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THESIS

**A HOME DEFERRED: THE FUTURE HOMELAND
SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF REVERSE DREAMERS**

by

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March 2020

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**A HOME DEFERRED: THE FUTURE HOMELAND SECURITY
IMPLICATIONS OF REVERSE DREAMERS**

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ABSTRACT

A diaspora of U.S.-born minors living in Mexico are falling under the radar of both U.S. and Mexican authorities. Referred to in this thesis as reverse dreamers, many of these minors express interest in repatriating to the United States in the near future, and the U.S. government is severely underprepared for their return. This thesis explores the social, personal, psychological, political, and ethical implications of reverse dreamers and the policies that might mitigate the growing concerns. Using demographic research, signals analysis, fictional narratives, and scenario planning, the thesis outlines the core struggles of the reverse dreamer population during transitions to Mexico and back to the United States. Two fictional narratives imagine the plight of a reverse dreamer, shown first as an eleven-year-old boy and then as an adult. A third narrative depicts an overwhelmed U.S. government with an influx of repatriating reverse dreamers. Based on the research, the thesis presents a set of recommendations for U.S. policymakers, such as the creation of a special consular unit at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico to liaise with reverse dreamers and government authorities from both countries. Moreover, if we can identify reverse dreamers in Mexico and provide them with necessary resources and advocacy, we can help ensure that they return home with the foundation needed to become productive U.S. citizens in the future.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
FVAP	Federal Voting Assistance Program
GED	General Educational Development
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography (<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía</i>)
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps
SSN	Social Security number

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last decade, there has been a surge of Mexican nationals in the United States who decide to return to their home country. This return migration was attributed first to the 2008 recession and then to the more recent “tightening of U.S. borders, surveillance, deportation and problems with permanent residency applications.”¹ Many of these Mexican citizens have brought their American-born children with them back to Mexico. This thesis coins the term *reverse dreamers* to refer to minors who are U.S. citizens currently living in Mexico, but who spent their formative years in the United States. These U.S. citizens live in a state of documentation limbo while trying to adjust to their new lives in Mexico.

In 2016, Roberta Jacobson, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, estimated that there were approximately 600,000 U.S.-born children under eighteen years of age living in Mexico.² As of January 2019, other sources claim that approximately 3 percent of all students, between kindergarten and the twelfth grade, enrolled in Mexican schools are U.S. citizens.³ These newer estimates suggest a child population 33.3 percent larger than Jacobson’s estimation in 2016. Extrapolating these figures to 2020, an estimated 960,000 U.S.-born minors are likely enrolled in Mexican schools. Given these conservative numbers—and with recent increases in deportations—the population of U.S.-born children living in Mexico could be even higher. Although the U.S. government does not track how

¹ Dulce Medina and Cecilia Menjívar, “The Context of Return Migration: Challenges of Mixed-Status Families in Mexico’s Schools,” *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 38, no. 12 (2015): 2123–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1036091>.

² Paula Bravo Medina, “Los niños invisibles: Ni estadounidenses ni Mexicanos [Invisible Children: Neither American nor Mexican],” *CNN Español*, March 27, 2017, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/03/27/los-ninos-invisibles-hijos-de-inmigrantes-en-ee-uu-que-no-son-ni-mexicanos-ni-estadounidenses/>; Laura Ley and Luis Alonso Pérez, “Hijos de la deportación: Cuando un niño estadounidense tiene que adaptarse a un país que no conoce porque expulsaron a sus padres [Children of Deportation: When an American Child Has to Adapt to a Country They Do Not Know Because Their Parents Were Removed],” *Univisión Noticias*, February 10, 2017, <https://www.univision.com/noticias/amexica/hijos-de-la-deportacion-cuando-un-nino-estadounidense-tiene-que-adaptarse-a-un-pais-que-no-conoce-porque-expulsaron-a-sus-padres>.

³ Brooke Jarvis, “The Deported Americans,” *California Sunday Magazine*, January 31, 2019, <https://story.californiasunday.com/deported-americans>.

many U.S.-born children reside in Mexico, Mexican authorities anticipate that these numbers will continue to rise.⁴

It is critical to define the U.S. government's role and responsibilities in supporting these citizen minors abroad. As reverse dreamers mature into adults, the bureaucratic hoops they have to jump through will continue to compound. Logistical challenges such as inconsistent and invalid documentation, educational displacement, language barriers, and social, emotional, and identity issues will continue to give these reverse dreamers a mixed sense of American community and rejection from their birth country. Their repatriation to the United States no doubt includes fulfilling civic responsibilities like registering with the Selective Service System, paying taxes, and accessing federal programs, to name a few. Integration and assimilation efforts between Mexico and the United States can help identify the needs of reverse dreamers before they become adults.

Unlike their parents, when reverse dreamers leave the United States they are leaving the only home they know. Their transition to a life in Mexico includes complete immersion into a new language, culture, and identity. As they adapt, their cultural, linguistic, social, emotional, and academic obstacles multiply. Data gathered by Mexican schools and acknowledged by U.S. consulates has determined that the majority of reverse dreamers lack resources and live in a state of poverty.⁵ Throughout their lives, their social and emotional obstacles, coupled with the lost nationhood that occurred in childhood, can go undetected. They face other challenges, too, including invalid documentation, educational displacement, and potential failure to complete civic duties; without proper identification (either Mexican or American), they cannot enroll in school or access health and social services. A lack of identification continues to place reverse dreamers in a status limbo, and they have few advocates from within their own families, communities, or countries.

As reverse dreamers continue to fall under the radar, there is little publicly available information about them. On both sides of the border, information remains scattered and difficult to obtain, and the majority of primary sources are written in Spanish. The dearth

⁴ Ley and Alonso Pérez, "Children of Deportation."

⁵ Bravo Medina, "Invisible Children."

of information about the struggles of this population highlights the obstacles they face as they transition from the United States to Mexico: young reverse dreamers often express a strong desire to return to the United States, and they are understandably unaware of the challenges they will face upon repatriation. These insights also shed light on an important issue for the U.S. government: the country is unprepared for their return. Considering their legislative concerns, disadvantages, aspirations of returning to the United States, and sense of lost nationhood, reverse dreamers represent a diaspora of U.S. citizen minors with seemingly no advocacy.

To demonstrate the phenomenon of reverse dreamers, this thesis employed a futures methodology combined with scenario planning and fictional, yet realistic, narratives. Using the minimal demographic research available and signals analysis, the author developed three fictional narratives to identify trends and tendencies in the reverse dreamer's experience. These narratives bring to life a fictional character named Daniel who, as a boy, is forced to move from his home in the United States to a new one in Mexico. The narratives provide a canvas on which to paint the likely experience of a reverse dreamer today, a near-casting of such a dreamer's reintegration in thirteen years, and a parallel near-casting of the challenges for government agencies when an unanticipated influx of reverse dreamers returns to an underprepared United States.

As reverse dreamers begin to emerge from their camouflaged state, the United States has opportunities to help them before their challenges become unmanageable. For instance, the United States can create a special consular unit at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico that focuses solely on documentation for reverse dreamers. This unit would also be responsible for developing a National Reverse Dreamers Strategy, a planning document that would advocate for reverse dreamers by documenting U.S. citizens who move abroad. A coordinated effort between U.S. states and embassies to authenticate American birth certificates would help to prove reverse dreamers' U.S. citizenship. The United States would need to work, as well, with the Mexican National Population and Housing Census and advocacy groups to officially record the population of reverse dreamers in Mexico. These efforts can be lessened, however, if the Department of Homeland Security expands the U.S.–Mexico Entry/Exit Data Sharing Initiative. These recommendations require a

tremendous amount of resources and collaboration between the United States and Mexico, but these efforts will create a great investment for the future leaders of the United States.

The U.S. and Mexican governments need to prioritize and officially track how many U.S.-born children are in Mexico. The current estimated population of reverse dreamers living in Mexico is around the total population of the state of Delaware.⁶ Preparing these U.S.-born children for a successful future starts now, with better documentation processes and consular assistance. Tracking and assessing their existence through documentation, as well as through academic and social adaptation programs, will allow both the United States and Mexico to better prepare for the future of these U.S.–Mexican residents.

While this thesis focuses on U.S.-born Mexicans, the research applies to all reverse dreamers who live in the shadows of other Latin American countries and Asia. Being proactive about our homeland security measures will help us see the long-term importance of preventing terrorism, gang affiliation, crime, fraud, and economic and social drain among citizens who are vulnerable and disenfranchised.⁷

The solution to reverse dreamers' challenges is not isolated to one country; it must be seen as a shared vision for a brighter future. The United States and Mexico share a destiny, which has been intertwined since the formation of both nations. The sources examined in this thesis vividly foreshadow a developing future in which the Mexican and U.S. governments have created an entire populace of forgotten children. This analysis of what the future holds for reverse dreamers creates a platform to better understand how Mexico and the United States created a population of neglected children with U.S. citizenship, and seemingly no country to call home. Through these voices, we can only surmise that this population of abandoned children must be provided for to better the present and guarantee a just and bright future for both nations.

⁶ Prior 2016 estimates of 600,000 reverse dreamers were comparable to the population of Delaware. "QuickFacts: Delaware," Census Bureau, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DE>.

⁷ Joanne Joseph, "The Uprooting of the American Dream: The Diminished and Deferred Rights of U.S. Citizen Child in the Immigrant Context," *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 24, no. 1 (2014): 209–39, <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cjlpp/vol24/iss1/6/>.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Obama administration proposed the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, referred to as the DREAM Act, in 2010, Mexican-born children residing illegally in the United States have been a hot-button issue in American politics. From this legislation, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program was created to provide temporary paperwork for minors born outside the United States and brought to the country illegally by their parents—these minors are referred to by some as Dreamers.¹ DACA was rescinded in 2017, however, and no additional applications were accepted.² The debate over what the United States should do with this group of children has bitterly divided Americans and remains a key issue in U.S. elections.

In the last decade there has also been a surge of Mexican nationals living in the United States who decide to return to their home country. This return migration was attributed first to the 2008 recession, then to more recent strict immigration enforcement. The reasons for their return to Mexico include “nostalgia, high costs of living in the USA, unemployment and cultural values, ... tightening of U.S. borders, surveillance, deportation and problems with permanent residency applications.”³ Many of these Mexican citizens have brought their American-born children with them back to Mexico.

¹ Immigrant Legal Resource Center, *Vivir en los Estados Unidos: Una guía para los jóvenes inmigrantes [Living in the United States: A Guide for Young Immigrants]* (San Francisco, CA: Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2015), https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/documents/youth_handbook-2015-06_05-sp.pdf.

While this thesis recognizes divisiveness surrounding the term *Dreamer*, it is used here apolitically. See Paul Bedard, “AP Stylebook Warns Media: They’re Not ‘Dreamers,’” *Washington Examiner*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/ap-stylebook-warns-media-theyre-not-dreamers>.

² American Immigration Council, *The Dream Act, DACA, and Other Policies Designed to Protect Dreamers* (Washington, DC: American Immigration Council, 2019), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/dream-act-daca-and-other-policies-designed-protect-dreamers>; Luis Miranda, “Get the Facts on The DREAM Act,” *What’s Happening* (blog), December 1, 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2010/12/01/get-facts-dream-act>.

³ Dulce Medina and Cecilia Menjívar, “The Context of Return Migration: Challenges of Mixed-Status Families in Mexico’s Schools,” *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 38, no. 12 (2015): 2123–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1036091>.

Far from the spotlight, a population of children exists that face similar challenges as Dreamers; they are referred to in this thesis as *reverse dreamers*. Reverse dreamers are U.S. citizen minors living in Mexico who were born, and spent their formative years living in the United States. Reverse dreamers live in a documentation limbo while trying to adjust to their new lives in Mexico. In 2016, Roberta Jacobson, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, estimated there were approximately 600,000 U.S.-born children under eighteen years of age living in Mexico.⁴ As of January 2019, other sources claim that approximately 3 percent of all students in kindergarten through twelfth grade enrolled in school in Mexico are U.S. citizens.⁵ These newer estimates suggest a child population 33.3 percent larger than Jacobson originally estimated in 2016. Extrapolating these figures to 2020, an estimated 960,000 U.S.-born minors are likely enrolled in Mexican schools. Given these conservative numbers—along with the increase in strict immigration security—the population of U.S.-born children living in Mexico could be even higher. Although the U.S. government does not track how many U.S.-born children currently reside in Mexico, Mexican authorities anticipate that these numbers will continue to rise.⁶

American news media and policymakers have failed to acknowledge the children—American children—of deported undocumented migrants. Whether the neglect is intentional or not, the sheer volume of these children who have no documented home demands recognition. Mexican media outlets recognize that reverse dreamers exist, and are aware of the implications. Moreover, publicly available testimonies from reverse dreamers demonstrate their struggles. While these children face a precarious start in Mexico, they will likely face even greater challenges when trying to repatriate from Mexico to the United

⁴ Paula Bravo Medina, “Los niños invisibles: Ni estadounidenses ni Mexicanos [Invisible Children: Neither American nor Mexican],” CNN Español, March 27, 2017, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2017/03/27/los-ninos-invisibles-hijos-de-inmigrantes-en-ee-uu-que-no-son-ni-mexicanos-ni-estadounidenses/>; Laura Ley and Luis Alonso Pérez, “Hijos de la deportación: Cuando un niño estadounidense tiene que adaptarse a un país que no conoce porque expulsaron a sus padres [Children of Deportation: When an American Child Has to Adapt to a Country They Do Not Know Because Their Parents Were Removed],” Univisión Noticias, February 10, 2017, <https://www.univision.com/noticias/amexica/hijos-de-la-deportacion-cuando-un-nino-estadounidense-tiene-que-adaptarse-a-un-pais-que-no-conoce-porque-expulsaron-a-sus-padres>.

⁵ Brooke Jarvis, “The Deported Americans,” *California Sunday Magazine*, January 31, 2019, <https://story.californiasunday.com/deported-americans>.

⁶ Ley and Alonso Pérez, “Children of Deportation.”

States in the not-so-distant future. This thesis asks the question: What are the social, personal, psychological, political, and ethical implications of reverse dreamers, and what policies might mitigate associated challenges?

It is critical to determine the U.S. government's role and responsibilities in supporting reverse dreamers. As these children mature into adults, the bureaucratic hoops they have to jump through will continue to compound. Logistical challenges such as inconsistent and invalid documentation, educational displacement, language barriers, and social, emotional, and identity issues will continue to create for these children a mixed sense of American community and rejection from their birth country. If they return to the United States, they will need to fulfill civic responsibilities like registering with the Selective Service System, paying taxes, and accessing federal programs, to name a few. Integration and assimilation efforts between Mexico and the United States can help identify the needs of reverse dreamers before they become adults.

Reverse dreamers continue to live in the shadows of the U.S. and Mexican governments, and a lost generation of U.S. citizens living abroad has the potential to destabilize important diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁷ Understanding the homeland security implications of their expatriation and then reintegration into the United States remains an important point of emphasis for U.S. policymakers.

A. BACKGROUND

Reverse dreamers face the same, if not worse, struggles faced by traditional Dreamers in the United States, yet they are invisible to Mexican and U.S. policymakers. In Mexico, reverse dreamers are often described as *los invisibles* (the invisible ones), considered a generation of de facto deportees left “in between.”⁸ They are increasingly difficult to notice because they are what this thesis refers to as *double untouchables*, minors

⁷ Luis H. Zayas and Laurie Cook Heffron, “Disrupting Young Lives: How Detention and Deportation Affect US-Born Children of Immigrants,” *CYF News*, November 2016, <https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/newsletter/2016/11/detention-deportation.aspx>.

⁸ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans”; Kristen Hwang, “Deportation Fears: Calif. Kids in Mexican Schools,” *Desert Sun*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2017/09/05/americans-exile-increased-deportation-parents-pushes-southern-california-children-into-mexican-school/494301001/>.

who are living abroad. Unlike their parents, when reverse dreamers leave the United States for Mexico they are leaving their home. Their transition to a life in Mexico is often traumatizing; they must completely immerse themselves in a new language, culture, and identity. As they adapt, the cultural, linguistic, social, emotional, and academic obstacles multiply. Data gathered by Mexican schools and acknowledged by U.S. consulates has determined that the majority of reverse dreamers lack access to resources and live in poverty.⁹ Social and emotional obstacles coupled with the lost nationhood that occurred when they were children go undetected. They face other challenges, too, including invalid documentation, educational displacement, and potential failure to complete civic duties. An arduous future lies ahead for reverse dreamers, and they have seemingly no advocates.

Many reverse dreamers lack proper identification (either from Mexico or the United States), which prevents them from enrolling in school and accessing health and social services.¹⁰ Although the U.S. and Mexican governments have collaborated to facilitate residency papers and dual citizenship for reverse dreamers so they can enroll in Mexican schools, efforts to simplify the process have been unsuccessful.¹¹ In 2016, Ambassador Jacobson, along with Mexico's National Population and Personal Identification Registry (*Registro Nacional de Población e Identificación Personal*) and the U.S. National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems, sponsored a program called Soy México. This pilot initiative had the goal of helping between 430,000 and 600,000 U.S.-born children of Mexican parents obtain the proper paperwork to first validate U.S. birth certificates and alleviate the Apostille requirement, and to then facilitate

⁹ Bravo Medina, "Invisible Children."

