, frequenting of restaurants, payment of rent and utilities, and purchase of gasoline. We also find that fiscally the undocumented in Bridgeton contribute a considerable amount through an indirect property tax and a sales tax on prepared food. We estimate that their total contribution through these two taxes is \$842,990, with \$517,990 being in property tax and the other \$325,000 in sales tax on prepared food. Our economic study refutes the dangerously myopic and unsubstantiated position that undocumented immigrants drain fiscal resources and imperil small-town America. It is time to rethink how we as an American people treat undocumented immigrants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CATA sincerely thanks Luis Brunstein, an economics professor at Rowan University, for his generous assistance in conceptualizing and later revising the survey questionnaire used to determine the economic impact of undocumented immigrants in the City of Bridgeton in July 2006.

We are greatly indebted to the fervent participation by some members of CATA's Bridgeton Committee; without their support, we would not have been able to engender sufficient trust within the undocumented immigrant community to complete the survey, especially within the allotted amount of time. There is one gentleman in particular whose dedication to the survey was immensely inspiring. So many times over the past month he completed a 10-hour day of exhausting physical labor and then proceeded to conduct the survey going house to house with me for another three hours.

He recognized that while the benefits of conducting the survey and then making the subsequent report public would not be felt immediately it was nonetheless part of a larger process of fighting for justice and equality. His active community involvement, subtle leadership skills, and general goodness are precisely the type of character traits that this country so desperately needs. Regrettably, it seems that our society would just as soon deport him back to Mexico because he is a "lawbreaker" then embrace him as a neighbor and friend.

INTRODUCTION

In this year 2006, no issue in America has dominated the national scene more than that of immigration and none has more effectively exposed the xenophobic tendencies of certain Americans. Those Americans, and there are many, would clarify their position as not “anti-immigrant” but “anti-illegal immigrant.” They say: “We embrace immigrants who come to America legally; lawbreakers on the other hand are intolerable and undeserving. We want to make our communities as unwelcome to these lawbreakers as legally possible because they harm our country’s wellbeing.” Lamentably, American citizens and public officials who espouse this common refrain rarely substantiate their claims with supporting evidence.

In an effort to challenge the negative perception of undocumented immigrants in our society, the Farmworker Support Committee of South Jersey (CATA) conducted an economic study of undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton, New Jersey, in July 2006. The findings overwhelmingly demonstrate that as consumers and renters and employees of businesses in and around the City of Bridgeton undocumented immigrants contribute substantially to the health of the local economy. While this undocumented population uses public services like any legal non-citizen or citizen would, they do not abuse their use of them and contrary to popular opinion they in fact contribute to the fiscal coffers of the local, state, and federal government through the payment of property, sales, and income taxes. The economic study contained within this report refutes the dangerously myopic and unsubstantiated position that undocumented immigrants drain fiscal resources and imperil small-town America. It is time to rethink how we as an American people treat undocumented immigrants.

BACKGROUND

The Build-Up: Large-Scale Undocumented Immigration

“Their goal is not just to recapture what land was lost in the Mexican-American War, but to overtake the country through total destabilization.”

These words penned by a Bridgeton resident in a letter-to-the-editor printed in the *Bridgeton News* in May 2006 reveal the fierce anti-immigrant sentiments harbored by some within the City of Bridgeton. Many more letters written with equally virulent language can be found almost weekly over the past three or four months in the “Voice of the People” section of the *Bridgeton News*. It seems that there is a strong desire on the part of local residents in small towns across the country to weigh in on what traditionally has been a national issue. Through letters-to-the-editor, calls to local officials, and attendance at town council meetings, small-town Americans have voiced their growing frustration at the increasing problem of undocumented immigration and the inefficacy of the federal government in dealing with it. As the above excerpt indicates, Bridgeton has been no exception. Like many places in New Jersey and across the country, it has been heavily affected over the past decade, for better or worse depending on one’s opinion, by this unprecedented rise in undocumented immigration, most of which has come from Mexico. The addition of hundreds or thousands of people to small towns in the span of less than a decade would present new problems to any such community regardless of whether the newcomers were immigrants.

The reality, however, is that these newcomers are immigrants, most of whom are from Latin America and are undocumented, and that the cultures and languages, namely Spanish, they bring with them are vastly unsettling to small town life. The uneasiness generated by this undocumented immigrant influx has catalyzed an unforgiving backlash against them that has noticeably intensified over the past year. Since the federal

government has categorically failed to regulate the flow of immigrants legally, and with the seeming inability or unwillingness of our Congress to fix the problem, small-town Americans are demanding that their state and local representatives take action. The question confronting local public officials who sympathize with these “anti-illegal immigrant” sentiments is what can be done. How can they protect the borders of their communities from the influx of “illegal aliens” without encroaching on the legal jurisdiction of the federal government? In other words, how can they make their communities the most inhospitable places for the undocumented?

The Backlash: The Creation of Illegal Immigration Relief Acts

An idea emanating from a controversial crusade launched last fall in San Bernardino, California, by a resident activist has provided an appealing answer to some and spawned a slew of anti-illegal immigrant ordinances throughout the country, most ignominiously in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. Supposedly fed-up with the large undocumented population in San Bernardino, a resident there designed a ballot initiative entitled the “City of San Bernardino Illegal Immigration Relief Act” in order to “outlaw city-funded day-labor centers, punish those who rent housing to or do business with illegal immigrants and require that city communications be conducted exclusively in English.”¹ Although the resident believed he had received enough signatures to place the initiative on the ballot this year, a judge ruled that he had not collected a sufficient number and therefore the initiative could not be placed on the ballot.

The content of this initiative though would be revived when a mayor in Pennsylvania who shared this gentleman’s anti-illegal immigrant sentiments ran across an on-line article describing his efforts. Vowing to make his city the most unwelcome place in

¹ Kelly Rayburn and Megan Blaney. “Lawsuit looming: Petition said to need additional signatures” [San Bernardino County Sun](#) 6 June 2006.

America for undocumented immigrants, Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta proposed the “City of Hazleton Illegal Immigration Relief Act” in June 2006 to make English the official language of all city business, to fine landlords who knowingly rent to illegal immigrants, and to deny approval or renewal of operating licenses to businesses who knowingly hire illegal immigrants. The ordinance passed 4-1 in the city council in early July 2006. Temporarily at least, Hazleton has made itself the most hostile city in the country to undocumented immigrants but many more small towns are vying for that honor by emulating its illegal immigration relief act. Riverside, NJ, is the second small town to pass such legislation.² Many others are contemplating proposing something similar to Hazleton’s ordinance or have already done so, including Avon Park (FL), White Haven (PA), Shenandoah (PA), Elsmere (DE), and Kennesaw (WA).

Nothing but a Public Burden...Is that a fair assessment?

Those officials who have introduced or supported illegal immigration relief acts contend that they are obligated to act because undocumented immigrants pose an unacceptable public burden to already strained fiscal budgets. For instance, in a 2006 letter posted on the City of Hazleton’s website, Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta explains:

“...some people have taken advantage of America’s openness and tolerance. Some come to this country and refuse to learn English, creating a language barrier for city employees. Others enter the country illegally and use government services by not paying taxes or by committing crime on our streets, further draining resources here in Hazleton. Illegal immigration leads to higher crime rates, contributes to overcrowded classrooms and failing schools, subjects our hospitals to fiscal hardship and legal residents to substandard quality of care, and destroys our neighborhoods and diminishes our overall quality of life.”

² To read more on the Brazilian immigrant population in Riverside, see the following three-part series in the Philadelphia Inquirer in October 2005 entitled “Part I: A New Jersey town, a Brazilian deluge, diverging hopes,” “Part II: A struggle to find common ground on unfamiliar turf,” and “Part III: A struggle to plant roots while living in constant fear.”

Other public officials add to this laundry list and assert that undocumented immigrants further strain fiscal budgets by driving on roads and frequenting parks built with public finances, overextending under-funded police departments, and burdening municipal courts. These and many more are the charges levied against the undocumented immigrant community.

Curiously, although Barletta and other supporters of anti-illegal immigrant measures assert that undocumented immigrants harm American communities, they fail to support their claims with data. First, Barletta is mistaken with his assertion that undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes. All of them purchase food and other commercial products which are subject to a mandatory state sales tax. All of them indirectly pay property tax when they rent from landlords in Hazleton. Second, where is the data that shows that undocumented immigrants have increased the rate of crime in Hazleton? Are legal residents really receiving substandard quality of care and if so is it because of the presence of undocumented immigrants or some other factor(s)? Have the quality of neighborhoods truly diminished and if so is it due to the undocumented population? These questions and many more should have been asked and studied in a systematic manner before action was taken.

Local Decisions that Affect the Lives of the Undocumented

The truth is that local and state officials across the country continue to make decisions to leverage resources in ways intended to harass undocumented immigrants, many of whom they forget have lived in the same community for years and been active members within it. While the City of Bridgeton has not introduced as harsh an ordinance as the Hazleton Illegal Immigration Relief Act, it has chosen to deploy its resources in ways that appear to target and intimidate its undocumented population. The decision that has

most greatly impacted the daily lives of Bridgeton's undocumented immigrants has been the carrying out of periodic vehicle checkpoints since early 2006. The Bridgeton Police unquestionably reserve the right to do this whenever and wherever they see fit so they can check for valid registration and proper license. It is a well-known fact though that nearly all the undocumented with vehicles drive around with license plates from Pennsylvania and North Carolina which are much easier to obtain than ones from New Jersey. Most probably do not have a valid registration or a proper license. Nonetheless, the vehicles are essential to their livelihood since most need them to travel to and from work.

The police recognize that a large undocumented population lives in Bridgeton and that most of them, those with out-of-state plates, either do not have the vehicle validly registered or are not properly licensed. It would make sense then for the police to set-up checkpoints in areas with lots of out-of-state plates. Strictly speaking, they are targeting out-of-state tags not the undocumented but it just so happens that most of those belong to the undocumented. Daily experience has made the police cognizant of this fact; they know that checkpoints disproportionately affect the undocumented, especially when they are conducted at times when people are traveling to and from work or spending time with their families during the weekend. Why then do they conduct checkpoints during times when those most affected will be the undocumented?