¹⁰ Notably, the estimates presented earlier about the number of reverse dreamers in Mexico are likely low because they rely on data from Mexican schools. Many reverse dreamers are unable to enroll in school, however, because they lack proper documentation. The numbers may also be skewed by students who enroll using falsified Mexican paperwork.

¹¹ *Soy México* translates to "I am Mexico." Pamela L. Cruz, *A Vulnerable Population: U.S. Citizen Minors Living in Mexico* (Houston, TX: Baker Institute for Public Policy, 2018), <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/research-document/3869bc0a/bi-brief-031918-mex-citizenminors.pdf>.

Mexican residence for reverse dreamers.¹² This program provided much-needed assistance to Mexican families with U.S.-born children by simplifying the legal processes of obtaining Mexican residency.¹³ After two years of collaboration, Soy México had recorded 36,574 applications—only 18 percent of the 200,000 goal set for February 2018.¹⁴ These general figures do not indicate whether the applicant had enrolled in school. In October 2018, Soy México was terminated after minor, yet important, progress was made to help reverse dreamers.¹⁵ Other programs have helped to streamline the residency process, but outreach to communities varies by each Mexican state. Standards from the Mexican and U.S. governments lack uniformity, too, which creates significant administrative hurdles. Without identification, reverse dreamers continue to exist in documentation limbo, and they have few advocates within their own families, communities, or countries.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

As reverse dreamers continue to fall under the radar, there is little publicly available information about them. On both sides of the border, information remains scattered and difficult to obtain; and because most primary sources are written in Spanish, American researchers and policymakers are unable to see the depth of the problem. This literature review analyzes the limited literature on the mass diaspora of U.S.-born minors who move to Mexico due to their parents' relocation. The dearth of information about the struggles of

¹² Secretaría de Gobernación, “Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, secretario de gobernación, en el programa Soy México, registro de nacimiento población México-Americana [Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, Ministry of Interior for the I am Mexico Program, Birth Registry for the Mexican-American Population],” Gobierno de México, September 20, 2016, <http://www.gob.mx/segob/prensa/las-fronteras-geograficas-deben-ser-un-punto-de-encuentro-e-intercambio-el-secretario-de-gobernacion>.

¹³ “Obtención del acta de nacimiento de menores nacidos en Estados Unidos de América (EUA) [Getting a Birth Certificate for Minors Born in the United States of America (USA)],” Registro Nacional de Población, April 3, 2019, <http://www.gob.mx/segob/%7Crenapo/articulos/acreditacion-de-la-identidad-de-las-personas-mexicanas-nacidas-en-estados-unidos-de-america-150534?idiom=es>.

¹⁴ Government of Morelos Mexico, “Facilitan en registro civil estatal la doble nacionalidad a hijos de migrantes morelenses [State Civil Registry Facilitates Dual Nationality to Morelos Migrant Children],” Morelos Bulletin, October 7, 2018, <https://morelos.gob.mx/?q=prensa/nota/facilitan-en-registro-civil-estatal-la-doble-nacionalidad-hijos-de-migrantes-morelenses>. These statistics fail to include the states of Texas and Idaho suggesting that there could be a large population that is not included in these figures.

¹⁵ Ever Chávez, “Concluye programa ‘Soy México’ con mil 200 trámites de doble nacionalidad [The Program ‘I Am Mexico’ Ends with 200 Thousand Dual Nationality Applications],” NetNoticias, October 24, 2018, <https://netnoticias.mx/2018-10-24-ea988a68/concluye-programa-soy-mexico-con-mil-200-tramites-de-doble-nacionalidad/>.

this population highlights the obstacles reverse dreamers face. Though there are few public testimonies, the literature reveals some common themes. For instance, young reverse dreamers often express a strong desire to return to the United States, and they are understandably unaware of the challenges they will face upon repatriation. These insights also shed light on an important issue for the U.S. government: the United States is unprepared for the return of reverse dreamers. It is instrumental to understand the obstacles this population faces when evaluating their eventual return to the United States. Considering their legislative concerns, disadvantages, aspirations of returning to the United States, and sense of lost nationhood, reverse dreamers represent a diaspora of U.S. citizen minors with seemingly no advocacy.

1. Legislative Considerations

Per current legislation, today's reverse dreamers are U.S. citizens and have protections under U.S. law, regardless of future modifications to immigration laws. The U.S. Constitution states that "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside."¹⁶ Regardless of reverse dreamers' ethnicity or their parents' legal status at the time of their birth, the children are not denied or disqualified of their birth rights as U.S. citizens.¹⁷ Unlike traditional Dreamers, who were not born in the United States, reverse dreamers are constitutionally entitled to the same rights and responsibilities as all U.S. citizens; this means that they must maintain their civic duties, such as paying taxes and registering with the Selective Service System (often referred to as the draft), regardless of their residence.

Mexico has its own documentation rules for recording foreign births. Under Mexico's 1998 Nationality Law, children who are born abroad to Mexican parents are qualified to obtain Mexican citizenship through the naturalization process or through dual

¹⁶ U.S. Const. amend. XIV § 1.

¹⁷ Christopher L. Eisgruber, "Birthright Citizenship and the Constitution," *New York University Law Review* 72, no. 1 (April 1997): 54–96, <https://www.nyulawreview.org/issues/volume-72-number-1/birthright-citizenship-and-the-constitution/>.

citizenship. Under this law, until U.S.-born children are naturalized or receive dual citizenship, they are considered foreigners in Mexico, categorized as “mixed-status.”¹⁸ For children to obtain proper documentation as Mexican nationals, they need to be registered with the civil registrar of Mexico (*registro civil*) and then request a Unique Population Registry Code (*Clave Única de Registro de Población*, or CURP). Registration with CURP gives foreigners access to medical care, public services, and credentials, such as school, medical and vaccination records, retirement registration, employment applications, receipts, driver’s licenses, passports, and birth certificates.¹⁹ Without legal documentation, these children cannot access such services. According to Estela Suarez-Aguilar Vergara, writing for *Mexico and the World*, “Foreign-born children, naturalized via Mexican-born parents, do not have Mexican birth rights. Naturalized persons have legal status, but a lack of birth rights places them in a separate, still foreigner, category, essentially second-class citizenship.”²⁰ Estimates in 2010 showed that “53% of U.S. citizens under 18 living in Mexico did not have Mexican citizenship.”²¹ Although reverse dreamers are entitled to dual citizenship, if they are not registered with the *registro civil* they remain undocumented.

2. A Life in Flux: Obstacles and Disadvantages for a Susceptible Population

As reverse dreamers transition into a new culture, they face significant personal and academic struggles, which contribute to a perpetual cycle of disadvantages. Brooke Jarvis, writing for the *New York Times Magazine*, outlines the struggles of U.S.-born children who move to Mexico, describing them as belonging to “families with separate legal statuses but

¹⁸ Medina and Menjívar, “The Context of Return Migration.”

¹⁹ Medina and Menjívar, 2127.

²⁰ Estela Suarez-Aguilar Vergara, “La condición de extranjero en el México actual [Foreigner Status in Mexico Today],” *Mexico and the World* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2001), http://www.profmex.org/mexicoandtheworld/volume6/2spring01/condicion_extranjero.html.

²¹ Claudia Masferrer, Erin R. Hamilton, and Nicole Denier, “Half a Million American Minors Now Live in Mexico,” *The Conversation*, July 1, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/half-a-million-american-minors-now-live-in-mexico-119057>.

intertwined fates.”²² In another article, Jarvis outlines the difficult transitions traditional Dreamers face when they are left parentless, without advocates in the United States.²³ Reverse dreamers are left to manage for themselves too, but in Mexico.

Activists like Nora Sándigo, who came to the United States as a refugee, argue that American media outlets need to showcase advocacy for children of deported parents.²⁴ Sándigo regularly contacts English-speaking media outlets and brings traditional Dreamers, along with children who are U.S. citizens, to public venues so fellow Americans can hear their testimonies.²⁵ Advocacy groups like Sándigo’s—which is called the Nora Sándigo Children Foundation—and other groups that support traditional Dreamers can join together, too, to support reverse dreamers, who represent the largest diaspora of U.S. citizen minors living abroad in a mixed status.²⁶ In an article for *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, Dulce Medina and Cecilia Menjívar describe mixed-status families as those who have been integrated on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border by their dual familial ties.²⁷ They focus primarily on how children born in the United States transition into school in Mexico, the inconsistent and incomplete documentation issues, and how their overall sense of belonging is altered in a mixed-status family. Their description aptly captures immediate families that contain both traditional Dreamers and reverse dreamers.

Reverse dreamers face numerous academic hurdles when trying to integrate into Mexican schools. Juan Espindola and Mónica Jacobo-Suárez highlight the importance of education for children in migrant families, and the rights they have to education regardless of their birth and host country. They further emphasize that the right to education falls on the host state, but requires cooperation from every nation involved in the future of these

²² Brooke Jarvis, “Will They Take Me, Too?” *New York Times Magazine*, December 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/14/magazine/will-they-take-me-too.html>.

²³ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans”; Nora Sándigo Children Foundation, accessed June 14, 2019, <http://norasandigochildrenfoundation.org/>.

²⁴ Jarvis.

²⁵ Jarvis, “Will They Take Me, Too?”

²⁶ Medina and Menjívar, “The Context of Return Migration,” 2127.

²⁷ Medina and Menjívar.

children.²⁸ Further, as indicated by Kfir Mordechay and Cristina Alfaro, it is also necessary for U.S. states to establish “educational democracy” to accommodate migrant children on both sides of the border, which includes identifying linguistic and cultural barriers.²⁹ According to Edmund T. Hamann and Víctor Zúñiga, U.S.-born students studying in Mexico are “three times more likely to ... [repeat] a year of school than those whose experience had been entirely in Mexico.”³⁰ In addition to integration challenges, Jarvis indicates that these children also lack proper educational resources.³¹ Scholars agree that reverse dreamers are further hindered because educators cannot identify their needs in the classroom. Through interviews with transnational students, Hamann and Zúñiga demonstrate that reverse dreamers want to return to the United States; their research seeks to shed light on a population of U.S. citizens that is struggling academically, socially, linguistically, and culturally by encouraging dialogue and advocacy for reverse dreamers, through the dreamers’ own testimonies.³² Ali Borjian et al. support the necessity for more research beyond Hamann and Zúñiga’s, and they are eager to suggest that sociocultural and linguistic resources need to be enhanced for reverse dreamers. Both U.S. and Mexican authorities are not seeing the experiences of reverse dreamers, and so they do not truly understand their needs.³³

²⁸ Juan Espindola and Mónica Jacobo-Suárez, “The Ethics of Return Migration and Education: Transnational Duties in Migratory Processes,” *Journal of Global Ethics* 14, no. 1 (2018): 54–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2018.1498013>.

²⁹ Kfir Mordechay and Cristina Alfaro, “The Binational Context of the Students We Share: What Educators on Both Sides of the Border Need to Know,” *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 55, no. 1 (2019): 30–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2019.1549438>.

³⁰ Edmund T. Hamann and Víctor Zúñiga, “Schooling and the Everyday Ruptures Transnational Children Encounter in the United States and Mexico,” in *Everyday Ruptures: Children, Youth, and Migration in Global Perspective*, ed. Cati Coe et al. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010), 230, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlearnfacpub/100>.

³¹ Jarvis, “Deported Americans.”

³² Hamann and Zúñiga, “Schooling and Everyday Ruptures.”

³³ Ali Borjian et al., “Transnational Children in Mexico: Context of Migration and Adaptation,” *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 10, no. 1 (January 2016): 42–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2015.1084920>.

Compounding the problem, Jarvis discovered that many reverse dreamers arrive in rural communities in Mexico, and at schools with limited resources.³⁴ Bryant Jensen and Jacobo-Suárez shed light on reverse dreamers who are struggling in Mexican schools, unable to acclimate to their new school environment; their research advocates for better teaching programs and standards, resources such as bilingual programs, and more government advocacy.³⁵ Alejandra Favela also believes that the needs of mixed-status families are under represented, especially when children are having a difficult time linguistically, culturally, and emotionally.³⁶ Understandably, these children often struggle to identify with their new surroundings.³⁷ And for vulnerable adolescents, emotional instability has a profound effect on classwork; as Jarvis notes, many children in this situation express feelings of isolation that can lead to poor academic performance, and they are often placed in a lower grade level or, even worse, they drop out of school.³⁸

Furthermore, many reverse dreamers do not speak Spanish, making school instruction nearly impossible. Jacobo-Suárez and Jensen emphasize that because Mexico does not have programs that teach Spanish as a second language in schools, teachers lack proper mechanisms to assess their English-speaking students' academic comprehension.³⁹ Without such assessment, Jacobo-Suárez and Jensen stress that these children are not properly accommodated for, which drastically hinders their success in the classroom.⁴⁰

³⁴ Jarvis, ““Will They Take Me, Too?””

³⁵ Bryant Jensen and Mónica Jacobo-Suárez, “Integrating American–Mexican Students in Mexican Classrooms,” *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 55, no. 1 (2019): 36–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2019.1549439>.

³⁶ Alejandra Favela, “Vidas al Revés/Upside-Down Lives: Educational Challenges Faced by Transnational Children of Return Mexican Families,” *Journal of Latinos and Education* 17, no. 3 (2018): 272–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1337576>.

³⁷ Cruz, *A Vulnerable Population*, 8.

³⁸ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans,” 3.

³⁹ Mónica Jacobo and Bryant Jensen, *Schooling for US-Citizen Students in Mexico* (Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project, UCLA, 2018), 13, <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/immigration-immigrant-students/when-families-are-deported-schooling-for-us-citizen-students-in-mexico/?searchterm=Schooling%20for%20US-Citizen%20Students%20in%20Mexico>.

⁴⁰ Jacobo and Jensen, 5.

The emotional distress experienced by reverse dreamers can have a tangential effect on their academic and professional performance, and can contribute to a perpetual cycle of disadvantages, including susceptibility to poverty.⁴¹ Luis H. Zayas, a psychologist and dean at the University of Texas at Austin’s School of Social Work, refers to reverse dreamers as “forgotten citizens”—an orphaned generation of minors exiled from the United States.⁴² Zayas mentions that these children are likely to experience separation anxiety and low self-esteem.⁴³ Jarvis outlines the needs of these forgotten children through interviews she has conducted with them; with their needs unmet, she says, they feel completely misunderstood.⁴⁴ These psychological traumas are common themes found by psychologists who work with reverse dreamers.

3. Aspirations and Desire to Return Home

According to interviews with journalists and other researchers, many reverse dreamers have expressed their desire to return to the United States to attend high school or college, get a job, or join the U.S. military.⁴⁵ Jarvis indicates, for instance, that children who felt “fully American” upon their initial move to Mexico feel “half and half” as time passes.⁴⁶ Jarvis cites a teacher, too, who says that reverse dreamers have a way of thinking that goes beyond an academic setting; they have goals and career aspirations that include returning to the United States.⁴⁷ As Jarvis explains, however, these children will face reintegration concerns if they return to the United States as adults, including not having completed school and being more susceptible to poverty, which can hinder their success.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Espindola and Jacobo-Suárez, “The Ethics of Return Migration and Education.”

⁴² Jarvis, “Will They Take Me, Too?”

⁴³ Zayas and Heffron, “Disrupting Young Lives.”

⁴⁴ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans.”

⁴⁵ Consulate General of Mexico in Denver, “Los programas educativos y culturales del Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior (IME) [The Institute for Mexicans Abroad Educational and Cultural Programs (IME)]” (presented at Conferencia Estatal de la Oficina de Educación Migrante, Denver, CO, September 10, 2015), 24, <https://studylib.es/doc/4472782/programa-binacional-de-educaci%C3%B3n-migrante>.

⁴⁶ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans,” 4.

⁴⁷ Jarvis, 5.

⁴⁸ Jarvis, 6.

Nina Lakhani and Jacobo-Suárez’s research emphasizes that these “binational children should be one of the greatest resources of the next generation.”⁴⁹ Lakhani and Jacobo-Suárez quote Rufino Domínguez, head of the Oaxacan Institute for Attention to Migrants, who states that “identity is a human right [and a] key to accessing many things, but this population remains invisible. The truth is, violence, poverty and discrimination will eventually drive many back to the US.”⁵⁰ Alfredo Cuecuecha-Mendoza, Jaime Lara-Lara, and José Dionicio Vázquez-Vázquez also agree that U.S. citizens residing in Mexico struggle with transnationalism. They indicate that although attending school presents the biggest challenge, reverse dreamers express the most interest in returning to the United States for academic purposes. Their work also attempts to determine how many U.S.-born children reside in Mexico, and therefore how many may be enrolled in Mexican schools, through data collected in the National Population and Housing Census (*Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda*) from 2000 to 2010 and state and national numbers collected by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Geografía e Informática*, or INEGI).⁵¹ While these numbers predict that reverse dreamers may attain the same level of education as their parents, they do not specify if reverse dreamers have completed high school.

If we can give these students the necessary tools to be successful both in Mexico and when they return to the United States, we can create a foundation that will help them live productive lives as American citizens—they will be better positioned to go to college, join the military, or get a job. Although the literature suggests that reverse dreamers do want to return to the United States in the near future, the research fails to mention the civic duties they will need to fill as American citizens. For example, reverse dreamers will be our future leaders: they will be voting in elections, paying taxes, and participating in the

⁴⁹ Nina Lakhani and Mónica Jacobo, “Uprooted in Mexico: The US Children ‘Returned’ to a Country They Barely Know,” *Guardian*, July 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/13/immigration-us-children-migrants-returned-to-mexico>.

⁵⁰ Lakhani and Jacobo.

⁵¹ Alfredo Cuecuecha-Mendoza, Jaime Lara-Lara, and José Dionicio Vázquez-Vázquez, “La reemigración de niños estadounidenses que viven en México [The Re-emigration of American Children Living in Mexico],” *Papeles de Población* 23, no. 91 (March 2017): 93–116, <http://dx.doi.org/10.22185/24487147.2017.91.005>.

community upon their return. Acknowledging the needs of these U.S. citizens now can help the United States assess proactive measures to reduce issues when they do repatriate.

4. Lost Nationhood

Society is constructed by social interactions, and by objective and subjective realities that make us feel either included or excluded. Objective realities are those that indicate that “social order is a product of human interactions and cannot be ‘derived from the laws of nature.’”⁵² Subjective reality, or internalization, is when “the individual is not a born member of society; rather, the individual is inducted into society by a process.”⁵³ Reverse dreamers experience subjective realities, for instance, when they are transitioning to cultural, linguistic, and social practices in Mexico. Their adaptation or maladjustment to the new environment can make them feel included or excluded. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann further categorize subjective realities into primary and secondary socialization; primary socialization is a person’s first experiences of being a member of society, which typically starts in childhood, and secondary socialization occurs when a person is further classified into a subgroup of society.⁵⁴ Reverse dreamers experience ruptures in both types of socialization, both during childhood and adulthood. Berger and Luckmann’s concept of intersubjectivity, which happens when people share common experiences that are intertwined within their social groups, further demonstrates the transitions that reverse dreamers face between life in the United States and Mexico, and back again.⁵⁵

As a result of these transitions, reverse dreamers begin to form membership within their own imagined communities. Benedict Anderson describes imagined political communities as both sovereign and limited nations: imagined communities consist of a large-scale population that identifies as one overarching nation, in which members may never interact with one another but they share a common identity and comradeship, which

⁵² Thomas J. Chermack, *Scenario Planning in Organizations: How to Create, Use, and Assess Scenarios* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2011), 39.

⁵³ Chermack, 40.

⁵⁴ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 120, 127.

⁵⁵ Chermack, *Scenario Planning in Organizations*, 40.

can be rooted in a sense of nationalism.⁵⁶ This sense of nationalism is largely defined by cultural identity markers and class divisions within other groups. Anderson outlines that although there are differences, language is the glue that holds these imagined communities together. Although reverse dreamers have been immersed in both English and Spanish, their identity lies in the language they identify with most. Anderson focuses on the elements of sovereignty and egalitarianism within imagined communities that are prominent through self-naturalization.⁵⁷ He believes: “The interlock between particular educational and administrative pilgrimages provided the territorial base for new ‘imagined communities’ in which natives could come to see themselves as ‘nationals.’”⁵⁸ Because they feel excluded, reverse dreamers have created their own sense of identity, which eventually morphs and transforms.

Reverse dreamers are in a delicate position because their identities are unknown to the communities they need support from, and because they often feel disconnected from positive cultural products of nationalism that help form identity, such as music, art, and literature. Instead, they may create their own imagined markers based on what Anderson calls “natural ties,” or nationless identifiers out of a person’s control, often based on skin color, gender, or birth.⁵⁹ As a result, reverse dreamers might create their own community, which has its own patriotism, language, and anthem. In the United States, Spanglish is already being written and spoken throughout many communities. Anderson highlights that language, of them all, is one marker that carries through a person’s life, stating, “Through that language, encountered at a mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed.”⁶⁰ As their American and Mexican identities blend, and as they subscribe to their own imagined communities, the United States can anticipate that returning reverse dreamers will have difficulties fitting

⁵⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, UK: Verso, 2016).

⁵⁷ Anderson, 140.

⁵⁸ Anderson, 140.

⁵⁹ Anderson.

⁶⁰ Anderson, 155.

into American culture. They run the risk, then, of becoming their own subclass, or second-class U.S. citizens, and will have trouble assimilating upon repatriation.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

To demonstrate the phenomenon of reverse dreamers, this thesis employed a futures methodology combined with scenario planning and fictional, yet realistic, narratives that project their plausible future. A futures methodology generally sheds light on the near future; near-casting is an alternative means of projecting the outcome of the reverse dreamer phenomenon. Using the minimal demographic research and signals analysis, three fictional narratives were created to capture trends and tendencies of the reverse dreamer's experience. These narratives bring to life a fictional character named Daniel, a reverse dreamer who, as a boy, moves with his parents from his home in the United States to a new one in Mexico. As minimal literature has described the plight of reverse dreamers or the implications of expatriation to Mexico and reintegration into the United States, these scenarios and fictional narratives provide a canvas on which to paint the likely experience of a reverse dreamer today, a near-casting of his reintegration in thirteen years, and a parallel near-casting of the challenges for government agencies when an unanticipated influx of reverse dreamers returns to an underprepared United States.

1. Limitations

This research involved analyzing the limited information provided in English regarding U.S.-born minors living in Mexico. Some of the information used to support this research was written in Spanish and then translated by the thesis author. Further documentation came from publicly available media interviews with reverse dreamers. This thesis focuses solely on U.S. citizens who have moved or will move from the United States to Mexico. Furthermore, not one source reviewed during the research process considered all the ramifications of expatriation, and most sources relied heavily on anecdotal information. Some testimonies could be interpreted as biased, and fail to include a complete interpretation of a reverse dreamer's trajectory. To say that the literature surrounding this phenomenon is sparse is an understatement. Moreover, most available literature is written

for Spanish speakers, so communicating this topic to English speakers should raise awareness and hopefully provide solutions for this underrepresented population.

2. Demographic Research

While there has been little research about the demographics of reverse dreamers, some figures from 2015 and 2016 provided by Mexico’s National Institute for Educational Evaluation (*Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación*) estimate that 32 million students were enrolled in Mexican schools in kindergarten through twelfth grade.⁶¹ Based on these statistics, kindergarten (*pre-primaria*) had about 5 million enrollees, elementary school (*primaria*, grades one through six) had 15 million, middle school (*secundaria*, grades seven through nine) had 7 million, and high school (*preparatoria*, grades ten through twelve) had 5 million. School enrollment numbers indicate that the highest number of enrollees were in elementary and middle school (grades one through nine), estimated at around 22 million students.⁶² These grade levels are the most critical years for reverse dreamers, as they are transitioning from children to young adults. When the numbers show that there are fewer high school students than middle school students, this indicates a drop-out trend.

If we go by the estimates described previously—that 3 percent of students in Mexican schools are U.S. citizens—3 percent of the 32 million students is 960,000

⁶¹ Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación, *Principales cifras: Educación básica y media superior inicio del ciclo escolar 2015–2016 [Key Figures: Primary and Secondary Education for School Year 2015–2016]* (Mexico City, Mexico: Dirección General de Integración y Análisis de la Información, 2017), <https://www.inee.edu.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/P2M108.pdf>; Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación, *Principales cifras: Educación básica y media superior inicio del ciclo escolar 2016–2017 [Key Figures: Primary and Secondary Education for School Year 2016–2017]* (Mexico City, Mexico: Dirección General de Integración y Análisis de la Información, 2018), <https://www.inee.edu.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/P2M109.pdf>; Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación, *Principales cifras: educación básica y media superior inicio del ciclo escolar 2017–2018 [Key Figures: Primary and Secondary Education for School Year 2017–2018]* (Mexico City, Mexico: Dirección General de Integración y Análisis de la Información, 2018), <https://www.inee.edu.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/P2M111.pdf>.

⁶² Laura Islas, “10 datos clave del sistema educativo en México [10 Key Facts about the Mexican Education System],” *Unión Puebla*, April 3, 2017, <https://www.unionpuebla.mx/articulo/2017/03/04/educacion/10-datos-clave-del-sistema-educativo-en-mexico>; Rosado Professional Solutions, “School and Grade System in Mexico. for All Interpreters Who Struggle with This Issue,” *The Professional Interpreter* (blog), July 23, 2012, <https://rpstranslations.wordpress.com/2012/07/23/school-and-grade-system-in-mexico-for-all-interpreters-who-struggle-with-this-issue/>.

American-born students enrolled in Mexican schools.⁶³ This is about 360,000 more than was anticipated by former Ambassador Jacobson in 2016. It is unclear if Jacobson's estimates were off in 2016 or more reverse dreamers have left the United States in the last four years than anticipated. It is fair to state that these significant gaps in estimates demonstrate, at the very least, a failed attempt in the United States to determine how many reverse dreamers may eventually return to the country. Moreover, the United States has relied on Mexico's estimates of U.S.-born children enrolled in Mexican schools, yet these numbers have not revealed dual-citizen children, those fraudulently enrolled with Mexican residency paperwork, or those who have not enrolled in school.

Neither the United States nor Mexico has tracked the current population of U.S.-born minors living in Mexico. According to Peter Drucker, identifying and acknowledging a demographic trend that has already occurred will ultimately predict the future.⁶⁴ Drucker indicates that “demographics will not only be the most important factor in the next society, it will also be the least predictable and least controllable one.”⁶⁵ Given Drucker's insight, an unanticipated influx of returning reverse dreamers could create a U.S. population surge at any moment. Combining demographics and scenario planning allows for the United States and Mexico to near-cast this group's future in either country. Scenario planning and future planning show us the plausibility of a susceptible and even forgotten generation of citizens who will reintegrate into the United States in the next ten, fifteen, or twenty years.

By analyzing demographics of a population that is already surfacing—U.S.-born minors living in Mexico—this thesis sheds light on a topic that has almost no visibility. Drucker emphasizes that, given such emerging information about this generation, the study of demographics allows for the “developing of new concepts, methods, and practices [that] will be in the management of society's knowledge resources specifically, education and

⁶³ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans.”

⁶⁴ Peter F. Drucker, “The Future That Has Already Happened,” *Futurist Magazine*, November 1998, <http://iranscope.ghandchi.com/Anthology/Drucker-Future.htm>.

⁶⁵ Peter F. Drucker, *The New Demographics: How to Live with an Ageing Population* (London, UK: Enviably Workplace, 2001), 6, https://enviablyworkplace.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/The_New_Demographics_Drucker.pdf.

health care, both of which are today over administered and undermanaged.”⁶⁶ Reverse dreamers have already arrived in Mexico; because there are so many of them, and because their numbers are likely to increase, it is critical for U.S. policymakers to identify potential homeland security implications of this population repatriating to the United States.

3. Signals Analysis

By analyzing the unique stories of reverse dreamers, we can identify both tangible and intangible trends. The tangible trends include inconsistent and invalid documentation, limited resources, and educational displacement. Intangible trends include linguistic barriers, coupled with unbeknown social, emotional, and identity challenges that reverse dreamers will carry as they try to repatriate to an underprepared U.S. government system. Focusing on the struggles that reverse dreamers will face emphasizes their needs and highlights what may be in store for them personally, academically, and professionally along a possible trajectory.⁶⁷ Using a timeline and justified markers to outline future events allows policymakers to estimate the likelihood that these future events will occur.⁶⁸

Amy Webb defines trends as timely and persistent

developments on the fringe—that will impact our lives in the future. A trend, therefore, is a new manifestation of sustained change within an industry, the public sector, or society, or in the way that we behave toward one another. A trend is a starting point that helps us to simultaneously meet the demands of the present while planning for the future.⁶⁹

Signals analysis identifies these trends, which are then used as signposts to map the future as well as to fill in the gaps where literature is not available. Reverse dreamers are subject to tangible and intangible trends that manifest at different points of their lives. For example, because reverse dreamers do not know that they have to register with the Selective Service,

⁶⁶ Drucker, “The Future That Has Already Happened.”

⁶⁷ Amy Webb, *The Signals Are Talking: Why Today’s Fringe Is Tomorrow’s Mainstream* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2018), 161.

⁶⁸ Webb, 56.

⁶⁹ Webb, 47.

they miss their window to register; this could put the U.S. government in a difficult position of having to accommodate an influx of late registrations.

4. Scenario Planning and Fictional Narratives

Scenario planning is an effective tool for projecting homeland security implications. Michel Godet defines scenario planning as using a scenario “to represent a future reality in order to shed light on current action in view of plausible and desirable futures.”⁷⁰ Scenario planning can be useful for decision-makers because it can surface assumptions that paint a clear picture of the environment.⁷¹ Furthermore, through simulation, such planning can help decision-makers “engage in deeper critical reflection on the causal processes underlying external events, in turn developing their understanding to inform appropriate strategic responses.”⁷² Scenario planning, Thomas Chermack says, should allow for open-ended solutions with multiple caveats.⁷³

As mentioned, this thesis uses scenario planning to present three fictional narratives about a boy named Daniel, a reverse dreamer whose plausible future unfolds throughout the narratives. By applying Godet’s approach to scenario planning through fictional narratives, this thesis frames outcomes that this future generation faces as it treks forward. Daniel’s story is a middle-of-the-road reverse dreamer experience. His story intersects likely scenarios of thousands of other reverse dreamers who have a variety of life experiences, though they all begin with being uprooted from the United States and transplanted to Mexico. Daniel’s story also describes his older brother, Carlos, who remains in the United States, as well as his twin sister, Patricia, who moves to Mexico and struggles in different ways, and who is eventually unable to return to the United States.

⁷⁰ Chermack, *Scenario Planning in Organizations*, 10.

⁷¹ Chermack, 3.

⁷² Mark P. Healey and Gerard P. Hodgkinson, “Troubling Futures: Scenarios and Scenario Planning for Organizational Decision Making,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Decision Making*, ed. Gerard P. Hodgkinson and William H. Starbuck (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2009), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199290468.003.0030>.

⁷³ Chermack, *Scenario Planning in Organizations*, 4.

These narratives bring to life for policymakers a population of invisible U.S.-born minors. Fictional narratives like Daniel's demonstrate future consequences of U.S. agencies overlooking this population; this type of scenario planning can initiate dialogue about the problem and create a platform for proactive solutions. Furthermore, near-casting the potential side effects of this displaced, disadvantaged generation of reverse dreamers, who may repatriate to the United States, can help us predict consequences for the United States and Mexico. Essentially, scenario planning works as a sandbox where we can demonstrate the needs of reverse dreamers and forecast improvements to our policies.

Notably, the three fictional scenarios in this thesis, summarized below, were constructed by the author. Though they are based on real patterns, any similarities to real situations and testimonies are purely coincidental.

a. Scenario One—Current State

Scenario one provides an understanding of the problems U.S.-born children face when moving to Mexico. It outlines the story of the González Rosa family and their move from Laredo, Texas, to Reynosa, Mexico: Daniel, the main character, and his twin sister, Patricia, are uprooted from their home in Texas to move to their parents' hometown. During their abrupt move, they have to say goodbye to their older brother, Carlos, who remains back in the United States. Once in Mexico, the twins are in documentation limbo when trying to register for school. Their adaptation to life in Mexico is hindered by limited resources, educational displacement, and social, emotional, and linguistic challenges as they acclimate to life in Mexico. Using a descriptive model, this scenario touches on the susceptibility of reverse dreamers and their disadvantages when they move to Mexico, and provides background about the current state of this population, based on unclassified information and interviews with such children.

b. Scenario Two—Near-casting for the Reverse Dreamer

Scenario two near-casts Daniel's life in Mexico thirteen years after his departure from Texas. It dives into his path toward returning to the United States to go to college and reunite with his brother, Carlos. Although Daniel returns to live with Carlos, life is not as he imagined. His transition into college was supposed to be an exciting time, yet he finds

himself underprepared for the bureaucratic components of repatriating to the United States as an adult. He is not only adjusting to American culture and to speaking English, he is also coping with the fact that his twin sister, Patricia, is stuck in Mexico living a very different life. Daniel’s path to college does not come without challenges; he must learn to navigate certain government systems—including registering with the Selective Service and with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)—and about the responsibilities that come with being a U.S. citizen through the help of an admissions counselor.