Although it might appear that the police are making Bridgeton safer with the checkpoints by keeping unregistered vehicles and unlicensed drivers off the street, it is less obvious than one might think. Since the undocumented community internalizes the presence of the checkpoints as an intentional attack on their livelihoods and well-being, their distrust of the police heightens. They start to view police less as the protectors of

their neighborhoods and more as the bearers of further hardship. This elevated anxiety manifests itself when the undocumented are less willing to report incidents of domestic abuse or acts of petty or violent crime for fear of the police alerting immigration authorities. At the end of the day, those undocumented who had their car impounded by the checkpoints, pay the fine, and get their car back or just purchase a new one. The long-term effects of the checkpoints on undocumented immigrants' psyche are much more permanent and ultimately are hazardous to the safety of all city residents, legal and illegal alike. In a subtle yet profound way the checkpoints, by disproportionately impacting the undocumented community, have made Bridgeton less safe. This anecdote illustrates that instituting procedures that adversely affect the undocumented can incur greater costs than commonly imagined.³

Recognizing the Economic Contribution of Bridgeton's Undocumented Immigrants

The checkpoints constitute the most notorious example in Bridgeton of how fiscal resources have intentionally been allocated to complicate the lives of its undocumented immigrants. Fortunately, during the past several months the frequency with which these checkpoints have occurred has declined considerably. Over the coming months and years, though, the public leaders of the City of Bridgeton will have the opportunity to make many decisions about how to handle an array of challenging issues. Some of these decisions could adversely affect the undocumented immigrant community, some could leave them the same, and others benefit them. At the moment, the prevailing perception of undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton and across the nation is that they only constitute a public burden. The state of public opinion in America then would seem to

³ The analysis in this paragraph is based on conversations we had with the undocumented community while doing the economic survey in Bridgeton.

incline leaders of the Bridgeton community to favor decisions that were seen as anti-illegal immigrant.

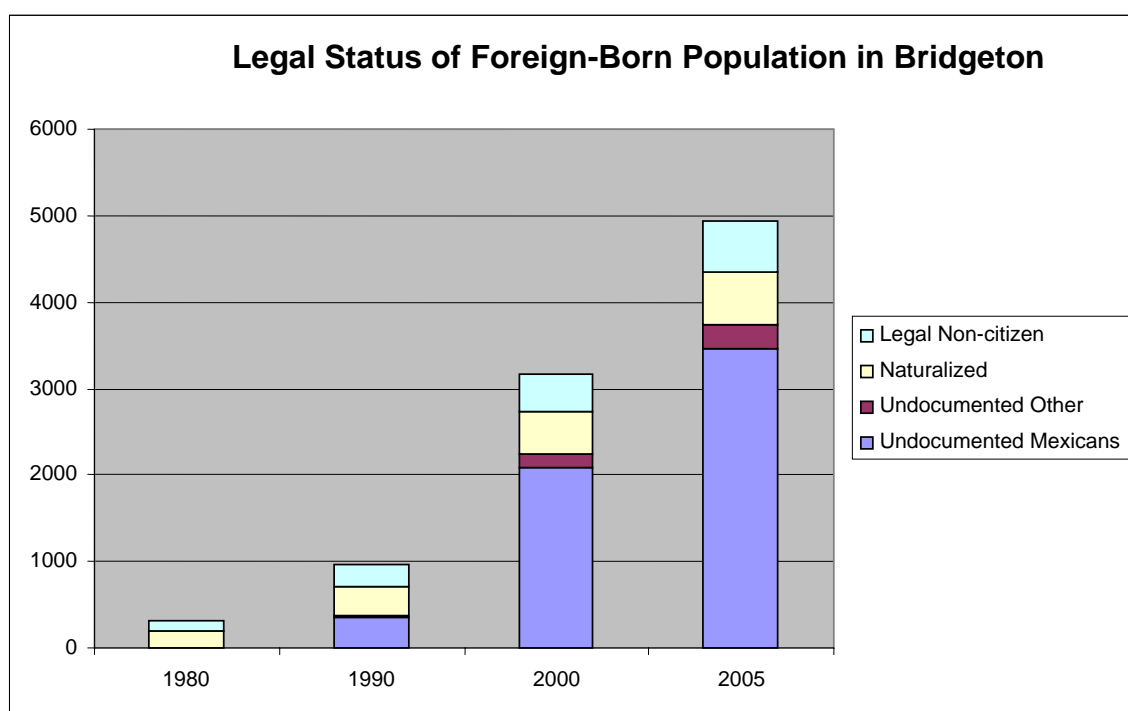
In large part because of these checkpoints and the general anti-illegal immigrant sentiment sweeping the nation, CATA decided to conduct the economic survey presented in the next section of this report. The intent of the study is to present an often overlooked and sometimes purposely suppressed side of the immigration debate which is the enormous economic contribution made by undocumented immigrants. By intentionally ignoring the benefits their communities derive from having hard-working immigrants and only emphasizing the costs, public officials are doing a disservice to themselves and the people they represent. We recognize the daunting challenge of weighing the costs versus the benefits since it is particularly difficult to know how many undocumented immigrants live in a community and then even more perplexing trying to calculate their total economic contribution.

Therefore, we undertook an experiment of sorts in Bridgeton to see if we could quantify the contribution of undocumented immigrants there. First, using national data on the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S., we estimated the number of undocumented in Bridgeton. Second, we constructed an economic survey and then administered it to over 200 undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton during July 2006. Although our economic study has limitations, we attempted to portray the economic impact of the undocumented in Bridgeton as accurately as possible given the small timeframe in which to complete the survey. What follows are the results that we obtained.

Size of the Undocumented Population in Bridgeton in 2005

The total foreign-born population in Bridgeton in 2005 was approximately 4,900. Six-hundred eight of those were naturalized U.S. citizens and 580 were legal non-citizens.

Extrapolating from Census 2000 data and using national trends revealed by decades of research done by demographer Jeffrey Passel at the Pew Hispanic Center, we estimate that the undocumented population in Bridgeton in 2005 was 3,740.⁴ Although we make assumptions that could affect the accuracy of our estimate, it nonetheless represents the most reliable and testable figure that we could provide based on the available data, which is limited.⁵ Due to the obvious difficulty of enumerating the undocumented, we feel if anything that our estimate is conservative and undercounts the undocumented in Bridgeton.⁶



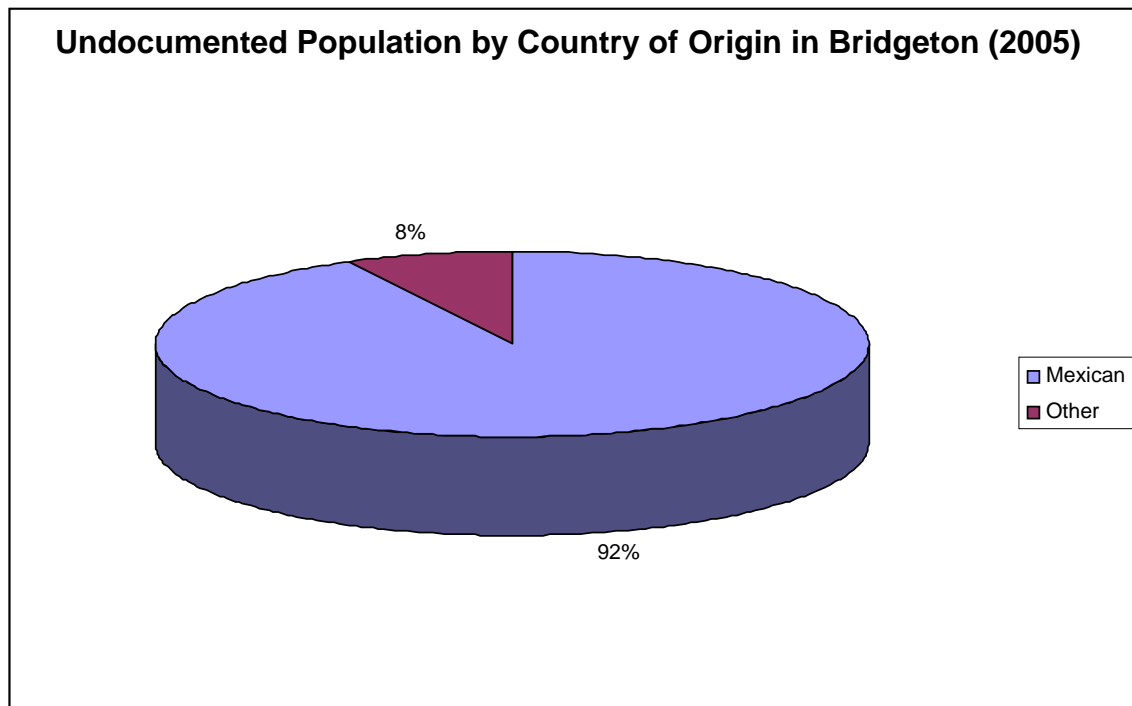
See Appendix A for calculations

⁴ Appendix A: “Calculating the Size of the Undocumented Population in Bridgeton” describes in detail how we arrived at the estimate of 3,740 undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton.

⁵ We are not aware of any other effort to determine the size of the undocumented population in Bridgeton nor could we find any attempt to measure the undocumented in a city similar in size.

⁶ For instance, Census 2000 was carried out in the month of March which is not part of the growing season in New Jersey. Since the size of the undocumented migrant population in Bridgeton most likely increases substantially during the summer months, the Census could not possibly have included even a portion of these migrants since they had not yet arrived.

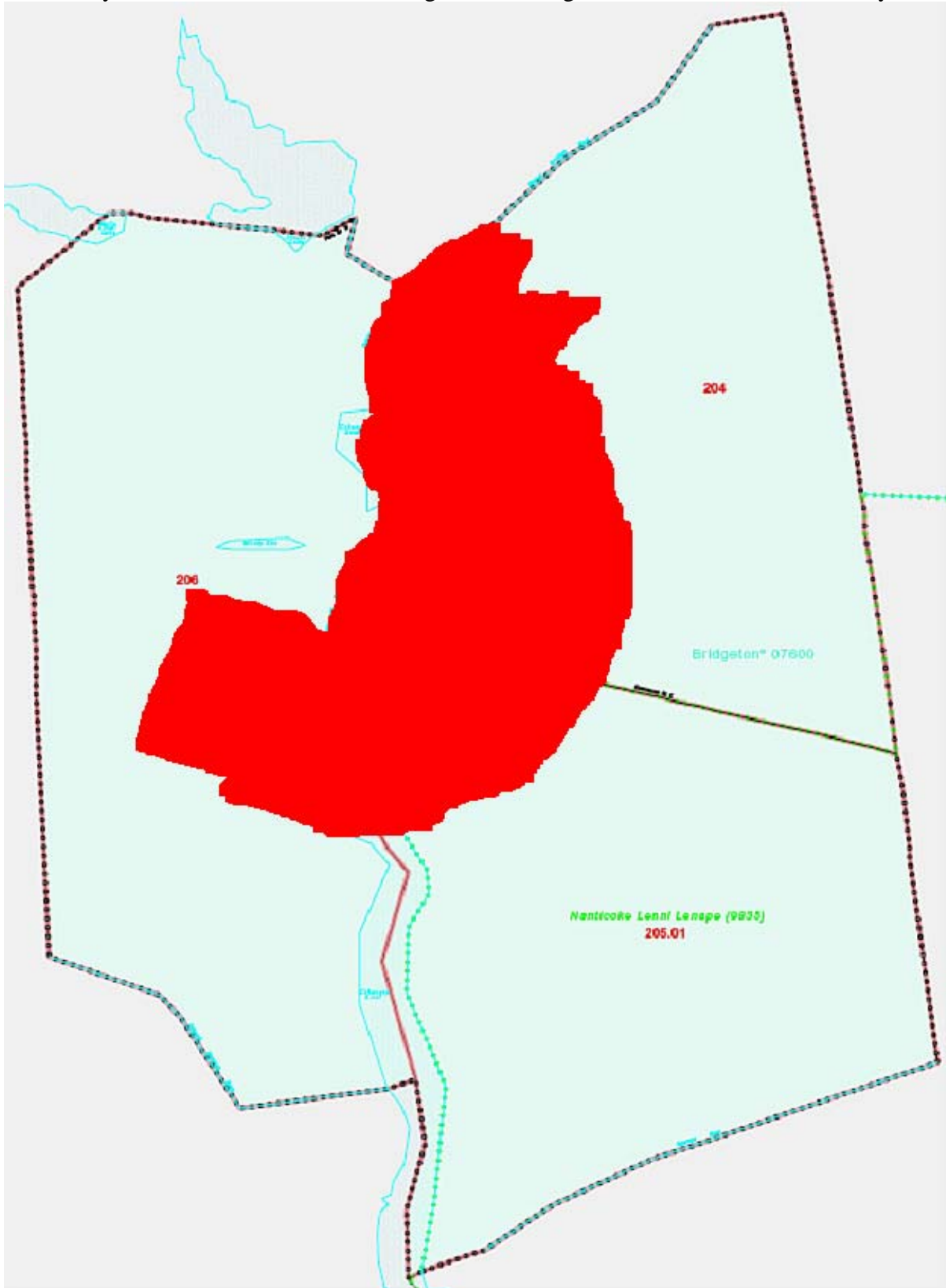
In 2005, 92% of the undocumented population in Bridgeton or 3,460 people were Mexican; the rest or 281 people came mainly from other Latin American countries, in particular Guatemala. Of the undocumented in 2005, 1,833 were men, 1,309 women, and 599 children. An additional 1,198 children had undocumented parents but were born in the U.S. and thus were U.S. citizens. That means that the total number of people in undocumented families (including children of the undocumented who are U.S. citizens) in 2005 was 4,939. Out of this population, 2,430 were employed.⁷



⁷ The calculations for determining the number of undocumented immigrants who work are contained in “Appendix E – Calculations Used to Find Economic Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in Bridgeton.”

Geographic Concentration of the Undocumented in Bridgeton

Essentially all of the undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton live in the heart of the city.



Source: Census Tract Outline Map (Census 2000)

THE ECONOMIC SURVEY

Formation of the Survey Questionnaire

Since no data existed on the economic contribution of undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton, we recognized that we would need to create our own through some type of economic study. After much discussion, we identified a survey as the most effective instrument for procuring the information we desired. Then through a series of conversations with immigrants in and around Bridgeton, we developed a preliminary survey questionnaire which we then tested on a group of CATA members. After processing their suggestions for improving the survey, we finalized the questionnaire which included a general information section, a section on employment and savings habits, and a final section on consumer spending and preferences. It totaled one page front and back and can be found in Appendix B: “The Survey Instrument.”

Training the Survey Administrators

We required any CATA Bridgeton Committee member interested in helping with the survey to attend a training session during which time we went over how to administer the survey so that the process would be as uniform as possible. At the end of the session, we had each of the committee members pretend that they were going house to house and practice the survey presentation themselves. We provided them with a presentation guide (see *Appendix C –GET GUIDE FROM JESSICA*) to ensure consistency when presenting the survey. Ultimately, each employed his own style but presented the same content. We also required that each of them accompany a CATA employee their first time going house to house so that if they had any questions they could be answered, and if the CATA employee had any suggestions for improving their survey presentation, he/she could offer them.

How the Survey Was Administered

The study of the economic contribution of undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton was conducted during the month of July 2006. We employed several strategies to administer the survey, including going house to house, setting up a table in front of Los Puentes, visiting classes at the Bridgeton Center for Human Services, and inviting members of CATA's migrant committee in Bridgeton to have people whom they knew fill it out.

Los Puentes

We set up a table in front of Los Puentes on two separate occasions. When individuals approached the table, we explained what CATA was and why we were conducting the survey. We invited them to participate but emphasized that it was completely voluntary and anonymous. Many of those who agreed to participate filled out the survey themselves but asked us if they had any questions. Even though the survey was in Spanish, many of those who wished to complete it were illiterate or semi-illiterate and therefore needed us to read the survey out loud and fill it out for them. If they filled it out themselves, a CATA employee reviewed their survey to make sure that they had answered all the questions or understood the questions correctly.

House to House

We went house to house eight times and traveled in teams of two or three. Sometimes we had multiple groups going house to house on a given evening. Generally, a CATA employee and an immigrant from the CATA Bridgeton Committee would go house to house together. This strategy of including someone from the immigrant community helped engender trust within those immigrants who were asked to complete the survey. When going house to house, we randomly selected a street on which we knew

immigrants lived and traveled down one side of it and then up the other. Most of the surveys were completed in this manner. We always went house to house in the early evening to try to maximize the number of immigrants who were home since most work from the early morning to the late afternoon. If someone were home and answered the door, we would explain what CATA was and why we were conducting the survey. We would then invite them to complete the survey but emphasized that it was completely voluntary and anonymous.

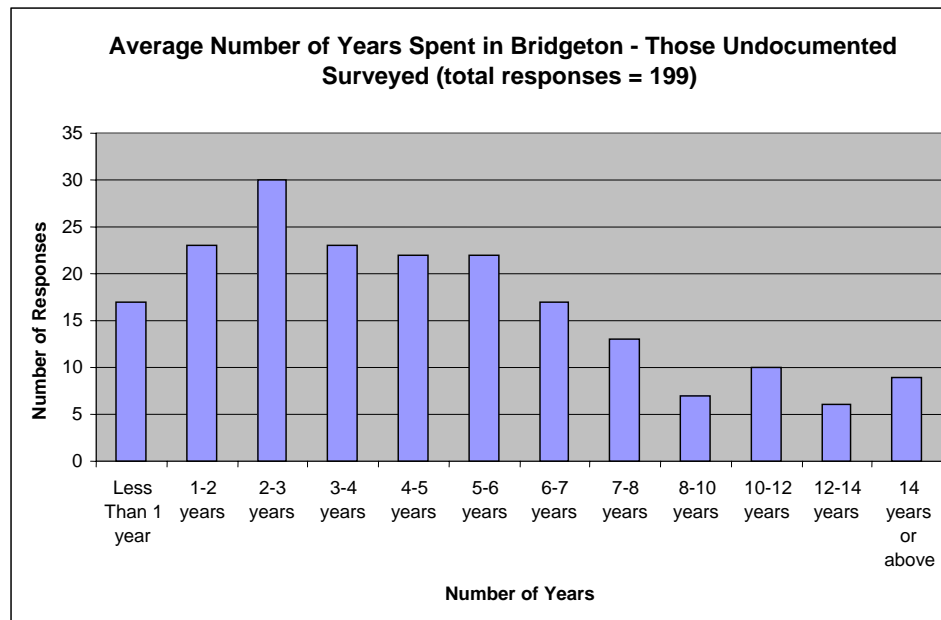
Survey Schedule: Times Administered

| Method Used | Day | Time | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Table in Front of <i>Los Puentes</i> | Monday | 5:30pm-8:30pm | |
| | Thursday | 3:30pm-8:30pm | |
| House to House | Monday | 5:30pm-8:30pm | |
| | Tuesday | 6:00pm-8:30pm | |
| | Wednesday | | 5:30pm-8:00pm |
| | | | 5:30pm-8:00pm |
| | Thursday | 5:30pm-8:30pm | |
| | Thursday | 7:00pm-9:00pm | |
| Sunday | 5:30pm-8:30pm | | |
| | | 3:00pm-8:00pm | |

RESEARCH FINDINGS⁸

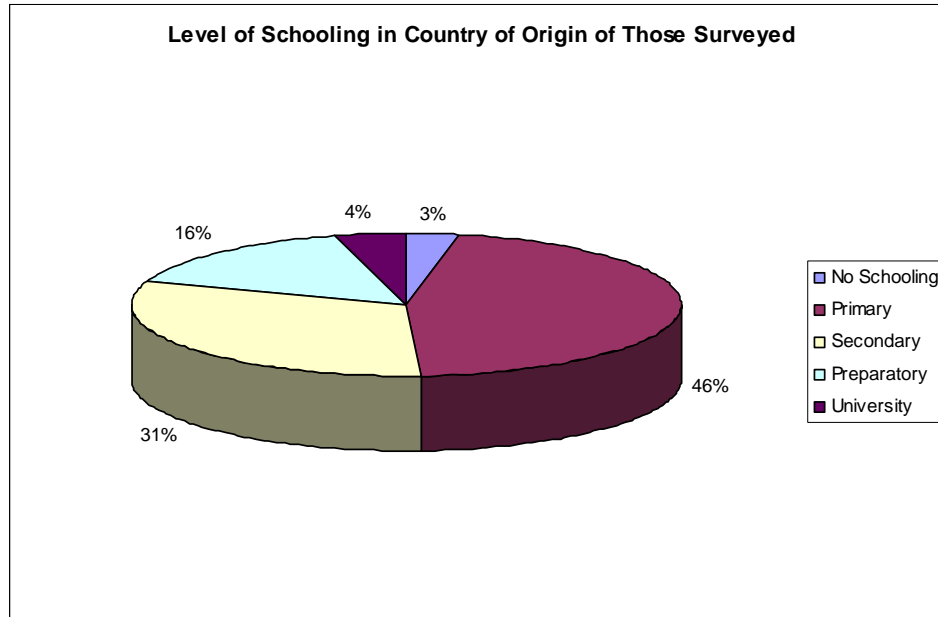
General Information on Those Undocumented Who Were Surveyed⁹

The average age of those who completed the survey was 29 years 8 months while roughly 80% of the respondents were men and 20% women. Ninety-five percent had emigrated from Mexico and the other 5% from Guatemala. Of those who were from Mexico, roughly 40% were from the state of Oaxaca; 14% were from the state of Mexico, 12% from Chiapas, and another 12% from Puebla. Four years and eight months was the average amount of time that a respondent had lived in Bridgeton. Nearly 60% of those surveyed were married and of those that were married over 60% lived with their wife/husband in Bridgeton. On average, each adult undocumented immigrant surveyed supported one child financially in Bridgeton. Nearly half (49%) had no more than a primary education in Mexico.