Scenario two presents the hypothetical effects and future homeland security implications of reverse dreamers when they try to repatriate to the United States. This scenario employs a futures methodology to demonstrate that this return-diaspora population will still be displaced and disadvantaged, even when they return to the United States. The current issues reverse dreamers face, described in scenario one, combined with their continued disadvantages as they repatriate to the United States in the future, described in scenario two, show that their future may be devoid of opportunity. These near-casted compounding struggles demonstrate the risks that the United States faces in the near future when reverse dreamers repatriate.

c. Scenario Three—Near-casting for U.S. Agencies and the Public Sector

Scenario three focuses on the same time frame as scenario two—thirteen years in the future—to near-cast an overwhelmed U.S. government system. Forecasting the future unintended homeland security implications of overwhelmed government systems as reverse dreamers repatriate in the next five, ten, and twenty years is supported by Drucker’s theories on demographics.⁷⁴

This scenario is written from the perspective of a college guidance counselor, Sandra, who is trying to admit multiple reverse dreamers into her university program. Like scenario two, scenario three predicts a cyclical diaspora of U.S. citizens returning from Mexico to the United States who continue to be at a disadvantage as they transition into American society. This return diaspora of reverse dreamers will have homeland security

⁷⁴ Drucker, “The Future That Has Already Happened.”

implications; for instance, they will have issues identifying as U.S. citizens, becoming contributors to society, and understanding their obligations as U.S. citizens. The scenario also presents an overworked and underprepared government system with no path forward, trying to puzzle adult reverse dreamers' lives back together.

D. DANIEL'S STORY

When Daniel was in fourth grade, he went on a school field trip to Houston, Texas, to visit the aquarium downtown. That afternoon Daniel saw tons of cool fish, and even got to see a diver feeding the fish. That was the day he decided to become a diver. The ocean—its tranquility, uncharted depths, and magnificent waves—fascinated him. The ocean, he thought, was the gateway to the rest of the world. But navigating the ocean comes with storms, lonely expeditions, and uncertainty. Unbeknownst to Daniel, this uncertainty was also his future, and he would soon be navigating that ocean without his diving equipment.

This thesis tracks Daniel's story: that of a reverse dreamer trying to steer his boat the best way he can through capricious weather. The next chapter begins with scenario one, as his family moves from the United States to Mexico.

II. WHEN REVERSE DREAMERS LEAVE HOME: DANIEL'S MEXICAN JOURNEY

It is April 2020. Rumor has it that U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement (ICE) will be cracking down on immigrant workers at the meatpacking plant in Laredo, Texas, where Daniel's parents work, sometime this month. The González Rosa family decides to abruptly flee to Reynosa, Mexico, to live with family members who have legal residency there. Taking the twins along is the only logical choice. Daniel and Patricia must abruptly move with their parents to live with their maternal abuelitos, who the twins have never met. Daniel fills his Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles backpack with LEGOS and his baseball memorabilia while his twin sister fills her JanSport backpack with as many books as it will hold. To the two eleven-year-olds, it isn't fair that their older brother, Carlos, gets to stay in the United States with their aunt and uncle, who have their immigration paperwork in order. Carlos is going to be sixteen soon and getting his driver's license. It's a shame, Daniel thinks, that he won't be there to celebrate with his brother.

This trip is not the first time the González Rosa family has moved, yet it is the twins' first international adventure. It's only a three-hour drive to Reynosa, but to Daniel it seems like an ocean away—away from the little house he's used to, away from his big brother, and away from all his friends.

Daniel's parents had not anticipated the challenges they would face in registering Daniel and Patricia for sixth grade at Escuela Primaria Esperanza. They had not registered the twins' birth with Mexico's civil registry (registro civil) before they left Texas. What's more, Daniel's U.S. birth certificate had not been apostilled, and Patricia's was lost in the move. Daniel's parents have no choice but to get a false Mexican birth certificate for Patricia's school enrollment, while they await a decision from the school to enroll Daniel without an apostille birth certificate. The González Rosas had also failed to bring proof of the twins' prior academic enrollment and report cards to demonstrate Daniel's and Patricia's education level and proficiency, so they reach out to school administrative officials, who also struggle to understand the enrollment process for these international students. Since the González Rosa family departed Laredo just before the end of the school

year, they have some time to organize the twins' paperwork in Reynosa—but they are still not able to do so before the first day of the new school year. Through phone calls with Carlos back in Laredo, Daniel's parents arrange for the twins' school report cards to be forwarded to Mexico. Even with the correct documents, the report cards have to be translated to Spanish by an official translator. Meanwhile, the twins' aunt, a teacher at Escuela Primaria Esperanza who often assists parents of reverse dreamers with the birth certificate translation process, connects Daniel's parents with a government-approved translator. The translation process for the report cards and Daniel's birth certificate is lengthy and costly, pushing the twins' first day of school back nearly two weeks.

Five months to the day after that fateful move to Reynosa, the school bell jolts Daniel from a daydream—he looks around the classroom to see if anyone has noticed his inattention. Daniel's homeroom teacher, Señora Marmota, calls on him quickly to read his short story aloud to the class. He hates speaking Spanish in front of the class because he struggles to pronounce unfamiliar words, and the other kids make fun of his obvious American accent. The assignment had been to write about his summer vacation, but Daniel's vacation had never come, spent, instead, in his parents' car, surrounded by their household belongings. Daniel's short story describes, instead, the hot afternoons he remembers spending with his cousins Sam and Alex, playing soccer together in Texas. He misses the cul-de-sac, soccer games, camping, and the quick bike rides up the street to his cousins' pool. Daniel is having a hard time making friends, he struggles to understand what his teachers are saying, and he often comes home choking back tears, trying to understand why he is constantly teased by the other students. Daniel feels stuck in a bad dream, one from which he cannot awake. He finds himself more comfortable recounting his summer vacation the way he knows best—in English. After all, who is listening?

* * *

In recent years, U.S.-born children have been uprooted from their American communities and transplanted into Mexican communities when their parents lack documentation to remain in the United States. If the family leaves the United States abruptly, such as in Daniel's case, the parents might not gather the necessary documents to prove their children are American citizens. The children's situation is made more

precarious when their parents lack the correct paperwork to establish their Mexican citizenship as well. Incomplete or missing identification, language barriers, and educational displacement are just a few of the challenges reverse dreamers face after being torn from the only place they have called home. Their new, more difficult lives in Mexico are juxtaposed against their fond memories of childhood in the United States.

Due to their little-known presence, this population of minors also faces numerous transitional obstacles when they arrive in Mexico. Lisa Gisvold, chief of American citizen services at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, says that “the U.S. considers transnational families as highly vulnerable.”⁷⁵ Caught in the undercurrent, reverse dreamers often struggle as a displaced, disadvantaged diaspora. Furthermore, many U.S.-born minors living in Mexico become lost in the education, social, and immigration systems. The limited resources in some Mexican communities further exacerbates reverse dreamers’ social, emotional, and identity challenges. These compounding issues foreshadow their uncertain future.

A. RETURNING TO MEXICO WITH U.S.-BORN CHILDREN: THE DE FACTO DEPORTEES

When undocumented parents of U.S.-born children are forced to leave the United States to return to Mexico, they face the dilemma of where to raise their children. Daniel’s parents choose to return to Reynosa because they have family there. They know that returning home allows their family to support them while they transition back to Mexico with the twins. Parents have legal custody of their children unless they voluntarily or involuntarily forfeit it. Typically, most parents are left to choose among limited options when deciding who should care for their children between the two countries; Kristen Hwang, who has reported on reverse dreamers, indicates that parents prefer to keep their families together when moving to Mexico.⁷⁶ While Daniel’s parents decide to let their oldest son, Carlos, stay in the United States with extended family, they bring Daniel and his twin sister, Patricia, back to Mexico to keep their family together as much as possible.

⁷⁵ Lakhani and Jacobo, “Uprooted in Mexico.”

⁷⁶ Kristen Hwang, “As American Kids Pour across the Border, Mexican Schools Struggle to Keep Up,” *USA Today*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/09/05/american-kids-pour-across-border-mexican-schools-struggle-keep-up/629458001/>.

The oldest child is established and can fend for himself with the help of his aunt and uncle in the United States. Carlos is being scouted by the University of Texas at Dallas for soccer, and because his aunt and uncle are naturalized U.S. citizens who do not plan to leave the United States, they invite Carlos to stay with them so he can finish high school.

Many families struggle to decide what is in their best interest when they are separated. Carlos is no extraordinary exception, remaining in Texas to finish high school while his parents escape deportation. Experts point out that it is in the best interest of younger children to stay with their parents, however, because those who are separated have a higher probability of childhood mental illness and behavioral issues.⁷⁷ Additionally, having two parents to provide emotional and financial support typically gives the child a better quality of life and more opportunities.⁷⁸ Once the family is settled, both of Daniel's parents find work in Reynosa, his father as a mechanic at his brother's shop and his mother as a caretaker. Even though they are able to provide for the twins in Mexico, the family income has been reduced, and the emotional support that Carlos needs from his parents has dwindled due to the distance. Although some of the González Rosa family remains in the United States, it would have been easier to prove Daniel's and Patricia's U.S. citizenship while the twins were still living in Texas. As this scenario demonstrates, reverse dreamers must quickly transition from their lives in the United States to uncertain and sometimes illegal status in Mexico.

B. INCONSISTENT AND INVALIDATED DOCUMENTATION

Reverse dreamers often arrive in Mexico without first having their birth recorded with the *registro civil*, Mexico's civil registry. Some reverse dreamers do not have their U.S. birth certificates altogether. U.S.-born children of Mexican parents need to be registered with the *registro civil* before exiting the United States; otherwise, working backward to correct the child's documentation is complicated and expensive.

⁷⁷ Hwang.

⁷⁸ Nancy S. Landale, Kevin J. A. Thomas, and Jennifer Van Hook, "The Living Arrangements of Children of Immigrants," *The Future of Children* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 43–70, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41229011>.

When Daniel and his sister move to Mexico, they face fairly typical integration challenges. First of all, lacking registration with the *registro civil*, they are ineligible for Mexican residency. And without this paperwork, they cannot attend school in Mexico and are at higher risk of not finishing school or of dropping out; although Daniel and Patricia were able to get into a school, they started nearly two weeks late.⁷⁹ Additionally, failure to register reverse dreamers' international birth with the *registro civil* also precludes them from accessing social and health services.⁸⁰ As undocumented residents of Mexico, Daniel and Patricia fall into a double-untouchable status: they are undocumented citizens living abroad, just as their parents were before the move.⁸¹

Every U.S.-born child needs a U.S. birth certificate apostilled by the secretary of state in the state that the birth certificate was officiated. When the birth certificate is apostilled, it certifies that the document is authentic and can be accepted in a foreign country.⁸² Since this step is often forgotten, many Mexican parents have to acquire the child's residency by working through the process backward. Getting a document apostilled in the United States is not as costly as doing so while in a foreign country. If parents fail to apostille a birth certificate before exiting the United States, they must pay a trusted third party to facilitate the process back and forth between Mexico and the United States. This process can be expensive, especially for families with multiple children and whose income is reduced following deportation or relocation; the choice to move to Mexico does not necessarily improve the financial status of reverse dreamer families.⁸³ According to the American Immigration Council, between 2006 and 2009, "families lost 40 to 90 percent of their income, or an average of 70 percent, within six months of a parent's immigration-

⁷⁹ Amelia Shaw, "An Invisible Tide: Undocumented U.S. Kids in Mexico," *Foreign Service Journal*, October 2016, <http://www.afsa.org/invisible-tide-undocumented-us-kids-mexico>.

⁸⁰ Bravo Medina, "Invisible Children."

⁸¹ Shaw, "An Invisible Tide."

⁸² "Apostille Requirements," U.S. Department of State, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/travel-legal-considerations/international-judicial-assistance/authentications-and-apostilles/apostille-requirements.html>.

⁸³ Bravo Medina, "Invisible Children."

related arrest, detention, or deportation.”⁸⁴ Families that do not have financial support after their move to Mexico have to work twice as hard to recuperate lost wages, even if that places the child’s documentation acquisition and authenticity on hold.

Daniel and Patricia are twins, but now have different birth records in Mexico. Daniel had to wait while his birth certificate was apostilled in the United States, delaying his school enrollment. Luckily the process was initiated quickly, since Carlos was notarized to receive the birth certificate and send it back to Mexico.⁸⁵ Since Daniel was not registered with the *registro civil* before leaving the United States, his parents had to work with the *registro civil* in Reynosa and schedule an appointment to register his foreign birth, meanwhile paying fines for their failure to register prior to his departure from Texas.⁸⁶ Some parents feel that they have no choice but to purchase counterfeit birth certificates so they can enroll their children in school and have access to health and social services. As the start of the school year approached, Daniel’s parents felt that acquiring a false birth certificate for Patricia was the only option to expedite her enrollment. Little did they know, however, that submitting a counterfeit birth certificate will hurt Patricia as an adult when she tries to reenter the United States. As reverse dreamers reach adulthood, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to obtain a passport through the U.S. Department of State if they have falsified documents.⁸⁷ Using falsified documents is a violation of the law and, therefore, legally punishable.⁸⁸ Out of feelings of necessity, Daniel’s parents subject their

⁸⁴ “U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement,” American Immigration Council, November 22, 2019, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/us-citizen-children-impacted-immigration-enforcement>.

⁸⁵ “Frequently Asked Questions,” Texas Department of State Health Services, January 6, 2020, <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/vs/reqproc/faq/Texas-Vital-Statistics-Frequently-Asked-Questions/#authorize;ApostilleInfo.com>, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://www.apostilleinfo.com/>.

⁸⁶ Karen Mercado Asencio, “The Under-Registration of Births in Mexico: Consequences for Children, Adults, and Migrants,” Migration Policy Institute, April 12, 2012, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/under-registration-births-mexico-consequences-children-adults-and-migrants>.

⁸⁷ Lakhani and Jacobo, “Uprooted in Mexico.”

⁸⁸ Lakhani and Jacobo.

children to further harm by waiting to get their children's dual citizenship, increasing the risk of U.S. authorities finding fraud.⁸⁹

The Mexican Department of Education (*Ministerio de Educación*) requires that official documents, such as U.S. birth certificates, identification cards, and academic transcripts, are not only apostilled but also translated into Spanish by an official translator, who must be authorized by the Mexican government to follow the standard process for Mexican residency and school enrollment.⁹⁰ Documents are not to be accepted unless they are translated by one of the Mexican state-specified translators recognized by the Supreme Court of Justice (*Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación*).⁹¹ The process for authenticating student records is equally onerous and expensive. Researcher Mónica Jacobo-Suárez and Nancy Landa have found that to transfer one school report card from the United States to Mexico using a trusted third party for translation costs, on average, 4,000 pesos, or approximately 200 U.S. dollars. Moreover, the process is lengthy, which stalls school registration; the process to apostille and translate a document can take between six months to a year, depending on the volume of documents each office is handling.⁹² The Mexican authorities tried to remedy complications and inconsistencies in this process with a 2015 law, which ended the apostille requirements for school registration documents.⁹³ Escuela Primaria Esperanza, the school in Reynosa used for Daniel's story, has registered numerous U.S.-born children, most of whom enrolled after 2015 and therefore had the apostille requirement waived. According to Jacobo-Suárez and Landa, although these processes are no longer required by law, many schools still enforce the apostille requirement and, thus, turn students away until they submit documents. Out of necessity, some parents pay for

⁸⁹ Milagro Meléndez, "¿Indocumentado con un hijo estadounidense? Tramite su pasaporte antes de que sea tarde [Undocumented with a U.S.-Born Child? Process your Passport before it Is Too Late]," *El Tiempo Latino*, July 13, 2018, <http://npaper-wehaa.com/el-tiempo-latino/2018/07/13/#?article=3112109>.

⁹⁰ Mónica Jacobo and Nancy Landa, "La exclusión de los niños que retornan a México [The Exclusion of Children Returning to Mexico]," *Nexos*, August 1, 2015, <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=25878>.

⁹¹ "Apostilla de documentos [Apostilled Documents]," Gobierno de México, July 22, 2015, <http://www.gob.mx/sre/acciones-y-programas/apostilla-de-documentos-8029>.

⁹² Jacobo and Landa, "Exclusion of Children Returning to Mexico."

⁹³ Natalie Gross, "Crossing Borders Means Repeated Grades, Denied Enrollment for Some Mexican-American Students," *Latino Ed Beat* (blog), September 13, 2016, <https://www.ewa.org/blog-latino-ed-beat/crossing-borders-means-repeated-grades-denied-enrollment-some-mexican-american>.

their children to go to private school, where the registration requirements are less stringent; nevertheless, this route does not resolve reverse dreamers' lack of Mexican residency.⁹⁴

C. LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES

Many reverse dreamers have linguistic challenges when they move to Mexico. Even though they have been exposed to Spanish at home, most have a better command of English than Spanish, and limited comprehension in Spanish makes school instruction more difficult. The majority of U.S.-born students who move to Mexico—such as the fictional González Rosa twins—have neither formally studied Spanish nor been educated in a language other than English. Though he is embarrassed when he does so, Daniel is more outgoing and willing to speak Spanish than Patricia. As a result, Patricia becomes more isolated from her peers, as she lacks the means to communicate with them effectively. Although reverse dreamers can speak and understand Spanish, typically their reading and writing in Spanish lags.⁹⁵

Reverse dreamers face further linguistic challenges if they move to an indigenous community. Many children may understand their family's indigenous language yet have never been exposed to Spanish. These children are further isolated in remote, often poorer communities, where opportunities to acquire Spanish occur only in an academic setting. These stressful learning environments subject children to higher rates of illiteracy.⁹⁶ As English is usually their dominant language, these reverse dreamers suffer linguistically when adapting to all aspects of life in Mexico. This affects not only their academic success but also their social integration.

D. LIMITED RESOURCES

When families return to Mexico, many return to a place with limited resources. While Daniel's family moves to an area with good infrastructure and resources, many

⁹⁴ Jacobo and Landa, "Exclusion of Children Returning to Mexico."

⁹⁵ Jacobo and Jensen, *Schooling for US-Citizen Students in Mexico*, 13.

⁹⁶ Some of these children live in the towns of the U.S. and Mexico border. In Tijuana, the town Mariano Matamoros is one of the most dangerous parts of Mexico. Lakhani and Jacobo, "Uprooted in Mexico"; Ley and Alonso Pérez, "Children of Deportation."

reverse dreamers are not so lucky. Mexican schools and U.S. consulates have determined that the majority of undocumented U.S.-born children in Mexico suffer from abject poverty, a lack of resources, gang violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence.⁹⁷ Transferring from a safe school in the United States to a dangerous one in Mexico is a traumatic experience to say the least.⁹⁸ Although the González Rosa family does have resources in Reynosa, the area has become increasingly dangerous in recent years, making the twins' walk to school stressful for the family. Nancy Landale, Kevin Thomas, and Jennifer Van Hook explain how these challenges potentially hinder children's future success: "For children, living in poverty increases the risk of negative outcomes, including health and developmental problems, poor academic performance, low completed education, and lower earnings."⁹⁹ Moreover, when the living conditions are worse in Mexico than in the United States, parents find it more difficult to support their children financially. Even though Daniel's parents both work, and the González Rosa family has the support of their family in Mexico, they still rely on what little money Carlos can send from the United States to help pay for school supplies for the twins.

Some schools, like Escuela Primaria Esperanza, have insufficient resources. Ley and Pérez suggest that small classrooms, no areas for sports, and few computers have made student transitions even more difficult—not to mention that some students go hungry when lunch is not provided at school.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, reverse dreamers lack in-school support, such as teachers who can accommodate and evaluate their needs. It is no surprise, then, that Daniel and Patricia struggle with Spanish. Although their parents have always spoken Spanish at home, the twins prefer to speak English. In many cases, such barriers prevent proper education for U.S.-born students; the schools do not address these students' struggles and therefore cannot facilitate their success inside and outside the classroom, causing their overall academic failure.

⁹⁷ Zayas and Heffron, "Disrupting Young Lives"; Bravo Medina, "Invisible Children"; Jarvis, "The Deported Americans," 1; Ley and Alonso Pérez, "Children of Deportation."

⁹⁸ Ley and Alonso Pérez, "Children of Deportation."

⁹⁹ Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook, "The Living Arrangements of Children of Immigrants," 51.

¹⁰⁰ Ley and Alonso Pérez, "Children of Deportation"; Hamann and Zúñiga, "Schooling and Everyday Ruptures," 230.

Due to inconsistent documentation and improper academic evaluations for reading, writing, and speaking comprehension in Spanish, reverse dreamers are often improperly placed behind in their academic grade level. Daniel and Patricia both struggle with sixth grade and are required to repeat the grade due to their inability to grasp Spanish. Jarvis says that repeating grades is a trend among such children.¹⁰¹ Being placed in the wrong grade level can ultimately hinder reverse dreamers' advancement as students, and increases the risk that they will drop out of school. A few years down the road for the González Rosa family, Patricia drops out and never finishes high school.

E. EDUCATIONAL DISPLACEMENT

The primary and secondary school curricula in Mexico differ substantially from the curricula in the United States. Things that children take for granted in the United States become a struggle to learn in Mexican schools—national history, currency, and the national anthem, to name a few.¹⁰² Inconsistencies in academia, coupled with the tribulations of adapting to a new home environment, create further difficulties when reverse dreamers try to successfully express themselves in a different language.¹⁰³ Many Mexican immigrants already are at a deficit because they are under-resourced, have lower incomes, and have a higher rate of academic dropout.¹⁰⁴ If the needs of these children are not addressed when they are young, the United States and Mexico run the risk of further academic dropouts.¹⁰⁵

Reverse dreamers, who are already susceptible to lower literacy rates, are at a higher risk to not finish school. Although high school dropout rates differ, studies indicate that, in the United States, “immigrant Mexicans are more likely to be high school dropouts than are 3rd generation students of native-born parents ... [and] second generation Hispanic students [are] less likely to drop out of high school than first and third generation

¹⁰¹ Jarvis, “The Deported Americans.”

¹⁰² Ley and Alonso Pérez, “Children of Deportation.”

¹⁰³ Jacobo and Jensen, *Schooling for US-Citizen Students in Mexico*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Chunyan Song and Mary Benin, “Dropping Out of High School: The Effects of Living in Non-traditional Families” (presented at the Population Association of America Annual Meeting Program, Boston, MA, 2004), 24, <http://paa2004.princeton.edu/papers/42013>.

¹⁰⁵ Hwang, “As American Kids Pour across the Border.”

youth.”¹⁰⁶ Since these American children have returned to Mexico, they are now first-generation Americans in Mexico and are more likely to drop out of school for the same reasons that first-generation Mexicans drop out of school in the United States. Furthermore, according to Steven Camarota, “The lower educational attainment of Mexican immigrants appears to persist across generations.”¹⁰⁷ Camarota’s research indicates that high school dropout rates for second- and third- generation U.S.-born children of Mexican immigrants are two and a half times greater than for other U.S. citizens. He further suggests that Mexican immigrants in the United States (ages twenty-five to sixty-four) are six times more likely not to graduate from high school than U.S.-born citizens. As mentioned, Patricia ends up dropping out of school because she never fully grasps classroom instruction, and feels that she needs to get a job to help support her parents.

F. SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND IDENTITY CHALLENGES

Reverse dreamers are an invisible, or under-the-radar, population, both when they reside in the United States and when they move to Mexico. When these children live with undocumented parents in the United States, they may feel their parents’ continuous fear of deportation. Reverse dreamers may try to stay under the radar by not engaging in activities that would draw attention to their families due to their parents’ illegal status. Then when they move to Mexico, reverse dreamers are undocumented Mexican citizens who fail to integrate appropriately, often going unnoticed when they struggle in school, and as they are raised in another tradition and culture.¹⁰⁸ Daniel longs for his friends back in the United States and feels out of place when trying to speak Spanish. Feeling out of place among peers, teachers, neighbors, and friends makes these children feel misunderstood, or invisible, and they are commonly considered outcasts. These children also face double rejection because they do not fit into Mexico and are being discriminated against in their

¹⁰⁶ Song and Benin, “Dropping Out of High School,” 24.

¹⁰⁷ Steven A. Camarota, *Immigration from Mexico: Assessing the Impact on the United States* (Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies, 2001), 18, <https://cis.org/Report/Immigration-Mexico>.

¹⁰⁸ Beatriz Díez, “Quiénes son los niños estadounidenses forzados a crecer en México [Who Are the U.S.-Born Children Forced to Grow Up in Mexico],” *Animal Politico*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2017/11/ninos-estadounidenses-mexico/>.

new communities.¹⁰⁹ Patricia, for example, is teased for her American accent when she tries to speak Spanish, which makes her feel insecure. In Mexico, U.S.-born students are often referred to as *niños inocentes* (innocent children) because of their lack of wherewithal and their dependence on others, which makes it even more difficult for them to adapt.¹¹⁰

Often, social obstacles pair with emotional issues. Some children's testimonies indicate that being sent to Mexico caused an immense amount of emotional stress and affected their family substantially.¹¹¹ Many reverse dreamers are at risk for mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and anger issues.¹¹² Being predisposed to environments that cause "symptoms of toxic stress," such as fear of losing a parent or having witnessed an arrest in the United States, affects these children.¹¹³ Reverse dreamers can be subject to bullying, identity crises, and further isolation as they struggle to integrate.¹¹⁴ These children show signs of negative moods and symptoms of bad behavior, depression, and low self-esteem.¹¹⁵ Daniel uses soccer as his outlet and makes some friends, but Patricia struggles to make good friends. Many U.S.-born children enrolled in Mexican schools are of preadolescent and adolescent age, and they are particularly susceptible to emotional issues. In an interview with Ley and Pérez, one Mexican school teacher aptly equates these children's struggles to breaking a bone: "Although the bone has healed, the break remains and when [weather] changes occur, the bone aches."¹¹⁶

When reverse dreamers are uprooted and placed in a new, unfamiliar environment, they suffer from a mixed sense of identity; this comes, too, from a change in family

¹⁰⁹ Lakhani and Jacobo, "Uprooted in Mexico."

¹¹⁰ These children are also referred to as binational students, migrant students, or transit students. Díez, "Who Are the U.S.-Born Children?"

¹¹¹ Díez.

¹¹² American Immigration Council, "U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement."

¹¹³ American Immigration Council.

¹¹⁴ Hwang, "As American Kids Pour across the Border."

¹¹⁵ Cruz, *A Vulnerable Population*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Ley and Alonso Pérez, "Children of Deportation."

structure, which can cause adolescents to behave rebelliously.¹¹⁷ Daniel and Patricia, for instance, have both of their parents in Mexico, but Carlos remains in Texas, splitting their family across the border. Daniel is confident he is going to return to the United States and be reunited with Carlos. Patricia is more pessimistic, as her acclimation to Mexico is not as easy. In the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, Zayas et al. explain why such a move is so traumatic to children like Daniel and Patricia: “Late-elementary and middle-school period ... [is the] stage in life marked by major developmental milestones in cognition, emotional processing, and behavior ... ascendance in influence of peer groups, extra-familial systems, and social roles.”¹¹⁸ Moving in the middle of this phase stunts development in adolescents’ interest to talk, make friends, and express how they feel.¹¹⁹ In Mexico, Patricia never develops a close-knit group of friends like the one she had in Texas. Although she is still very close with Daniel, she becomes more distant with her parents. This critical age, when Patricia is about to hit puberty, has a long-term effect on her well-being; this sets Patricia up for failure in her studies and disillusionment with school just a few years later.¹²⁰ Children carry the trauma of moving with them as they mature. This can be seen in military children, who experience frequent moves and must constantly adjust to a new environment. Chunyan Song and Mary Benin’s research suggests that such adolescents are more susceptible to impulse; for example, they may get married or have children at a young age.¹²¹

U.S.-born children in Mexico already feel a sense of alienation, from both the United States and Mexico; they face discrimination in the United States because of their parents’ immigration status, and then again upon their move to Mexico because of their own immigrant status.¹²² Lisa Gisvold acknowledges that “many of these children have

¹¹⁷ Cruz, *A Vulnerable Population*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Luis H. Zayas et al., “The Distress of Citizen-Children with Detained and Deported Parents,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 24, no. 11 (2015): 3216, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0124-8>.

¹¹⁹ Díez, “Who Are the U.S.-Born Children.”

¹²⁰ Hwang, “As American Kids Pour across the Border.”

¹²¹ Song and Benin, “Dropping Out of High School,” 24.

¹²² Zayas and Heffron, “Disrupting Young Lives”; Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook, “Living Arrangements of Children of Immigrants.”

spent most of their lives in the shadows in both the U.S. and Mexico—first as children of undocumented parents in the U.S. and later as children who cannot prove their identity and citizenship in Mexico.”¹²³ Even though the twins’ parents are able to navigate the Mexican residency process for Daniel, they have to falsify paperwork to establish residency for Patricia. Additionally, Mexican parents returning to Mexico are naturally more acclimated and assimilated than their U.S.-born children are.¹²⁴ This is a defining difference between the experience of the parents and children: parents are relieved of the stress of possible deportation, but the plight of their reverse dreamer children has just begun.

G. ANALYSIS

If reverse dreamers have access to proper educational, health, and social services, they will be better equipped to become capable U.S. citizens who can contribute positively to society when they repatriate to the United States.¹²⁵ These children need to be integrated and acculturated appropriately when they enter the Mexican school system so that they can receive, at a minimum, their high school diploma.¹²⁶ Limited education, poverty, and inadequate educational resources have contributed to consistently high levels of poverty in Latin America.¹²⁷ According to Camarota, “Mexican immigrants who have not graduated from high school are almost three times as likely as native [Mexican-born citizens] to live in poverty.”¹²⁸ Dropping out of high school is associated with poverty or near poverty, lack of health insurance, and poor welfare use among these populations.¹²⁹ Preparing reverse dreamers to complete high school will be fundamental for their success when they are transitioning to the workforce.

¹²³ Lakhani and Jacobo, “Uprooted in Mexico.”

¹²⁴ Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook, “Living Arrangements of Children of Immigrants.”

¹²⁵ Landale, Thomas, and Van Hook.

¹²⁶ Ley and Alonso Pérez, “Children of Deportation.”

¹²⁷ Susan Wendy Parker and Carla Pederzini, *Gender Differences in Education in Mexico* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), 33, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/659741468752986916/Gender-differences-in-education-in-Mexico>.

¹²⁸ Camarota, *Immigration from Mexico*, 47.

¹²⁹ Camarota.

U.S.-born children who have spent the majority of their lives living in the United States and then must integrate into Mexican culture face many hardships.¹³⁰ Years of acclimation to Mexican culture and education does little to alleviate the stressful, precarious existence of reverse dreamers, whose nationhood and residency may never quite be legitimate. Removed from their country of birth and placed in an unfamiliar environment, this population of U.S.-born minors struggles to identify as American or Mexican. Fictional narratives like Daniel's provide a framework for understanding how Mexico and the United States have created a population of neglected children with U.S. citizenship but seemingly no country to call home. With limited resources, social and emotional obstacles for these children create an unreliable foundation for their future.

¹³⁰ Cruz, *A Vulnerable Population*, 8.

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III. WHEN REVERSE DREAMERS COME HOME: DANIEL'S AMERICAN JOURNEY

Daniel works hard and earns his diploma from Escuela Preparatoria Esperanza in Reynosa in May 2027. He spends his late teens and early twenties working full time as a welder for a local mechanic, but he knows that being a U.S. citizen means he can go to college in the United States, which would allow him to pursue a promising career as a dive welder, and return him to his childhood dream of working in the ocean. The lucrative opportunities near oil rigs in Texas would provide job security and allow him to be closer to his older brother, Carlos. Finally, his dream is becoming a reality: Daniel applies and is accepted to Texas A&M's dive program in Galveston.¹³¹ Daniel works with the U.S. Passport and Citizenship Unit in Matamoros, Mexico, to get his U.S. passport, the only document he has been missing, to reenter the United States.

Patricia's story has not been as rosy. She never finishes high school, but still dreams of returning to the United States with Daniel to reunite with Carlos and the rest of their extended family. But she has experienced more complications than Daniel with her efforts to repatriate. Because Patricia was registered in all of Mexico's systems with a forged Mexican birth certificate, her problems are just beginning when she applies for a passport at the U.S. Embassy and the consular officer finds fraud in her case. This means that she is not be eligible to apply for a U.S. passport, which in turn means she cannot return to the United States to take advantage of educational and job opportunities.

Meanwhile, Carlos has rented an apartment with an extra room for Daniel to stay in when he returns to Texas. Carlos has finished high school in Laredo and has joined the U.S. Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), which helps him pay for college. After graduating from college, he begins working for the Army Corps of Engineers outside Houston. Carlos works hard and provides for himself as he prepares for Daniel's arrival. Without Carlos, Daniel would have to navigate the return to the United States alone.

¹³¹ "TAMUG Dive Program," Texas A&M University at Galveston, September 3, 2019, <http://www.tamug.edu/DiveProgram/index.html>.

How is it that three siblings from the same family have experienced such disparate trajectories?

It is now 2033; it has been thirteen years since Daniel has been to the United States, and all that time Texas has been calling the young man home. Daniel saw his older brother only once during that time, when Carlos came to visit Mexico. He has never been back to the cul-de-sac in Texas where he grew up. Passport clutched tightly, Daniel makes the same drive his parents did so many years ago, only this time in reverse, back home. His aunt and uncle have planned a special homecoming meal, tacos al pastor, and paletas de la Michoacana (Mexican ice pops) for dessert. The reunion is surreal. Daniel and his big brother embrace, each shedding tears for the years lost. For the first time, Carlos realizes that his little brother is now a young man. They are ready to pick up where they left off, yet both feel the emptiness of not having Patricia and their parents with them. A tinge of sadness permeates what should be a joyous reunion.