⁸ These findings are based on 202 surveys. Two-hundred twenty-four surveys were actually collected but since we only wanted to show the economic contribution of the undocumented population we removed those surveys in which the respondent circled permanent legal resident, temporary worker with a visa, or naturalized U.S. citizen to question #7: “What is your immigration status?” or left that question blank. That totaled 22 surveys leaving us with 202.

⁹ Appendix D: “Graphs Generated from Survey” contains graphs on the general information found within this section.



Total Number of Responses = 197

Economic Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in Bridgeton¹⁰

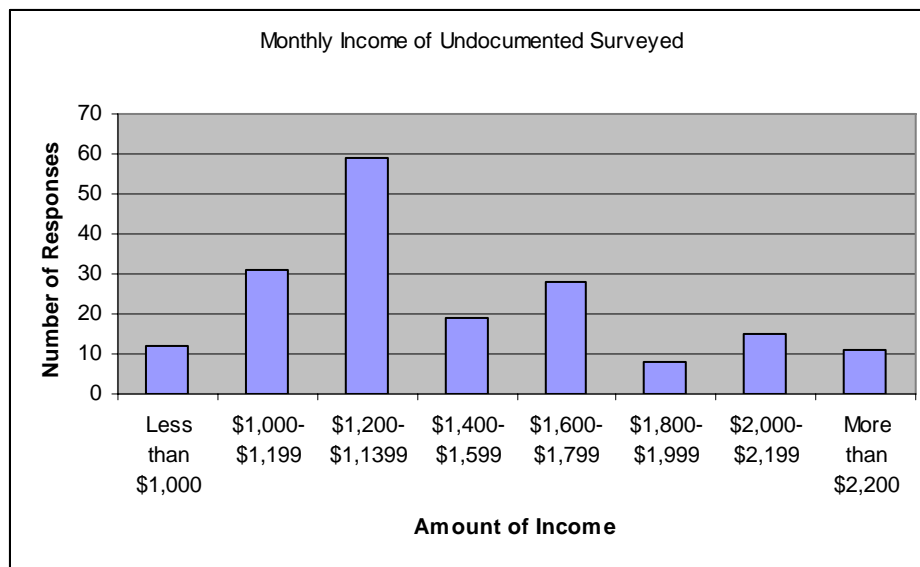
Undocumented immigrants contribute between \$25.7 and \$29.6 million to the local Bridgeton economy annually.¹¹ An undocumented immigrant in Bridgeton brings home an average monthly income between \$1,387 and \$1,595 and works on average for ten months out of the year resulting in an average annual income between \$13,870 and \$15,950. Some \$328-\$378 of their monthly income is sent back to their country of origin. That leaves them with \$1,059-\$1,217 in Bridgeton per month, nearly all of which is funneled back into the local economy through shopping and rent payment. In the stretch of ten months then that provides an undocumented immigrant with \$10,590-\$12,170 to spend. Multiplying those numbers by 2,430, the number of undocumented in Bridgeton who work, means their collective economic contribution is \$25.7-\$29.6 million.

The average amount that undocumented immigrants send back to their country of origin or spend in Bridgeton is most likely highest in the summer since that is when work

¹⁰ The math for the calculations contained in this section can be found in Appendix E. All are calculated using a 95% confidence interval.

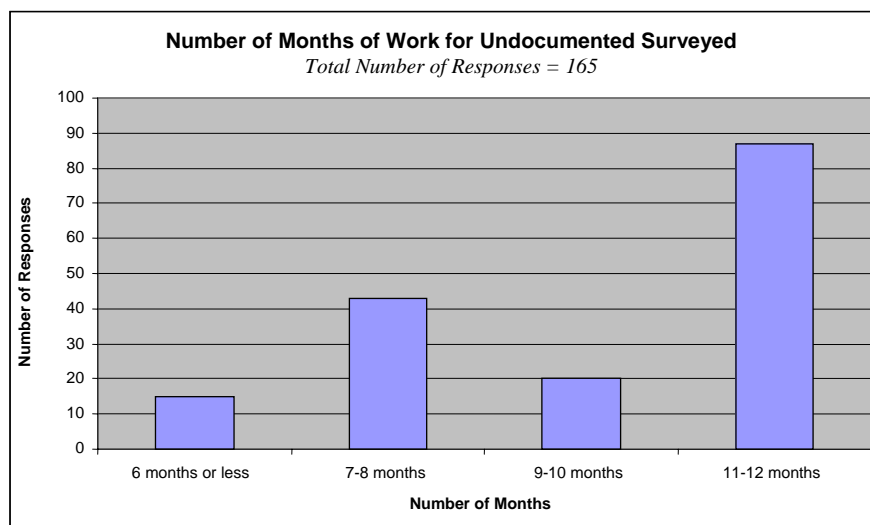
¹¹ This estimate includes money spent in the City Proper of Bridgeton and in the immediate surrounding area. To see how we arrived at this figure, please refer to Appendix E.

is most available, especially on farms and nurseries. This fact does not affect our calculations of their average annual income but it could change how much and on what they spend their income. Leading up to the winter months when work is more difficult to find undocumented immigrants most likely send less money to their country of origin and then stop sending any when they are unemployed. Although undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton save a little bit of money during the summer months, we assume that nearly all of that is put back in the local economy during the financially tough winter months.



Total Number of Responses = 183

Of those undocumented surveyed, the income range of \$1,200-\$1,399 had by far the greatest frequency with nearly 60 respondents earning an income within that interval. The income range with the second greatest frequency was \$1,000-\$1,199 with slightly over 30 responses. This frequency distribution seems to indicate that although the average monthly income is \$1,491 most undocumented immigrants actually earn less than that. Enough earn higher incomes though that the average is pulled up. The frequency data also reveals that although most undocumented immigrants only have work for an average of 10 months out of the year many actually have it year round or close to it.



Undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton send nearly a quarter of their monthly income back to their country of origin. Roughly 45% of their income or \$614-\$704 is spent on food, including both unprepared in a grocery store and prepared in a restaurant; another 20% or \$274-\$314 covers total housing costs (rent and utilities). Undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton dedicate the remaining 10% or \$151-\$173 to purchases of other commercial products. The little bit left over from all these expenses is what they save.

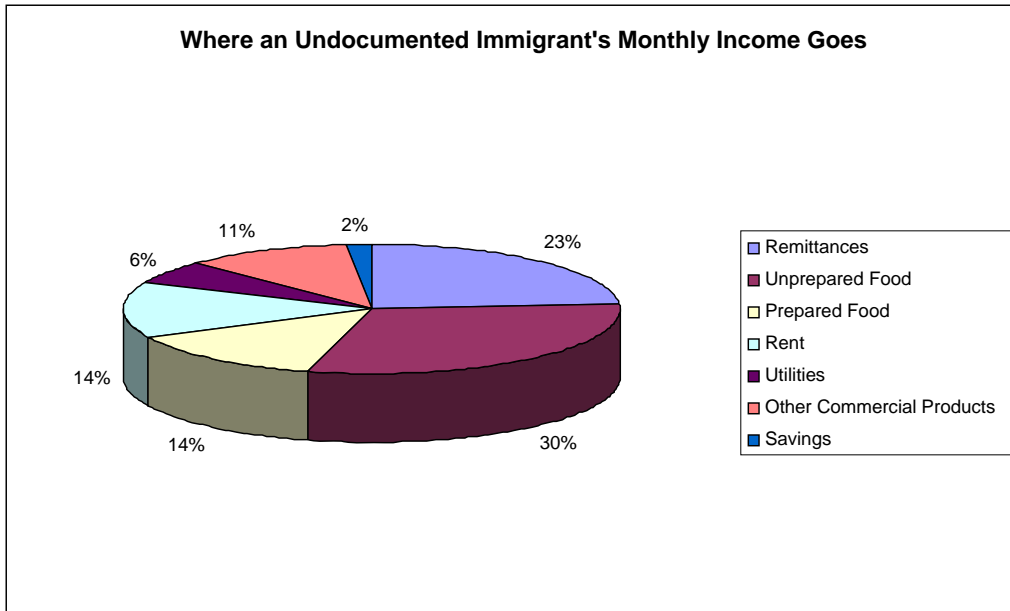
Economic Behavior of an Undocumented Immigrant in Bridgeton

| Where the average monthly income goes | Amount of Money | Percentage of Income |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sent back to country of origin | \$328-\$378 | 23.7% |
| Spent on unprepared food | \$424-\$486 | 30.5% |
| Spent on prepared food in restaurant | \$190-\$218 | 13.6% |
| Spent on rent | \$194-\$222 | 13.9% |
| Spent on utilities | \$80-\$92 | 5.8% |
| Spent on other commercial products* | \$151-\$173 | 10.8% |
| Saved* | \$23-\$26 | 1.7% |
| Average monthly income | \$1387-\$1595 | 100.0% |

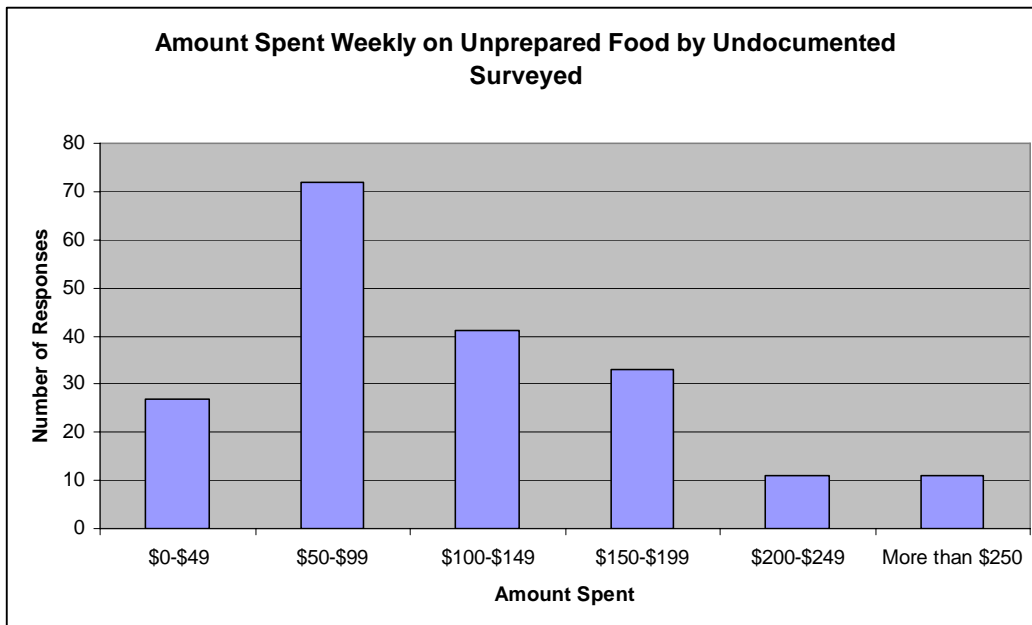
* The category “other commercial products” includes any commercial product except for food, cars, and gasoline which are already asked about in other questions on the survey.