It isn't until Daniel visits the admissions office at Texas A&M that he begins to encounter problems. When he applies for a student loan to help finance his future, he is questioned about his registration with the Selective Service. He has never even heard of it, he says. After some investigative work, his admissions counselor, Sandra García, informs him that he must register before his twenty-sixth birthday. A few weeks later, Daniel receives a letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) demanding state and federal income tax information. Daniel is confused. He had worked for a local mechanic shop back in Reynosa, yet the money is long gone. How was he to know that, as a U.S. citizen, he was obligated to register with the Selective Service and pay U.S. taxes? It seems to Daniel that his American dream has become an American nightmare. Moreover, it is difficult for Daniel to depend so heavily on Carlos while living in the States. Carlos doesn't make a lot of money, but he can support Daniel financially and emotionally until the younger brother gets on his feet. Also, Daniel has to adjust to speaking English again, as he has mostly spoken Spanish at home with his family. Over the course of several months, he is immersed in Spanglish, second-guessing his English as Spanish begins slowly to feel foreign to his ears, as it had when he was a child.

Daniel is torn in all directions mentally and emotionally but, for the first time, not physically. He feels overjoyed to be reunited with Carlos. Yet Patricia, who has been through everything with him, is now alone to navigate Mexico. Daniel continues to push through and registers for the Selective Service, meanwhile submitting his FAFSA to hopefully receive tuition assistance. Sandra, Daniel's admissions counselor, assures him that she will look into his unresolved questions about in-state tuition and paying back taxes.

* * *

Reverse dreamers, like Daniel, may express interest in returning to the United States as adults. These U.S. citizens are unique to other American diasporas in Mexico who reside there for retirement or job prospects because they are not there by choice. Reverse dreamers will likely begin repatriating to the United States en masse by 2033; when they return, after living their developmental years in Mexico, they will face significant challenges assimilating into American culture. As outlined in Chapter II, haphazard documentation and sparse advocacy have compounding effects when these citizens pursue lives in the United States. Documentation issues will remain one of the largest obstacles for U.S. and Mexican governments to navigate. Inconsistent documentation, including missing birth certificates, Social Security numbers (SSNs), or passports, or a combination thereof, will force authorities to piece together mismatched profiles. Some reverse dreamers will be high-school drop-outs, too, and therefore have diminished career prospects. Reverse dreamers may also place a burden on their family members who have been living in the United States legally, like Daniel's brother, Carlos, who supports Daniel as he repatriates. Finding housing and access to social and health services will be a turbulent path for most reverse dreamers, who are unfamiliar with navigating the U.S. systems. Others will find that they have not fulfilled some of their responsibilities as U.S. citizens, such as paying taxes and registering with the Selective Service. As these now-grown Americans repatriate, they must fulfill these responsibilities or face legal action and rejection from government programs.

A. INCONSISTENCIES AND INVALID DOCUMENTATION

Having no birth certificate is one of the most crucial challenges for reverse dreamers who are attempting to reintegrate into the United States. When a mother gives birth to a child in the United States, the hospital automatically issues the child's birth certificate for the state and county of birth. A U.S. birth certificate indicates a person's age, citizenship, and identity.¹³² If you lose your original birth certificate and need to order a replacement, you must contact the vital records office in your state of birth.¹³³ To request a replacement birth certificate, each applicant is required to provide another proof of identity, such as a Social Security card, a driver's license, and depending on the state, documents considered "lesser identity," such as a utility bill or bank statement with the requestor's current U.S. address.¹³⁴ Without supporting identity documents, receiving a copy of a birth certificate is exceedingly difficult. Daniel has an apostille birth certificate, which certifies his identity by both the United States and Mexico.

In the United States, each state is in charge of registering every birth, most often through an electronic vital records system.¹³⁵ However, a federal or centralized birth records system does not exist in the United States.¹³⁶ The cost to replace a birth certificate and the process for verifying identity also differ by state. For example, the processing fee for a replacement birth certificate is \$22 in Texas, versus \$30 in New York.¹³⁷ Similarly, the process for requesting a certified birth certificate, such as one that would be required

¹³² "Birth Certificates," American Bar Association, November 20, 2018, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/publications/teaching-legal-docs/birth-certificates/.

¹³³ "Replace Your Vital Records," USA.gov, last updated January 2, 2020, <https://www.usa.gov/replace-vital-documents>.

¹³⁴ Teo Spengler, "How to Get a Birth Certificate without a License," *USA Today*, October 27, 2017, <https://traveltips.usatoday.com/birth-certificate-license-27043.html>.

¹³⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Computerization, ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/73* (New York, NY: United Nations, 1998), https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/SeriesF_73E.pdf.

¹³⁶ American Bar Association, "Birth Certificates."

¹³⁷ "Where to Write for Vital Records," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January 25, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w/index.htm>.

to verify U.S. citizenship in Mexico, has additional authenticity parameters.¹³⁸ Since Patricia has a missing U.S. birth certificate, she could try and prove her U.S. identity by requesting a replacement birth certificate. Although she might be successful in proving her U.S. birth, her falsified Mexican birth certificate would create two records for her birth, which will show fraud if she tries to apply for a U.S. passport. U.S. citizen minors under sixteen years of age can reenter the United States from Mexico with an original copy of their U.S. birth certificate, but only by land or sea.¹³⁹ If both biological parents are not present at the time of the U.S. citizen minor's crossing into the United States, the legal parent has to provide customs with additional documentation.¹⁴⁰ In addition to the child's original birth certificate, the accompanying parent has to provide a notarized document acknowledging that both legal parents are aware of the child's departure back into the United States.¹⁴¹ A U.S. birth certificate is the gateway to apply for a U.S. passport or passport card, as well as to apply for and claim government benefits, enroll in school, and join the military.¹⁴²

Parents typically apply for their reverse dreamer child's SSN once they receive their official birth certificate, a process called enumeration at birth.¹⁴³ While a birth certificate verifies U.S. citizenship, an SSN does not. Although having an SSN is voluntary, those who request their SSN after their birth certificate is issued need to provide their birth certificate as proof of U.S. citizenship.¹⁴⁴ Daniel and Patricia were both issued SSNs when they were born, which allowed the IRS to track Daniel's U.S. tax records. Although parents can apply for their child's SSN while living in Mexico, most reverse dreamers who do not

¹³⁸ "Foreign Authentication," Virginia Department of Health, accessed November 23, 2019, <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/vital-records/foreign-authentication/>.

¹³⁹ "Before Your Trip," U.S. Customs and Border Protection, July 22, 2019, <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/us-citizens/know-before-you-go/your-trip>.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

¹⁴¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

¹⁴² USA.gov, "Replace Your Vital Records."

¹⁴³ "Having a Baby: Applying for a Social Security Number," Lawyers.com, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.lawyers.com/legal-info/social-security/social-security-basics/having-a-baby-applying-for-a-social-security-number.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Social Security Administration, *Social Security Numbers for Children* (Washington, DC: Social Security Administration, 2017), <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10023.pdf>.

have an SSN begin applying on their own as adults. Reverse dreamers find applying for an SSN at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico difficult. Scheduling an appointment and meeting with staff in the Federal Benefits Unit who work with the Social Security Administration's Office of Earnings and International Operations to facilitate the process can be daunting.¹⁴⁵ An in-person appointment is required for first-time reverse dreamers twelve years old and older, along with additional supporting documentation, such as an original birth certificate, a valid U.S. passport, and a valid reason for not having an SSN. Other information that can be requested by the Social Security Administration includes original proof of residency outside of the United States, such as school records, employment records, bank account information, and old identification cards, which many reverse dreamers living in Mexico do not have.¹⁴⁶ Once the Federal Benefits Unit and the Social Security Administration receive the birth certificate, it must be verified, which may take more than six months.¹⁴⁷ Applying for an SSN as an adult takes a significant amount of time, which also increases the amount of time reverse dreamers must wait before they are eligible to apply for a passport, passport card, or a job in the United States.

Reverse dreamers applying for a U.S. passport while in Mexico can encounter identification challenges when working with the U.S. Embassy. Daniel applied for his first passport when he was seventeen. While Daniel had the required documentation to apply for a passport, Patricia's fraudulent birth certificate prohibited her from getting a U.S. passport. Obtaining a U.S. passport presents a challenge, too, for reverse dreamers who want to fly back to the United States. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico encourages all parents traveling abroad with U.S. citizens to get their children a U.S. passport or a U.S. passport card before leaving the United States to facilitate a quick reentry.

¹⁴⁵ "Social Security," U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico, accessed December 16, 2019, <https://mx.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/social-security/>; "Guidance for Obtaining Your Social Security Number from Overseas," American Citizens Abroad, October 2016, <https://www.americansabroad.org/guidance-for-obtaining-your-social-security-number-from-overseas/>.

¹⁴⁶ "First-Time Applicant for a Social Security Number Card," U.S. Embassy in Chile, accessed December 16, 2019, <https://cl.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/social-security/>.

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Embassy in Chile.

If reverse dreamers are already in Mexico and do not have a U.S. passport or passport card, they can apply in person at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in Mexico.¹⁴⁸ Passports and passport cards are valid for ten years for applicants who are at least sixteen years old, and valid for five years for applicants under the age of sixteen.¹⁴⁹ Processing and documentation requirements are the same to apply for a passport and passport card while living abroad, though the procedures differ from country to country.¹⁵⁰ The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs states that renewing a minor’s U.S. passport or passport card every five or ten years can be costly for families who have many children.¹⁵¹

In 2033, the Department of State will not have anticipated the influx of applications for passports that it faces, and will be overwhelmed by the number of applications coming from reverse dreamers; the process for receiving a passport, which typically takes only a matter of months, could take a year for these reverse dreamers. Reverse dreamers will be frustrated, unable to start jobs or college in the United States because of the backlog. Luckily for Daniel, it took only four weeks for him to receive his U.S. passport. And since Daniel applied for his passport when he was seventeen, it is valid for ten years.

To successfully navigate the passport and passport card process abroad, it is critical that all U.S. citizens, and especially U.S. citizen minors, have all the correct paperwork before trying to schedule an appointment with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in Mexico. When adult reverse dreamers try to reenter Mexico by land, air, or sea without a U.S. passport or passport card, they are denied entry.

B. EDUCATION: COMPLETION, VERIFICATION, AND IMPEDIMENTS

A high school diploma is critical for providing opportunities for reverse dreamers who are reintegrating into the United States. As Daniel’s school experience shows, even

¹⁴⁸ “Apply outside the United States,” U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed December 16, 2019, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/need-passport/outside-us.html>.

¹⁴⁹ “Apply for a Passport Card,” U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed December 16, 2019, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/need-passport/card.html>.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs.

¹⁵¹ U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs.

when reverse dreamers' documentation is in order, they are likely to encounter problems when trying to earn a high school diploma, or afterward. It is likely that many reverse dreamers reintegrating to the United States have not received a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) equivalent. For example, even if Patricia could reenter the United States, lacking a diploma or GED, she still would not have the same job opportunities as her twin.

In recent years, GED programs have grown internationally, allowing students from across the world to obtain a high school diploma equivalent.¹⁵² Kuepa, a vocational training company and the first Latin America institution authorized to provide GED exams in Mexico, allows students who have not completed their high school diploma to take online and in-person preparation courses to complete their GED while in Mexico, and they can take the exam in their preferred language—English or Spanish.¹⁵³ Since the GED is accepted by nearly all U.S. universities and employers, these programs can afford reverse dreamers with more job choices or opportunities for higher education.¹⁵⁴ Even reverse dreamers who cannot return to the United States, like Patricia, can complete their GED and apply for college in Mexico. Unfortunately, many reverse dreamers like Patricia are unable to afford the classes associated with these programs.

Reverse dreamers who do not hold a high school diploma or equivalent will become unskilled laborers with fewer job prospects and lower wages.¹⁵⁵ When reverse dreamers are unable to finish high school, they become further disadvantaged when competing for unskilled positions in the U.S. labor market. Jobs for high school dropouts and unskilled laborers, on average, pay less than those that require a high school diploma; reverse dreamers who do not have a high school diploma can expect the same hourly rate as

¹⁵² Ivan Cantu and CT Turner, "Kuepa Becomes First Latin-American Institution Recognized as a GED Authorized Provider to Offer GED Exams in Mexico Schools," Business Wire, November 18, 2015, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20151118005169/en/Kuepa-Latin-American-Institution-Recognized-GED-Authorized-Provider>.

¹⁵³ Cantu and Turner.

¹⁵⁴ "GED International Test Program Updates," GED Testing Service, March 13, 2019, https://ged.com/in-session/ged-international-program_march2019/; Cantu and Turner, "Kuepa."

¹⁵⁵ Camarota, *Immigration from Mexico*.

unskilled laborers, approximately \$19 per hour.¹⁵⁶ Daniel’s case is a fortunate one: unlike most reverse dreamers, he has finished high school, automatically making him eligible for higher-paying jobs. In the year 2033, the median weekly income for adults twenty-five years of age and older who have not completed high school is expected to be \$785, compared to \$971 for high school graduates.¹⁵⁷

Although the majority of unskilled jobs offer lower wages, the United States still needs workers to fill these roles.¹⁵⁸ Reverse dreamers may respond positively to a Department of Labor campaign to attract such young people to trade work, as white middle-class Americans have left gaps in fields such as plumbing, electrical work, and construction. Daniel, for instance, benefits from the 4.6 million new jobs added to the economy since he left the United States.¹⁵⁹ And the Bureau of Labor and Statistics will likely show an overwhelming increase in occupational licenses among repatriating reverse dreamers, who can go into fields such as massage therapy and aesthetics, and others may join labor unions and public service careers.¹⁶⁰ Workers who did not finish high school but have licenses and certificates will be hired, too, but reverse dreamers with diplomas and licenses will have better job prospects.¹⁶¹ Because Daniel was already a certified welder,

¹⁵⁶ “Median Weekly Earnings \$606 for High School Dropouts, \$1,559 for Advanced Degree Holders,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 21, 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/med/2019/median-weekly-earnings-606-for-high-school-dropouts-1559-for-advanced-degree-holders.htm>.

¹⁵⁷ In the third quarter of 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that the median weekly salary for adults twenty-five years of age and older who did not complete high school had a weekly salary of \$606, compared to high school graduates with a salary of \$749. The calculations indicate an estimate of 2 percent inflation for the next thirteen years through 2033. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Median Weekly Earnings”; Camarota, *Immigration from Mexico*.

¹⁵⁸ Emily Richards and David Terkanian, “Occupational Employment Projections to 2022,” *Monthly Labor Review*, December 2013, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/pdf/occupational-employment-projections-to-2022.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ The Bureau of Labor and Statistics estimates an anticipated 4.6 million new jobs will be added to the U.S. economy by 2022, which will require a minimum of a high school diploma or its equivalent. Richards and Terkanian.

¹⁶⁰ According to a 2018 Bureau of Labor and Statistics labor participation chart, those who have professional certifications or occupational licenses have 88.7 percent participation, versus 57.8 percent for workers who do not have these credentials. “Labor Force Participation Rates Are Higher for People with Professional Certifications or Licenses,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 14, 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/med/2019/labor-force-participation-rates-are-higher-for-people-with-professional-certifications-or-licenses.htm>.

¹⁶¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics.

he could apply his skillset to a variety of professions even before moving to the United States. Patricia, on the other hand, is eligible only for lower-paying jobs that do not require a high school diploma. Daniel is eventually able to become economically independent of his brother, Carlos, but both brothers have to send money back to Mexico to support their family, including their grandparents, who are becoming more dependent on their children. Patricia is able to work two jobs in Mexico to support their family, yet she is unable to make a salary that is comparable to Daniel's in the United States.

Reverse dreamers who return to the United States without a high school diploma, on average, will cost the U.S. economy more than \$250,000 over their lifetime.¹⁶² Without a complete academic education, some of these reverse dreamers will rely on government programs for sustenance. As they return to the United States, the compounding effects of incomplete education and limited career opportunities will place them at a higher risk of having “lower tax contributions, higher reliance on Medicaid and Medicare, higher rates of criminal activity, and higher reliance on welfare.”¹⁶³ Even though a low-wage job is better than no job, a perpetual cycle of disadvantages will continue to hinder their success in the United States upon their repatriation. And for Patricia, her future aspirations of coming to the United States are never realized. She remains part of a group of reverse dreamers who are ineligible to return to the United States and who take lower-paying jobs as a result of dropping out of high school. It is difficult to determine how many reverse dreamers are finishing high school, as reliable statistics about even the number of reverse dreamers currently residing in Mexico do not exist. However, based on the limited information regarding reverse dreamers enrolled in Mexican schools, it is fair to assume that their probability of finishing high school is low. Many reverse dreamers are like Patricia, who is placed in a difficult situation at a young age because she has a falsified Mexican birth certificate. Compounding her documentation issues, she has trouble fitting

¹⁶² Patrick Stark and Amber M. Noel, *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2012*, NCES 2015–015 (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), 1, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015015.pdf>; “Unemployment Rate 2.1 Percent for College Grads, 3.9 Percent for High School Grads in August 2018,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 12, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2018/unemployment-rate-2-1-percent-for-college-grads-3-9-percent-for-high-school-grads-in-august-2018.htm>.