* This “saved” category constitutes the amount of the monthly income left over after accounting for the money sent home and the amount spent in Bridgeton. Although Question #13a in the survey asked respondents about their savings habits, we threw that question out because their responses suggested that they interpreted the question in several different ways. First, only 171 people answered the question. Of those that answered it, 43 put the same amount as they sent back to their country of origin. While it is possible that this accurately represented their behavior, most of those 43 seemed to equate saving money as sending it back to their country of origin. Another 24 respondents appeared to interpret the question as “How much do you ‘save’ or keep in Bridgeton?” Therefore, rather than putting how much they saved they put how much they kept in Bridgeton. This trend was apparent because the combined total of how much they sent to their country of origin and “saved” on question #13a nearly equaled, equaled, or surpassed their total monthly income.

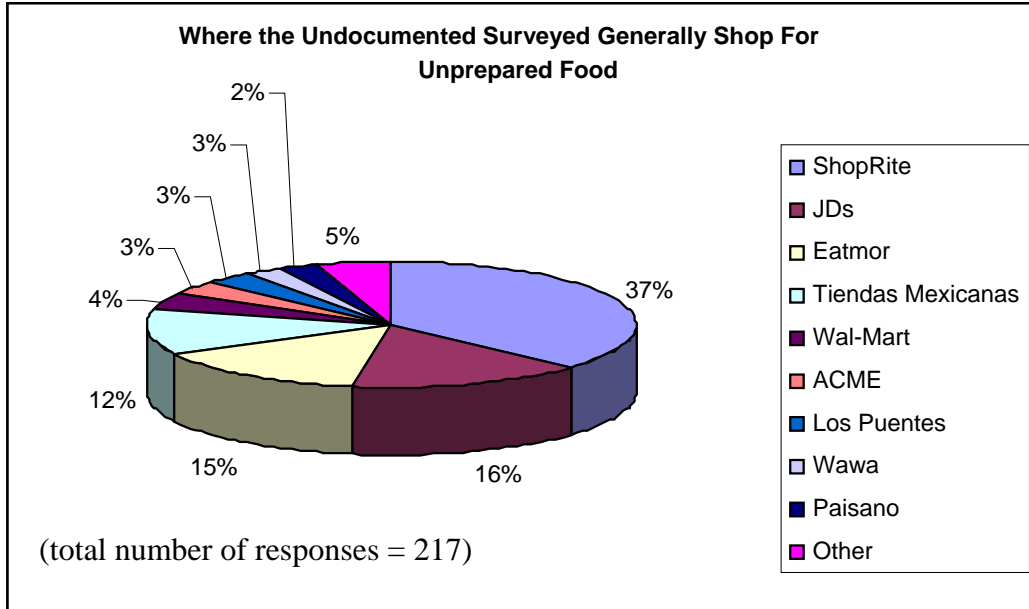
See Appendix E for these calculations. All were done at a 95% confidence interval.



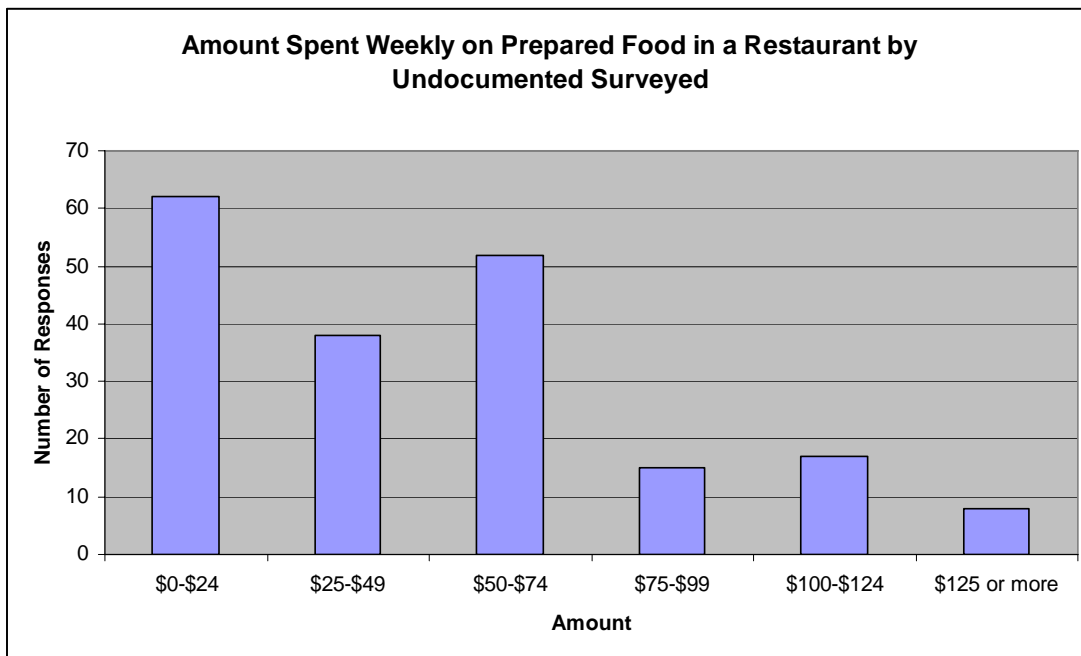
Unprepared Food. The undocumented surveyed on average spend \$105 on unprepared food per week. The expense interval \$50-\$99 has the greatest frequency with more than 70 individuals spending within that range. The store where most undocumented immigrants surveyed shop for groceries was ShopRite with 37% of respondents buying food there. JDs, Eatmor, and tiendas mexicanas rounded out the other main shopping destinations for unprepared food.



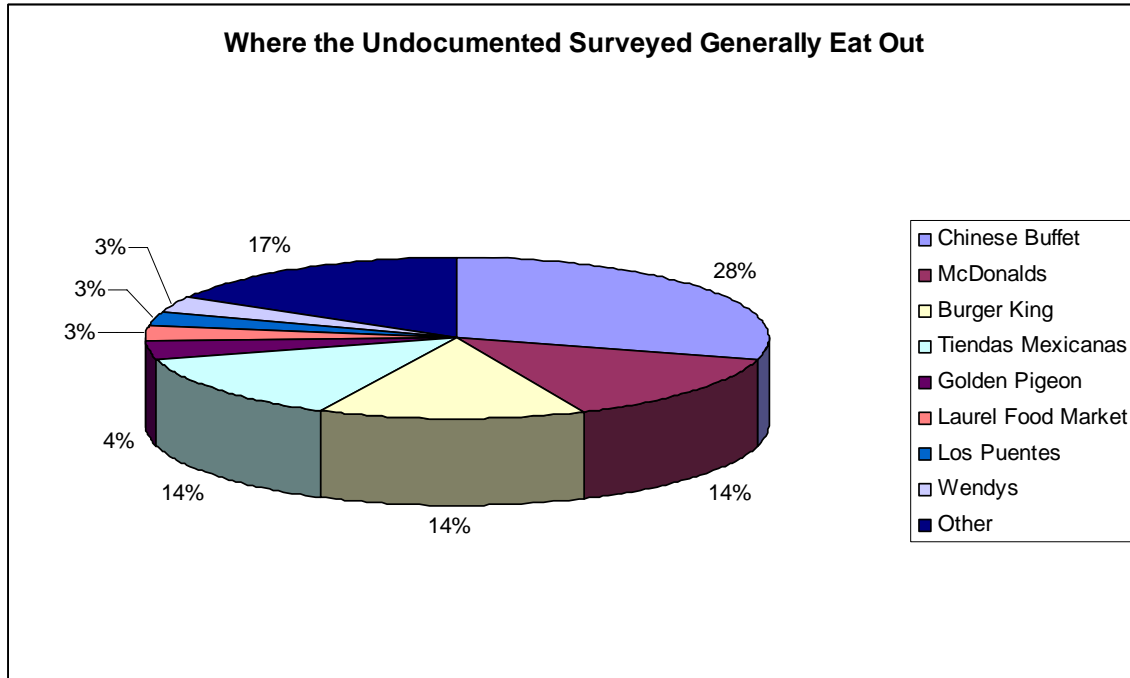
Total Number of Responses = 195



Prepared Food. The undocumented surveyed on average spend \$47 on prepared food in a restaurant per week. The expense intervals \$0-\$24 and \$50-\$74 have the greatest frequencies with more than 110 individuals combined. This data reveals that many undocumented immigrants rarely if ever eat out in a restaurant. However, if they do eat out, the local Chinese buffet is the favorite with 28% selecting it as a place where they generally eat. McDonalds, Burger King, and tiendas mexicanas rank as other frequent food destinations for those undocumented surveyed.

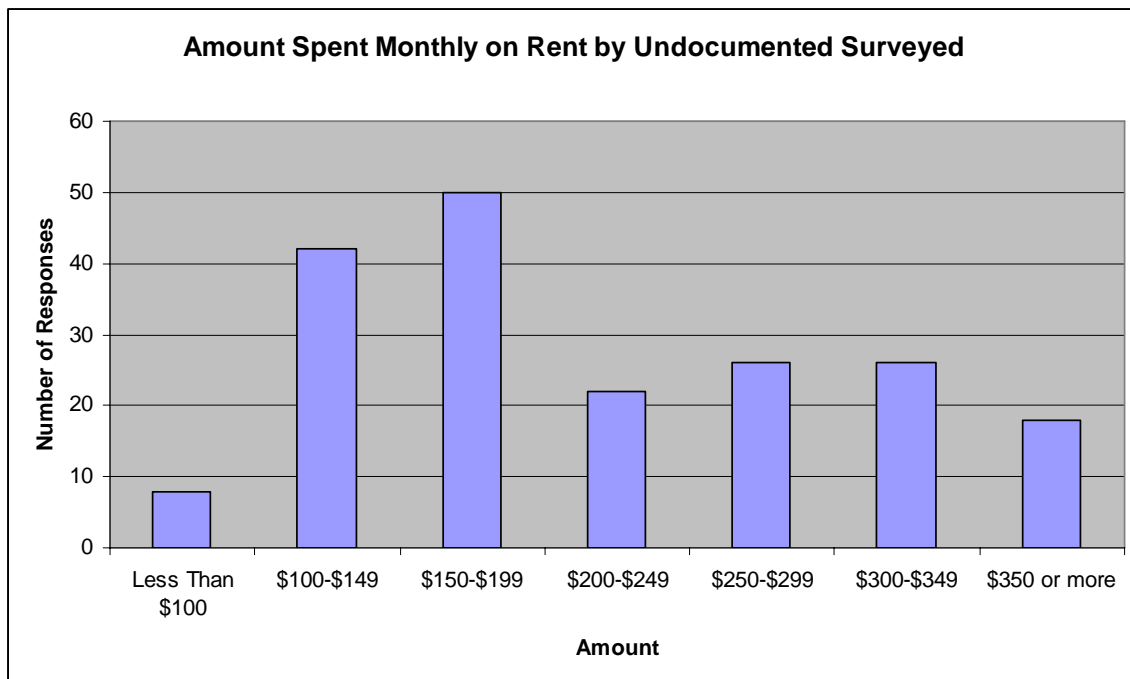


Total Number of Responses = 193



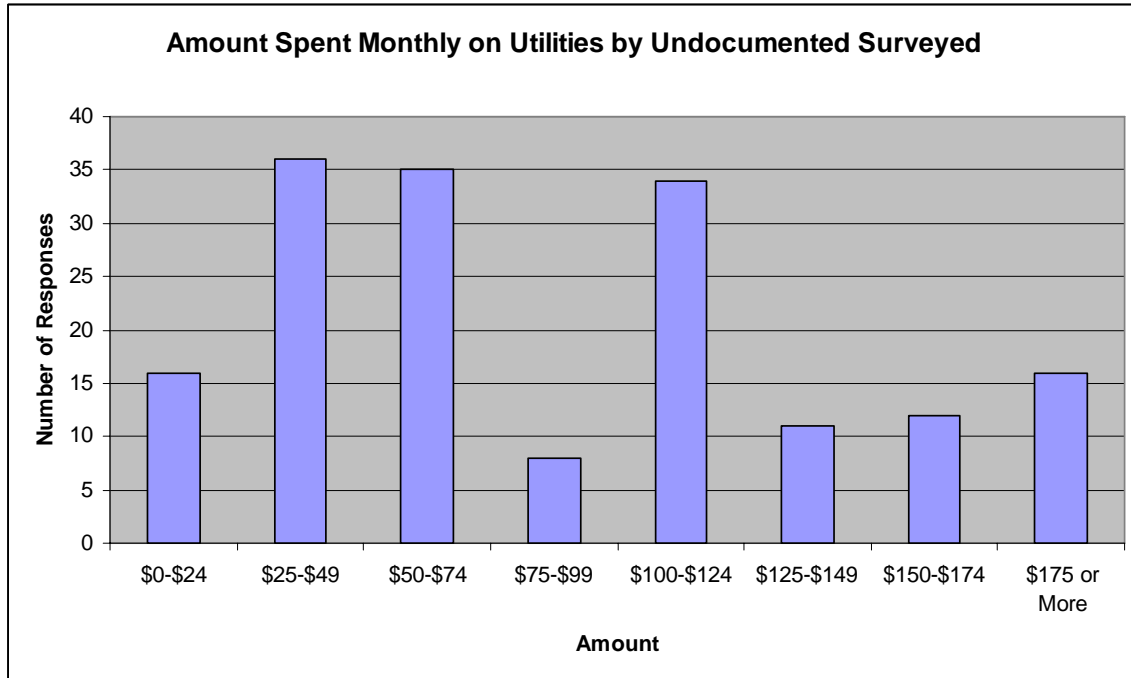
Total Number of Responses = 168

Rent and Utilities. Of those undocumented surveyed, the average total housing cost is \$294 per month with \$208 being spent on rent and \$86 on utilities.¹²



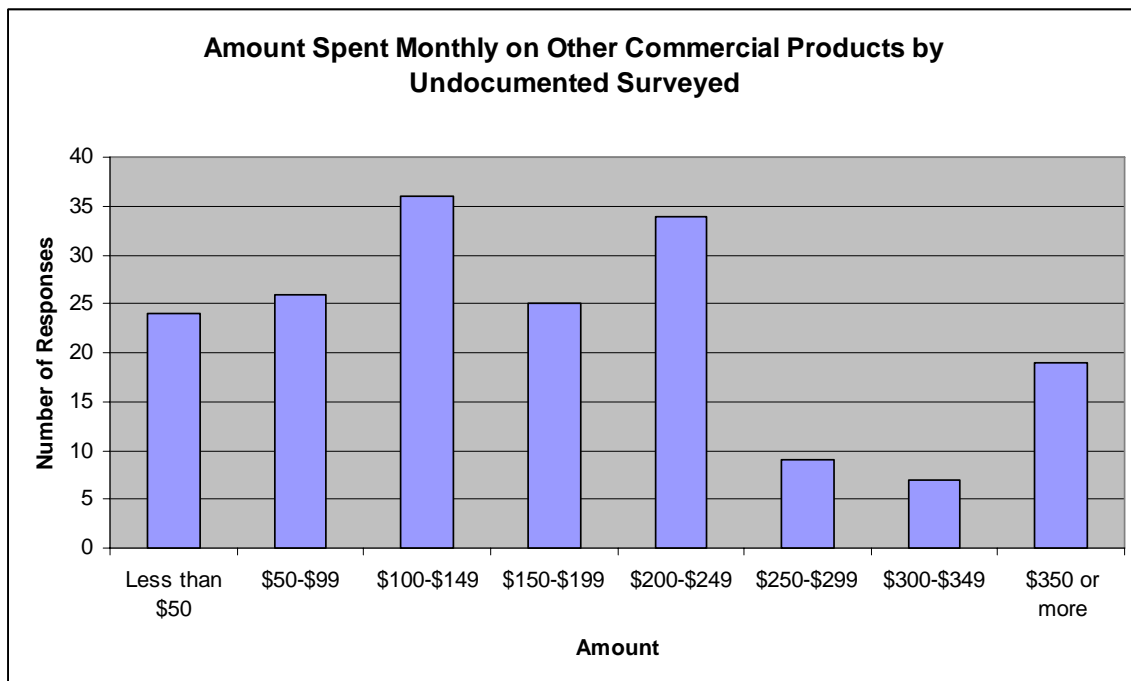
Total Number of Responses = 192

¹² Respondents often put down how much the rent for the entire was rather than how much of the rent they actually paid for out of their own income. We adjusted for this interpretation of the question by dividing the rent for the entire house by the average number of people (3) in an undocumented household who worked and thus could contribute to its rent. We did this for any rent above \$600 and any utilities cost above \$300. In total, we adjusted the rent 40 times and the utilities cost 31 times.

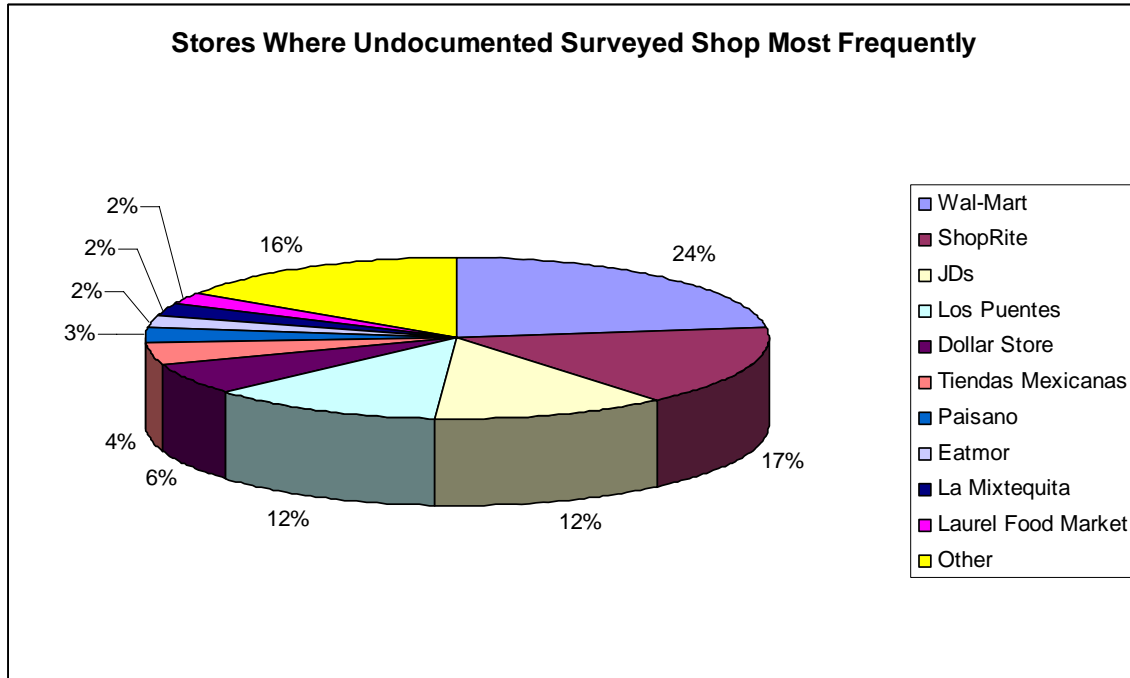


Total Number of Responses = 168

Other Commercial Products. The average amount spent on other commercial products is \$162 per month. The store where surveyed undocumented immigrants shop most frequently is Wal-Mart (24%). The next most preferred are ShopRite (17%), JDs (12%), and Los Puentes (12%).