¹⁶³ Stark and Noel, *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates*, 1.

in and becomes isolated from her peers, which eventually contributes to her dropping out of high school.

Reverse dreamers like Daniel who do receive a high school diploma are eligible to apply for college in the United States. Each college and university in the United States sets its own requirements for admission, though they all require that applicants have at least successfully obtained a GED.¹⁶⁴ Many schools require students to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or an American College Testing (ACT) exam or other standardized testing.¹⁶⁵ Daniel has to take the ACT multiple times before he receives a score that makes him competitive to apply for college. Enrollment for reverse dreamers is challenging, as well, because their records classify them as international students. As reverse dreamers return to the United States, college admissions offices will need to evaluate an influx of foreign student transcripts—far more than they did in the past. Colleges will have to scrutinize reverse dreamers’ international academic coursework and standardized tests, and have to administer the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for them.¹⁶⁶ This may increase the processing time for reverse dreamers’ college applications.

Since reverse dreamers typically are financially independent of their parents when attending college in the United States, these students will rely heavily on federal student assistance. To apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), students must have an SSN or a tax processing number, also called an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number.¹⁶⁷ Reverse dreamers who do not pay taxes face consequences such as compounding interest penalties and difficulties applying for jobs or to FAFSA for education assistance.¹⁶⁸ Daniel has an SSN, but is trying to determine if the IRS will request

¹⁶⁴ “Is the GED Enough to Get Me into College?,” LearningPath.org, accessed November 4, 2018, http://learningpath.org/articles/Is_the_GED_Enough_to_Get_Me_Into_College.html.

¹⁶⁵ Rob Franek, “College Admission Guide: Process and Prep,” Princeton Review, accessed November 4, 2018, <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/college-admissions-guide>.

¹⁶⁶ “How to Study in the U.S.,” USA.gov, December 20, 2017, <https://www.usa.gov/study-in-US>.

¹⁶⁷ “Individual Taxpayer Identification Number,” Internal Revenue Service, December 21, 2019, <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/individual-taxpayer-identification-number>.

¹⁶⁸ “Financial Aid and Undocumented Students: Questions and Answers” Federal Student Aid, February 2019, <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/financial-aid-and-undocumented-students.pdf>.

back taxes on income he accrued while living in Mexico. For families whose income is below a certain threshold, there are exceptions when supplying tax return information to FAFSA. Sometimes these exemptions include supplying alternative income documentation, including documentation that shows they are independent from their parents who live in a foreign country.¹⁶⁹ Reverse dreamers who do not have tax information can use their parents' prior Mexican financial information, but the students' parents have to provide this information, sign it, and send it by mail for the FAFSA ID to be completed.¹⁷⁰ Daniel has his own income in Mexico, and his family is unable to support his college education financially. His return to the United States, he knows, is his own financial burden. Many reverse dreamers are without financial support, left to navigate U.S. government systems on their own.

C. MILITARY SERVICE

Joining the U.S. armed forces may be the only option for reverse dreamers, though they must possess proper U.S. citizenship documentation and a high school diploma to do so; in some cases a GED is permissible, but only a small number of GED applicants are accepted each year.¹⁷¹ Each branch also has age limits for enlistees: you have until age twenty-eight to enlist as a Marine, thirty-one for the Coast Guard, thirty-four for the Army, and thirty-nine for the Air Force or Navy.¹⁷² A career in the armed forces provides reverse dreamers with opportunities they otherwise would not be able to afford, such as housing, a stipend for food, and other benefits such as the GI bill, which provides financial assistance for higher education. Army ROTC was a perfect fit for Carlos, as it helped him become independent of his aunt and uncle. To increase their success in the military, enlistees are encouraged to have college credit hours or to score high on the Armed Services Vocational

¹⁶⁹ “How Can I Fill out a FAFSA without a Tax Return?” H&R Block, August 8, 2018, <https://www.hrblock.com/tax-center/lifestyle/financial-education/fill-out-fafsa-without-tax-return/>.

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Hughes, “Applying for Financial Aid with International Parents,” Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority, November 22, 2017, <https://www.mefa.org/applying-for-financial-aid-with-international-parents/>.

¹⁷¹ “Join the Military,” USAGov, December 4, 2019, <https://www.usa.gov/join-military>.

¹⁷² Join the Military.

Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) exam. The ASVAB determines eligibility for enlistment and determines each applicant’s qualifications and job placement.¹⁷³

Joining the U.S. military is an attractive option for reverse dreamers because it provides opportunities that would otherwise not be available to them. Reverse dreamers who take this path now have a career, stability, and an opportunity to serve their birth country. Daniel considered joining the military, like his brother, but decided to pursue the dive program instead.

D. SELECTIVE SERVICE AND VOTING

Male U.S. citizens living abroad can register with the Selective Service as well as register to vote. Although Daniel applied for his passport at seventeen, he never registered with the Selective Service—which he had never heard of. U.S. citizens are not required to have an SSN to register with the Selective Service or to vote, and males must register with the Selective Service within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday; if they miss this deadline, however, there is no long-term penalty as long as they register before their twenty-sixth birthday.¹⁷⁴ Some states have included the registration process as part of the application for a driver’s license.¹⁷⁵ Reverse dreamers who missed their window to register for the Selective Service are subject to consequences, some of which vary by state; for instance, they are not able to join the military, apply for federal student aid and loans, or apply for federal jobs or federal job training, and they may be fined up to \$250,000 or imprisoned for up to five years.¹⁷⁶ Men who are unable to explain why they failed to register with the Selective Service are investigated by the Department of Justice.¹⁷⁷ Since

¹⁷³ Department of Defense, *DOD Military Personnel Accession Testing Programs*, DOD Instruction 1304.12E (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2005), <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/130412p.pdf>.

¹⁷⁴ “Benefits and Penalties,” Selective Service System, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.sss.gov/Registration/Why-Register/Benefits-and-Penalties>; “US Citizens Abroad: Taxes, Passports, Military Service,” America Citizens Abroad, April 20, 2018, <https://www.americansabroad.org/requirements-of-us-citizenship/>.

¹⁷⁵ “State / Commonwealth and Territory Legislation,” Selective Service System, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://www.sss.gov/Registration/State-Commonwealth-Legislation>.

¹⁷⁶ Selective Service System, “Benefits and Penalties.”

¹⁷⁷ Selective Service System.

Daniel was still under twenty-six when he moved to the United States, he registered with the Selective Service before he was prohibited from accessing government services.

According to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs, citizens living abroad are "eligible to vote absentee for federal office candidates in U.S. primary and general elections."¹⁷⁸ Voting eligibility for reverse dreamers extends throughout their lifetime, even if they never return to the United States. Additionally, some adult reverse dreamers who are able to prove an established residence in the United States can also vote in state and local elections; eligibility requirements are determined by each state.

E. ANALYSIS

Adult reverse dreamers typically do not know their rights or their obligations as Americans. Carlos never fully grasps the challenges his younger brother faces as a result of being uprooted to Mexico and transitioning back to life in the United States. Upon returning to the United States, many reverse dreamers—unlike Daniel, whose story reflects a best-case scenario—face insurmountable obstacles. Patricia, unfortunately, has fallen between the cracks and is unable to recover her paperwork to return to the United States. In contrast, Daniel, who has proper documentation and a high school diploma, can apply to college in the United States, join the military, or find a good-paying job. For many reverse dreamers, however, failed documentation and convoluted opportunities cause them to return to a country where they are again at a disadvantage. These adults must work twice as hard to get back on track and provide for themselves. If this problem persists, the U.S. government will experience increased administrative backlogs and complications as official departments try to patch this diaspora's future back together.

¹⁷⁸ "Absentee Voting Information for U.S. Citizens Abroad," U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed February 9, 2020, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/while-abroad/voting.html#ExternalPopup>.

IV. WHEN REVERSE DREAMERS OVERWHELM THE U.S. GOVERNMENT: SANDRA'S STORY

Sandra García grew up in a small farming community in rural Texas as a first-generation American Mexican. Her parents were immigrants who had worked hard to provide her the best childhood they could. They never went to college, so Sandra's acceptance to Texas A&M was an important milestone for her and her family. After graduation, she applied for a job as an admissions counselor at her alma mater.

It is the year 2033, and Sandra loves paying it forward by helping eager students with their future. But the last few portfolios have been challenging—they have been for reverse dreamers, adults repatriating to the United States from Mexico. Sandra has five applications on her desk that need special attention, one of which belongs to Daniel González Rosa. These are early applicants for the fall semester, and she anticipates that many others like them will pile up in coming months. Sandra advocates for her nontraditional adult students, yet she seems to be the only one asking questions. In fact, many of Sandra's colleagues have been passing these cases to her. Some of the special cases involve students who have a GED or some higher education from Mexican universities that need document validation. Other students have no Social Security numbers and are having trouble completing the FAFSA. The admissions concerns are a problem for Sandra, but other complications have surfaced as well, such as unanswered questions from students on how to register for the draft and how to pay taxes.

Sandra finds herself sitting on hold with federal institutions for hours every day, trying to help her latest batch of reverse dreamers understand their legal responsibilities and meet the documentation requirements for college admissions. She has found that dealing with the Department of Education to sort out the federal student aid process is not for the faint of heart. When applicants do not have a Social Security number, the seemingly simple step to create a user account for FAFSA becomes impossible. Even worse, many of her male reverse dreamer applicants had not registered with the Selective Service before their twenty-sixth birthday, which disqualifies them from receiving federal aid. Through her time on the phone with various government agencies, Sandra learns that there is an

appeal process for late enrollment in the Selective Service, but she has yet to receive the details. Luckily for Daniel, Sandra is able to help him register before his twenty-sixth birthday, just in time to salvage his FAFSA.

Problems with the FAFSA are just the tip of the iceberg, and Sandra is frustrated. Some students had worked jobs in Mexico but never filed U.S. taxes. Plenty others had little to no financial or emotional support from their families, nor are they eligible for in-state tuition because they have not resided inside the United States. Sandra has worked with many students who have patchwork documentation, but not on a mass scale. And each agency she talks to leaves her with more questions than answers.

Over one million reverse dreamers like Daniel have reached adulthood, and many are returning or preparing to return home to the United States. This haphazard generation is unaccounted for in federal and state immigration policy, and plans to begin accommodating them have not been drafted. This phenomenon is overwhelming the U.S. government's institutions and spurring a national immigration debate. Disputes regarding what reverse dreamers are entitled to, including rights and protections as U.S. citizens, abound.¹⁷⁹ These reverse dreamers, a once invisible population, have materialized; they are ready to reestablish their identities as American-born citizens. Why must U.S. citizens demand legitimacy in their own country?

* * *

A. CENSUS BUREAU

To gauge the needs of the Hispanic and Latino populations in the United States, the U.S. Census asks about responders' country of origin. The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that these statistics help local, state, tribal, and federal programs with funding and policy decisions, and they help "monitor compliance with antidiscrimination laws, regulations,

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Spalding, "14th Amendment Doesn't Make Illegal Aliens' Children Citizens," *U.S. News & World Report*, August 30, 2010, <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2010/08/30/14th-amendment-doesnt-make-illegal-aliens-children-citizens>.

and policies.”¹⁸⁰ In 2033, the U.S. Census Bureau will be unprepared to provide estimates of how many reverse dreamers have returned or will return to the United States. Very little has changed since the Census Bureau reported to Congress in 2001 that “no accurate estimate exists of the total number of Americans living abroad or of the other components of this population.... [W]e cannot estimate accurately the size of the universe of the overseas population.”¹⁸¹ Without accurate numbers of U.S. citizens living abroad, reverse dreamers—an already disenfranchised population of U.S. citizen minors—are rendered invisible. Admissions counselors like Sandra, as well as social workers and employees across the public spectrum, will be increasingly overburdened by this under-preparation.

Although the population of U.S. citizens residing abroad is not officially documented, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), part of the Department of Defense, provides estimates of U.S. citizens who have registered to vote while living abroad. According to a FVAP estimate, there were over 1 million U.S. citizens living in Mexico in 2016, and Mexico had the largest population of overseas voters, at around 200,000.¹⁸² In the coming years, we may find that reverse dreamers are unable to register on time for the absentee ballot. FVAP is likely to be unaware of this flood of U.S. citizens who are newly eligible to vote, as they were never accounted for when they were minors.¹⁸³ Predicting voting registration of U.S. citizens abroad, especially for reverse dreamers who return to the United States, will prove crucial for presidential candidates, too, who will be relying on reverse dreamers’ votes.

Although there has been significant talk about documenting U.S. citizens living abroad, nothing has come to fruition. In 2017, Caucus Chair Congresswoman Carolyn B.

¹⁸⁰ “Why We Ask about...Hispanic or Latino Origin,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/ethnicity/>.

¹⁸¹ Joe Costanzo and Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, “Counting the Uncountable: Overseas Americans,” Migration Policy Institute, May 17, 2013, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/counting-uncountable-overseas-americans>.

¹⁸² Federal Voting Assistance Program, *2016 Overseas Citizen Population Analysis Study Findings* (Alexandria, VA: Department of Defense, 2018), <https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/FVAP-2016-OCPA-FINAL-Report.pdf>.

¹⁸³ The 2016 numbers indicate that only one-fifth of the population of U.S. citizens living in Mexico was registered to vote, further suggesting the inaccuracy of voter registration. Costanzo and von Koppenfels, “Counting the Uncountable.”

Maloney of New York sponsored the Commission on Americans Living Abroad Act of 2017, H.R. 2710, to “create a bipartisan federal commission to examine how U.S. laws and policies affect overseas Americans.”¹⁸⁴ Congressional in-fighting prevented progress on the bill and the act never passed; U.S. citizens living abroad remain exempt from U.S. Census statistics. Similar initiatives continue to sit in limbo. By 2033, the U.S. Department of State may finally decide to reach out to Mexico to account for the influx of reverse dreamers. This could lead government programs to create clauses in their procedures to help accommodate reverse dreamers’ situations, including documenting their existence in Mexico. These procedures will indicate the true volume of the reverse dreamer population and help determine the amount of funding needed to help them transition from Mexico back to the United States.

B. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Department of Education will also face registration obstacles when trying to verify reverse dreamers’ enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities. As previously discussed, many reverse dreamers do not have the correct paperwork to fulfill the residency requirement, which can delay their college enrollment.¹⁸⁵ To simplify the process, some states may decide to grandfather in reverse dreamers if they can supply proof of their last residence in the United States. This would make reverse dreamers eligible to apply for in-state tuition along the same grounds as traditional Dreamers; however, those who cannot prove their last residence in the States will fail to qualify for in-state tuition. This is problematic for reverse dreamers, as in-state tuition is often the only source of financial aid they can receive outside of FAFSA. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, in-state tuition for undocumented students is accepted in nineteen U.S.

¹⁸⁴ This bill called for a study to determine how federal laws and policies affect U.S. citizens living abroad, yet it fails to mention anything about reverse dreamers. Commission on Americans Living Abroad Act of 2017, H.R. 2710, 115th Cong., 1st sess., May 26, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2710/text>.

¹⁸⁵ Gilberto Soria Mendoza and Noor Shaikh, “Tuition Benefits for Immigrants,” National Conference of State Legislatures, September 26, 2019, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/tuition-benefits-for-immigrants.aspx>.

states.¹⁸⁶ Even though reverse dreamers in some states can be grandfathered into in-state tuition rates, other states' tuition allocation is determined through state legislation, and others still through a Board of Regents decision; currently, only seven states allow such students to receive state financial aid.¹⁸⁷ This inability to apply for federal aid compounds the disadvantages for reverse dreamers, many of whom also face challenges with the acceptance of their Mexican high school diplomas. Sandra does her best to process reverse dreamers' applications at Texas A&M, yet they are still being handled as international cases. Other colleges and universities will struggle to determine how to classify these applicants' enrollment altogether.

C. INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

Reverse dreamers who live abroad are obligated to pay U.S. income tax, even when they live and work in Mexico.¹⁸⁸ The IRS reminds all U.S. citizens living abroad that they are subject to U.S. tax laws and they need to report their income on their U.S. tax return; this law applies to reverse dreamers, too.¹⁸⁹ As Sandra discovers, reverse dreamers find it difficult to provide the IRS with tax records, and worry that they will be subject to back tax penalties. She guides these applicants to the IRS website for further assistance, but they are unsure how to interpret the jargon.

The IRS offers the Streamlined Filing Compliance Procedures, which give U.S. citizens the opportunity to rectify their unpaid taxes and to verify that they were unaware

¹⁸⁶ Marilyn Villalobos, "Undocumented Student Tuition: Overview," National Conference of State Legislatures, September 19, 2019, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/undocumented-student-tuition-overview.aspx>.

¹⁸⁷ Villalobos.

¹⁸⁸ "Taxpayers Living Abroad," Internal Revenue Service, January 15, 2020, <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/taxpayers-living-abroad>.