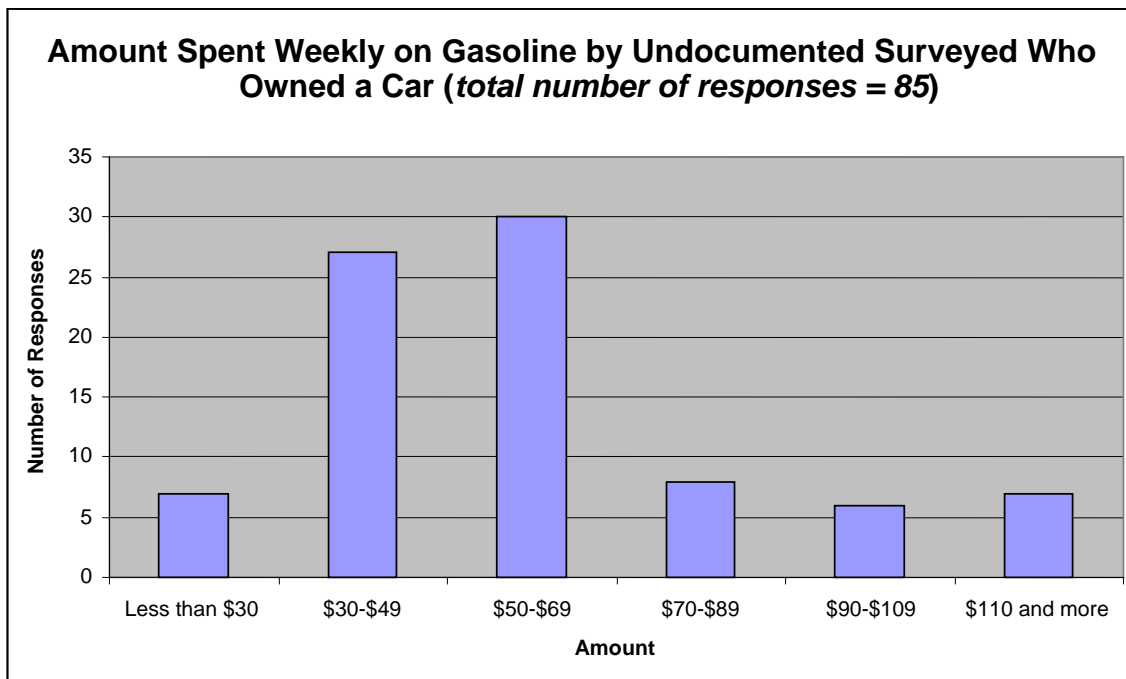


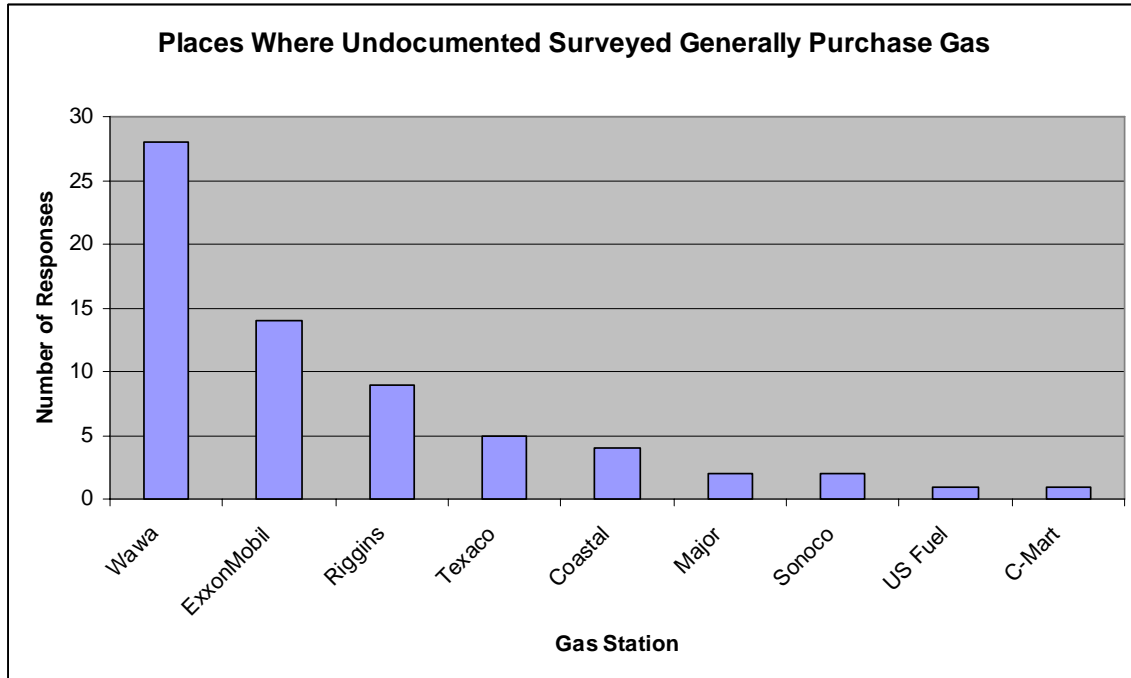
Total Number of Responses = 180



Total Number of Responses = 205

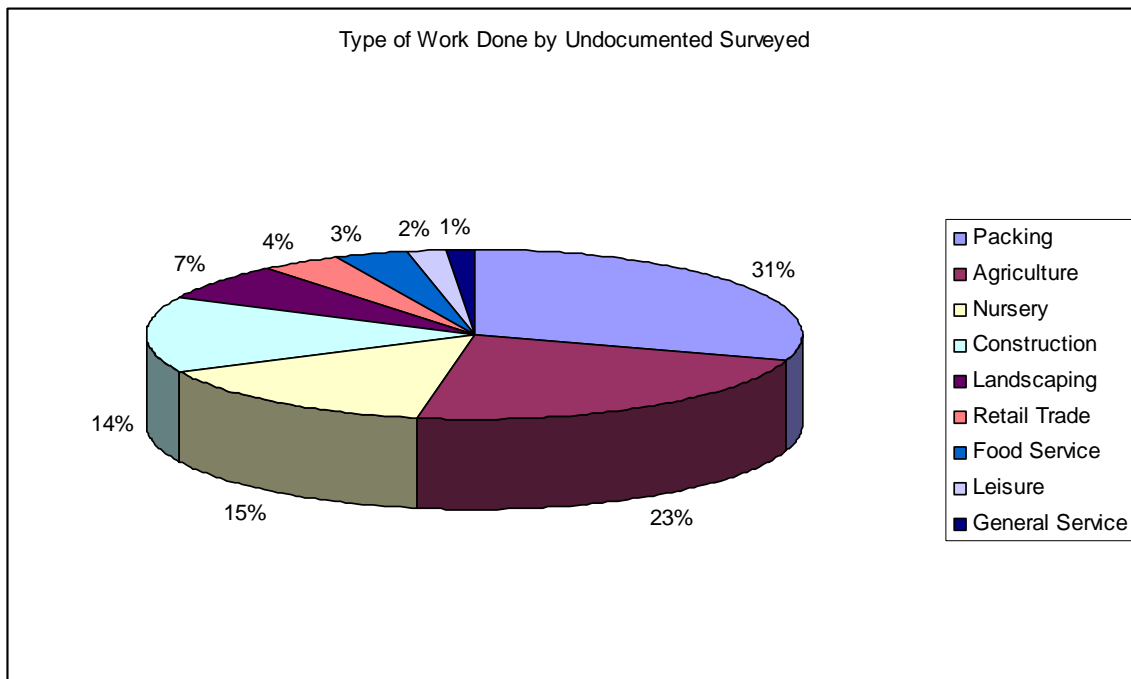
Car Ownership and Gasoline. Of those surveyed, 44% own a car and 73% of those people purchased it in Bridgeton or the immediate surrounding area. Based on conversations with and written responses of individuals who purchased their car in Bridgeton, it seems that many did not buy it from a dealership but from a family member, a friend, or someone off the street. Those with cars spend an average of \$59 per week on gas. The Wawa is the most frequented place for filling up the gas tank.



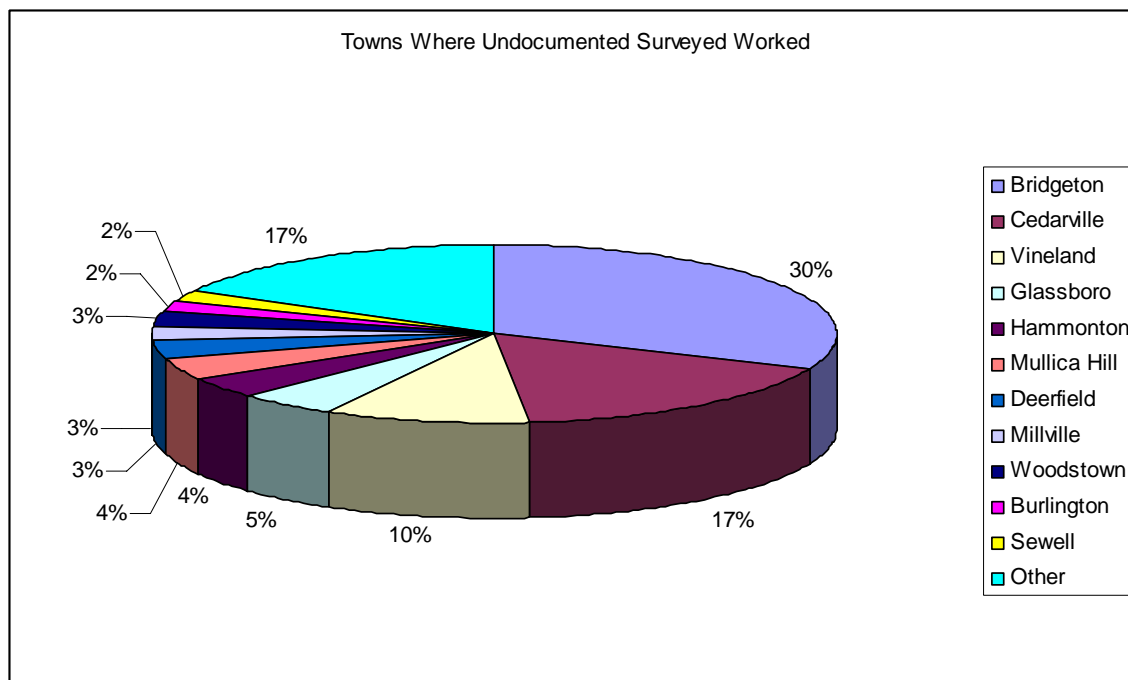


Total Number of Responses = 66

Employment. The undocumented immigrants surveyed work in a diverse range of industries. Thirty-one percent work in packing, 23% in agriculture, 15% in nurseries, and 14% in construction. They also work throughout South Jersey with 30% working in Bridgeton and 17% in Cedarville.



Total Number of Responses = 146



Total Number of Responses = 153

FISCAL RAMIFICATIONS OF THE UNDOCUMENTED IN BRIDGETON

This final section briefly explores the fiscal costs associated with having undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton but extends the analysis to include not only what they take out through things like public schooling and emergency medical care but also what they put in through taxes. The purpose of this section is more to walk through the steps of assessing the fiscal ramifications of the undocumented on local government than to conduct an exhaustive cost-benefit analysis. It discusses more the process than attempts to reach a conclusion about whether they take out more than they put in to the fiscal system. Developing an elaborate cost-benefit analysis that only requires the plugging in of numbers would be extremely convenient but that luxury lamentably does not exist in our complex society; that means that any cost-benefit analysis lends itself to a great deal of interpretation.

For instance, let's start with the question: what is the cost of providing undocumented children with public schooling in Bridgeton? This question seems straightforward: take

the average per pupil cost of schooling a child in Bridgeton and multiply that by the number of undocumented children who attend school there. Nonetheless, this assessment requires multiple levels of interpretation that ultimately affect its calculation. Does one find only the cost of undocumented children or also include that of U.S. children born to undocumented parents? Depending on what one decides the overall costs could be an astonishing two-thirds higher or lower since Passel (2006) estimates that nationally 2/3 of the children in undocumented immigrant families are U.S. citizens by birth. Does one use the average per pupil cost of schooling a child in Bridgeton or assume a higher cost because of the additional resources required for accommodating native Spanish speakers into the school system? How would one determine those added costs?

Complicating this assessment is the State of New Jersey's decade long effort to equalize per pupil school funding across the state so that children attending schools in impoverished urban areas have an equal opportunity at a thorough and efficient education as those in wealthy suburban districts.¹³ According to the New Jersey Department of Education, the per pupil cost of educating a child in Bridgeton in the 2004-05 school year was \$13,869. With the State's effort to equalize education funding and the fact that Bridgeton is an urban school district that has been historically disadvantaged due to a small property tax base, it has been eligible for a good deal of state education funds. In fact, 86% of the funding for Bridgeton public schools in the 2004-05 year came from the

¹³ In 1875, an amendment was added to the New Jersey constitution mandating that the State provide a system of "thorough and efficient education." The Abbott decision, a court case which has been ongoing for more than several decades, is the most famous effort in New Jersey to try to enforce this clause. ("Progress toward Equal Educational Opportunity for Urban Students in New Jersey." 2006. Education Law Center: Standing Up for Public School Children. 2 Aug. 2006. <<http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/AbbottvBurke/AbbottHistory.htm>>.)

state while the city only contributed 5%.¹⁴ Therefore, the state paid \$11,927 per child and the city \$693. This funding distribution between the State and the City of Bridgeton is vastly different from the average municipality in which the State funds 41% and the local district 51%.¹⁵ Essentially, this means that for each additional child enrolled in the Bridgeton school system, the city receives \$11,927 from the State for education funding.

When viewed in this light, having additional students in the school system is actually a strong revenue generator since in order to maintain a high level of per pupil funding the State provides the city with additional funds. The school system then benefits financially as a whole with the presence of undocumented because the money received from the State is not just used to educate the undocumented or U.S. citizens with undocumented parents but every child in the Bridgeton public school system. With the limited data we have available, it is hard to know the size of this funding windfall and even more difficult to determine whether it offsets the city's costs in educating undocumented children. It does, however, suggest that the public school costs imposed by the presence of the undocumented in Bridgeton are not as severe as some would have us believe.

In addition to the common assertion that the children of undocumented immigrants are plunging the budgets of America's public schools in red ink, many blame the undocumented for doing the same to the nation's hospitals. Many accuse the undocumented in Bridgeton for worsening the already financially shaky state of the local emergency room. This cost is real and most likely quite large. In response to our survey question "Have you or someone from your family visited the Bridgeton emergency room?" over half the respondents circled yes indicating that a large portion of the

¹⁴ Four percent came from the federal government and another 5 percent from other sources. If one looks over the data available since 2000, one sees that the large percentage of the Bridgeton public school budget financed by the State is not an anomaly.

¹⁵"2004-05 New Jersey School Report Card." 2005. New Jersey Department of Education 02 Aug. 2006 <<http://education.state.nj.us/rc/rc05/index.html>>.

undocumented community has used the emergency room in Bridgeton. Through informal conversations during the survey, most seem to have gone either because of a work-related accident or because of childbirth. I mention these conversations to illustrate the fact that most do not seem to visit the emergency room to take advantage of free medical care but only go when they have to, when they have an actual emergency. Still the financial burden on the emergency room in Bridgeton most likely is quite steep.

There are also many additional costs incurred by local governments, including use of the municipal court system, police and fire protection, use of city parks and recreational facilities, etc., that have nothing to do with any inherent quality of the undocumented but are instead attributable to population expansion; the costs nonetheless exist because the undocumented *are* the population growth. These costs would be extremely challenging to measure but if any local government desired to take stock of the actual fiscal expenses caused by undocumented immigration it would have to find a way to do so.

At the same time that the undocumented immigrant population in Bridgeton takes some out of the fiscal system, it also puts some back in with its indirect payment of property taxes. We estimate that the undocumented population indirectly contributes \$517,990 in property tax to the City of Bridgeton. Including the children of the undocumented who are U.S. citizens, approximately 4,939 people live in undocumented households. Dividing that by the average household size of a Mexican family in Bridgeton (6.6 people per household according to Census 2000)¹⁶ results in 748 undocumented households in Bridgeton. Since most of these households live in duplexes in the center of Bridgeton, we assume that each household pays 50% of the property tax

¹⁶ As our survey conclusively reveals, not all the undocumented in Bridgeton are from Mexico but since well over 90% are it seemed most accurate to apply Census 2000 numbers for the average size of a Mexican household to all those that are undocumented. Also data does not exist for the size of some households in Bridgeton, such as those from Guatemala.

that the landlord ultimately pays. The average annual property tax payment by a landlord on property rented to an undocumented household is \$1,385.

Total Property Tax Paid by Undocumented Immigrants in Bridgeton

$$= .5UPH = .5(748)(.04082)(33,936) = \mathbf{\$517,990}$$

U = # of undocumented households in Bridgeton = 748
 P = general property tax rate in Bridgeton¹⁷ = .04082
 T = average of the tax assessed value of property in area where undocumented are concentrated in Bridgeton¹⁸ = \$33,936

Even though the state sales tax does not directly enter the coffers of the City of Bridgeton, it does filter back down through state monies that help support the running of the municipality. The only part of the sales tax contribution made by the undocumented that we can calculate is what they pay in prepared food in restaurants. Although we asked the question “How much do you spend on other commercial products (clothing, shoes, electronic devices, music, etc.)?” it is impossible to determine how much of what they spent was actually taxed since so many products are tax exempt (like most clothing for instance). The mean amount of money spent monthly by an undocumented immigrant worker in Bridgeton on prepared food is \$190-\$218. Assuming the undocumented work an average of 10 months out of the year, they spend \$1,900-\$2,180 of their annual income on prepared food. The average annual amount of money then spent on prepared food by all undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton is \$4.62million-\$5.30million. Since the New Jersey State Sales Tax was raised to 7% in July 2006, undocumented immigrants

¹⁷ The general property tax rate for the City of Bridgeton for 2005 was found on the State of New Jersey website. (New Jersey State. 2005. New Jersey Division of Taxation. 2005 General Tax Rates Cumberland County. <<http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/pdf/lpt/gtr05cum.pdf>>.

¹⁸ To determine the “tax assessed value of the property,” we used a web tool offered freely to the public by www.zillow.com. You type in the address of a street, hit search, and then the site comes back with an assessed value of the property. We tried several addresses for which we knew the property value and www.zillow.com returned with estimates that were extremely close. We found the estimated property values of 219 homes in the general vicinity of where most undocumented immigrants live in Bridgeton and then calculated the average for those homes which equaled \$33,936.

in Bridgeton annually contribute \$300,000 to \$350,000 in sales tax on prepared food alone.

Annual Tax Contributions of Undocumented in Bridgeton

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Property Tax | \$517,990 |
| Sales Tax | \$325,000 |
| Total = Property Tax + Sales Tax Contribution | \$842,990 |

Some undocumented immigrants in Bridgeton probably comply with the state income tax but we are not sure what percentage that would be. Therefore, some contribute but we are unable to provide a figure for it.

CONCLUSION

Some preliminary observations would suggest that at best what undocumented immigrants take out of the local government fiscal coffers in Bridgeton is equivalent to what they put in but most likely it is at least somewhat higher. That honestly though is not an astounding revelation. It makes sense not because of something innate about the undocumented population but because of something inherent about the low annual income they earn, which is often below the federal poverty line. The juxtaposition of what it takes to educate a child in Bridgeton per year (\$13,869) with how much the average undocumented immigrant in Bridgeton earns (\$14,910) puts everything into perspective. Literally, a working undocumented immigrant would have to spend almost his entire annual income if he wished to pay for the full costs of his child's education. It is simple: the less you earn the less you are able to contribute to the financial operation of our local, state, and federal governments; for the most part, undocumented immigrants pay their fair share of taxes, they pay what they can, it just cannot possibly rival, nor should it, what people with higher incomes pay into the governmental system.

However, if our society wisely jettisons its unjust expectations that low-income earners (undocumented immigrants) should pay more than what they currently are, it will have finally removed the thick smoke blocking it from seeing the incredible economic contribution they make daily. Not only do these immigrants fill undesirable low-skilled labor positions in and around Bridgeton but they also spend the vast majority of their income in the city and immediate surrounding area. An annual economic contribution of \$25.7-\$29.6 million is not exactly chump change.

Miraculously though that money would somehow filter into the Bridgeton economy even if the undocumented were not there, right? The truth is that local economies across the country depend on the recent influx of undocumented immigrants to perform low-skilled labor. Even though it is shameful that our federal government has still not had the political will to legalize them, small-town America has the grand opportunity to make their communities as welcoming as possible to the undocumented, the opposite of what is currently transpiring. Undocumented immigrants are valuable community members, and that is how we as American citizens should treat them.

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APPENDICES:

All appendices are available upon request.

APPENDIX A: CALCULATING SIZE OF UNDOCUMENTED

APPENDIX B: THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

APPENDIX C: SURVEY PRESENTATION GUIDE

APPENDIX D: GRAPHS GENERATED FROM SURVEY

APPENDIX E: CALCULATIONS OF ECONOMIC IMPACT

APPENDIX F: FINAL SURVEY RESULTS AND FREQUENCIES