¹⁸⁹ "Income from Abroad Is Taxable," Internal Revenue Service, December 12, 2019, <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/income-from-abroad-is-taxable>; Madison DuPaix, "How to File Tax Returns for Minor Children," The Balance Careers, November 20, 2019, <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/do-minors-have-to-pay-income-tax-2085603>.

of their obligation.¹⁹⁰ In 2033, even though the IRS indicates that all U.S. citizens are subject to pay taxes, regardless of their residence, the IRS does not pursue income records for U.S. citizen minors in other countries. Reverse dreamers will remain confused, however, about whether they have to pay back taxes once they arrive in the United States. The Tax Fairness for Americans Abroad Act of 2018, which tried to create a tax exclusion for income earned abroad by U.S. citizens who do not reside in the United States, never passed, and resolutions have been stagnant in Congress.¹⁹¹ This means that reverse dreamers are still responsible for paying U.S. taxes while they are living in Mexico. Reverse dreamers, who must work hard to become financially independent and do not have the same support network as U.S. citizens living in the United States, must maneuver misinformation and incomplete government procedures.

By 2033, as this crisis compounds, we may see an executive order from the president that directs the Social Security Administration, which is struggling to fund its program, to rush to fill new SSN applications. In such a scenario, the government hopes that assigning SSNs will ease problems across the Department of Education, IRS, Social Security Administration, and government assistance programs for reverse dreamers. To establish a personal line of credit, pay taxes, and apply for FAFSA, students need an SSN or a tax processing number, also called an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number.¹⁹² A line of credit allows reverse dreamers to open a bank account and create a credit score, which in turn allows them to apply for loans for a car or home.¹⁹³ An SSN allows reverse dreamers to get a job, collect Social Security benefits, and receive other government benefits, such as federal student loans.¹⁹⁴ For reverse dreamers to take advantage of federal

¹⁹⁰ “Catching Up: What You Need to Know about Streamlined Filing Compliance Procedures and FBAR Penalties,” H&R Block, accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.hrblock.com/expat-tax-preparation/resource-center/filing/tax-responsibilities-and-penalties/streamlined-filing-compliance-procedures/>.

¹⁹¹ Fairness for Americans Abroad Act of 2018, H.R.7358, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., December 20, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/7358/text>.

¹⁹² Internal Revenue Service, “Individual Taxpayer Identification Number.”

¹⁹³ “Credit Cards,” USA.gov, April 11, 2019, <https://www.usa.gov/credit-cards>.

¹⁹⁴ “Social Security Number and Card,” Social Security Administration, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>; “Obtaining a Social Security Number,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, August 16, 2011, <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/obtaining-a-social-security-number>.

and state programs when repatriating to the United States, however, they must first prove their tax contributions, including payments for Social Security and Medicare.

D. SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION AND MEDICARE

For U.S. citizens to receive Social Security and Medicare, they must first pay into these systems and then contribute enough time and money to collect their benefits when they reach retirement age.¹⁹⁵ Reverse dreamers, however, may not begin paying into these systems until later in their life, and may miss the threshold to qualify for these benefits. This will contribute to the continued disenfranchisement of this population, which will rely on government assistance later in life. The lack of funding in these resources will also affect reverse dreamers' spouses and children, as family members will not qualify for benefits as dependents if they become widowed or if their reverse dreamer parent passes away.

E. GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED SERVICES FOR STATES

Human, social, and health services, such as affordable housing, food assistance programs, and health care, are available to help struggling families in the United States.¹⁹⁶ Sandra finds that many reverse dreamers who need support outside the academic setting can benefit from these services. She directs students to local programs at Catholic Charities and other nonprofits for guidance on how to apply for government services. Each year, the number of reverse dreamers who need housing and health services will grow, but Sandra's understanding of how she can help reverse dreamers will remain limited.

In 2033, reverse dreamers will be working the best they can to stay afloat financially, yet they will still rely on government assistance and assistance from their families. For instance, they can apply for relief for living expenses through welfare programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), housing subsidies, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Supplemental

¹⁹⁵ Social Security Administration, *Understanding the Benefits* (Washington, DC: Social Security Administration, 2020), <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10024.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ "Find Affordable Rental Housing," USA.gov, August 23, 2019, <https://www.usa.gov/finding-home>.

Security Income.¹⁹⁷ Reverse dreamers will likely be applying for low-incoming housing and will need health insurance for themselves and their children. The U.S. government allocates money for each state to use toward these services; but without accurate numbers of potential reverse dreamers, these programs will be flooded with unanticipated applicants, and will be increasingly unable to keep up with the demand.

F. ANALYSIS

The United States and Mexico need to prepare for this return diaspora of reverse dreamers to repatriate to the United States. These two countries share a physical border and a population of minors who need support on both sides of their journey. This population, which has been touted as “one of the greatest resources of the next generation,” may become one of the greatest strains on the American economy.¹⁹⁸ The U.S. Census fails to account for reverse dreamers, and the U.S. government is blind to their volume and to their repatriation needs. Without accurate numbers, the communities reverse dreamers repatriate to will be unable to fund the resources they need. The Department of Education will be unable to accommodate funding, creating a population that cannot seek higher education, and the Social Security Administration will be unprepared to deal with questions about back taxes for citizens who were involuntarily moved to Mexico as children.

These government agencies are in desperate need of guidance and reform to help them assist reverse dreamers—a population of future adults who will be working to become self-reliant. American society will fumble as poor preparedness leads to lagging systems, overwhelmed employees, and outdated guidance to accommodate this population.

¹⁹⁷ “Government Benefits,” USA.gov, January 22, 2020, <https://www.usa.gov/benefits>.

¹⁹⁸ Lakhani and Jacobo, “Uprooted in Mexico.”

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: ACCOMMODATING REVERSE DREAMERS' REPATRIATION TO THE UNITED STATES

The American spirit has always sustained itself through new arrivals, who have braved untold danger to reach a land teeming with opportunity. Regardless of our political persuasion, we have an obligation to care for the children of our country—no matter how they received their citizenship. Reverse dreamers are American citizens and should be treated as such. With this citizenship, too, comes responsibilities. All Americans are held to the same basic standards and, as American citizens, reverse dreamers will engage in civic acts such as voting, serving on a jury, traveling with a U.S. passport, bringing family members to the United States, applying for federal jobs, becoming elected officials, applying for federal grants and scholarships, and obtaining government benefits.¹⁹⁹ If we fail to recognize the citizenship status held by reverse dreamers who repatriate to the United States, we will create a population of American citizens that desires the American dream but lacks the resources to attain it, even triggering resentment. The danger of abandoning this populace is most assuredly one of practicality, but it is also a measure of how well we are adhering to our country's founding principles. Either all citizens are created equal, or they are not. There is no middle ground. As a nation we must ask ourselves whether we will stand up for our most vulnerable citizens: our children.

Reverse dreamers are entitled to the right to return to the United States. Helping them reestablish American citizenship by authenticating documentation via official birth certificates should be a top priority. Without advocacy from the government of their home nation, reverse dreamers are hidden in the shadows, left to see the American dream as a slogan, not a reality. Without collaboration between the U.S. and Mexican governments, reverse dreamers will remain grasping for dreams that are always just out of their reach.

If reverse dreamers remain unnoticed by the American public, they will face further isolation when trying to repatriate to the United States. Lacking nationhood, and unable to

¹⁹⁹ "Should I Consider U.S. Citizenship?" U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/should-i-consider-us-citizenship>.

identify with Americans who have not experienced similar traumas, they will create a population deprived of social cohesion. Proactive policy changes that recognize reverse dreamers as U.S. citizens, especially when they are minors, will encourage social cohesion between this diaspora and their nation of birth. Providing resources, such as trained guidance counselors, social workers, and teachers who can evaluate students' academic progress, will give them a foundation for a successful transition into Mexican schools. Further, we can cultivate their sense of belonging as they mature by being conscious of reverse dreamers' emotional and social needs and by facilitating outreach efforts between parents, school administrators, and students in their formative years.

If we continue to ignore reverse dreamers, we are making an already vulnerable population of U.S. citizens more susceptible to involvement in gangs, cartels, and trafficking. The United States places a high emphasis on combating these nefarious activities, and our communities will suffer if we fail to take preemptive steps aimed at stopping a vulnerable populace from slipping into organized crime. It must be a top priority for the U.S. homeland security leadership to document children who are susceptible to cartel recruitment or human trafficking rings. These preemptive measures should not fall to the United States alone; we must secure Mexico as a regional partner committed to addressing the unique needs of the reverse dreamer populace.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS

Reverse dreamers have already begun to emerge from their camouflaged state, and the United States has plenty of opportunities to help these U.S. citizens abroad before the problem becomes unmanageable. The recommendations that follow will require a tremendous amount of resources, along with much collaboration between the United States and Mexico. But these efforts will prove to be a great investment to the future leaders of the United States.

1. Create a Special Consular Unit for Reverse Dreamers

The first step in helping reverse dreamers living in Mexico is to create a special consular unit within the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. This consular unit will work specifically with U.S. minors by identifying their

documentation needs for enrolling in Mexican schools. The unit's primary goal will be to place reverse dreamers as priority cases so they can access services in Mexico, and so they are no longer undocumented. This consular unit will have the institutional capacity to work with Mexico's *registro civil* to address the needs of this diaspora and provide much-needed resources to American minors abroad. This unit will ensure the prioritization of reverse dreamers due to their status as minors and American citizens, and will initiate dialogue with Mexican communities and schools to help identify reverse dreamers.

2. Adopt a National Reverse Dreamers Strategy

To combat the mounting hurdles reverse dreamers will face, the United States and Mexico need to adopt a policy—the National Reverse Dreamers Strategy. The strategy will first and foremost aim to help reverse dreamers obtain birth certificates and become legally documented in Mexico. It will also create a bilateral effort with the Mexican and U.S. censuses to identify how many reverse dreamers exist, and then provide outreach to this disenfranchised population. A coordinated effort between Mexico and the United States, the strategy will place the needs of reverse dreamers at the forefront of its mission.

3. Fast-Track Birth Certificate Requests through the U.S. Embassy in Mexico

As part of its duties, the consular unit will oversee all birth certificate requests for reverse dreamers. The priority for this initiative is to help reverse dreamers as minors, not necessarily as adults. This will necessitate a special agreement with U.S. states that allows the consular unit to request a birth certificate on the reverse dreamer's behalf. The U.S. state will first verify the child's birth, then verify the authenticity of the child's birth certificate through an apostille, and finally return the certificate to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico. U.S. border states will be the top priority, along with Florida, Illinois, Nebraska, Nevada, and Washington, DC—states that have heavy migration flows with Mexico and

that also have some of the lowest school enrollment figures.²⁰⁰ Once a reverse dreamer's birth certificate is received, the family can then register the child with Mexico's *registro civil*, which makes the child a Mexican resident. As residents of Mexico, reverse dreamers can register for school and have access to health and social services. The consular unit will also hold case-by-case appointments for reverse dreamers who need assistance obtaining an SSN, registering with the Selective Service, and obtaining a passport or passport card.

4. Work with Mexican Authorities to Improve the Mexican National Census

The longer the United States remains in the dark about the population of reverse dreamers in Mexico, the longer the country goes without understanding the true scale of future homeland security implications. To prepare for the future, the United States must be able to document the number of reverse dreamers, and must collect information about their school enrollment. The Mexican National Population and Housing Census needs to help identify how many U.S. citizen minors are living in Mexico. It is possible to identify reverse dreamers by collecting information from families all across Mexico. The census would include questions about citizenship and age, if the child attends school, which municipality the child is in, and the child's highest level of education achieved.²⁰¹ This will also help the United States anticipate the number of reverse dreamers who need to

²⁰⁰ According to a Mexican Intercensal Survey, two of every 100 children from six to eleven years old were not enrolled in school in 2015. Children from the Mexican states of Chiapas, Campeche, Michoacán, and Colima were the most affected. Based on immigration trends, the majority of residents from these Mexican states moved to a U.S. border state or to Florida, Illinois, Nebraska, Nevada, or Washington, DC. There is a high probability that reverse dreamers will return to these states.

"Migrantes de colima piden al estado y los municipios sumarse a la estrategia de ebrard [Colima Migrants Ask the State and Municipalities to Join Ebrard's Strategy]," *Estación Pacífico* (blog), March 1, 2019, <https://estacionpacifico.com/2019/03/01/migrantes-de-colima-piden-al-estado-y-los-municipios-sumarse-a-la-estrategia-de-ebard/>; Sergio Leal Gómez, *Perfil sobre la migración del estado de campeche [Migration Profile for the State of Campeche]* (San Francisco de Campeche, Mexico: Campeche State Government, 2012), <http://www.coespo.campeche.gob.mx/phocadownload/MIGRACION.pdf>; Miriam Posada García, "Millones de niños en México no van a la escuela [Millions of Children in Mexico Do Not go to School]," *La Jornada*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/07/10/sociedad/031n2soc>; Leal Gómez, *Perfil sobre la Migración del Estado de Campeche*; Estación Pacífico, "Migrantes de Colima Piden al Estado."

²⁰¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística & Geografía, "Encuesta intercensal—2015: Cuestionario para viviendas particulares habitadas y población [Intercensal Survey—2015: Questionnaire for Private Houses and Population]" (Aguascalientes, México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística & Geografía, 2015), https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/doc/eic2015_cuestionario.pdf.

retroactively contribute to programs such as Social Security and Medicare once they retire. Additionally, Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, or INEGI) will need to be lobbied so that they can provide statistical and geographical information about reverse dreamers living in Mexico. Other government-assisted services can prepare for reverse dreamers who may need social or health services, including housing, for an already disenfranchised population. Proactive measures to document reverse dreamers will provide a platform for U.S. government agencies to start incorporating this population into their policies.

5. Create Outreach, Advocacy, and Awareness Campaigns in Mexico

It is imperative that the responsibility of supporting reverse dreamers falls on both the U.S. and Mexican governments. The current policy approach haphazardly places gaps in this population's path to self-sufficiency in both Mexico and the United States. Outreach for this population may include creating bilateral programs between the two countries. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico should create a campaign that consists of branding, social media, and community engagement targeted toward the families of reverse dreamers in Mexico. These initiatives would allow for online and in-person engagements and would encourage parents, school administrators, and outreach programs to come together and provide resources to U.S. citizens abroad that they may otherwise not know about.

Other initiatives should include help with acculturation, integration, and next steps for reverse dreamers who are repatriating to the United States. For example, when reverse dreamers have to work with federal or state agencies, initiatives should seek to provide guidance about their rights. The U.S. Embassy in Mexico can provide information about how to register with the Selective Service, join the military, and apply for loans, SSNs, FAFSA, and jobs in the United States. Other initiatives can focus on voting and working with other federal agencies and programs, including the IRS and social and health services, to give reverse dreamers information about the benefits they have when repatriating. The U.S. Embassy already provides the majority of these resources, but with little outreach to Mexican communities. These engagements can provide crucial information for reverse dreamers, who may not understand their civic obligations as American adults.

As American citizens, reverse dreamers have the right to run for public office and represent their constituency. Advocacy groups championing the cause of traditional Dreamers in the United States will join in the support of reverse dreamers, and these merging political movements will inevitably garner media attention. If we fail to recognize this population, we may catalyze a larger political movement of reverse dreamers and traditional Dreamers who have joined in an effort to reclaim their rights. However, if we establish bilateral programs that help reverse dreamers achieve success, we will encourage dialogue and provide opportunities for these children in both the United States and Mexico.

It is critical to implement acclimation and assimilation programs for these children in Mexico that will allow them to achieve, at minimum, a high school diploma. Having a diploma will allow them, once they repatriate to the United States, to apply for jobs, join the military, and attend college. We can give them a pipeline to civic engagement through collaborative efforts to provide resources, and through outreach that helps them verify school transcripts, rectify back taxes, declare income, resolve Selective Service registration, and answer documentation questions. Furthermore, proactive engagements that prevent reverse dreamers from adding to the national debt, that help them understand their rights as U.S. citizens, get jobs, and allow for government infrastructure to respond to their needs will encourage better relations between the United States and Mexico.

We must start preparing these children for a successful future now, with better documentation processes and educational programs. Preventing long-term homeland security threats such as terrorism, gang affiliation, crime, fraud, and economic and social drain from already disenfranchised citizens should be a top priority for U.S. policymakers.²⁰² Although these outreach programs would require additional resources and a tremendous bilateral effort between the U.S. and Mexican governments—with significant financial implications—they are invaluable programs that can change the course of U.S. citizens' future, and our country's future.

²⁰² Joanne Joseph, "The Uprooting of the American Dream: The Diminished and Deferred Rights of U.S. Citizen Child in the Immigrant Context," *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 24, no. 1 (2014): 209–39, <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cjlpp/vol24/iss1/6/>.

6. Establish Exit Control Procedures and Voluntary Registration for Minors

One way to monitor the number of U.S.-born children living in Mexico is to establish parameters for this demographic as part of the Department of Homeland Security's existing U.S.–Mexico Entry/Exit Data Sharing Initiative.²⁰³ This initiative is projected to work with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Mexico's National Migration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*) to share information that has been collected from travelers at ports of entry along the U.S.–Mexico border.²⁰⁴ The long-term goal behind this initiative is to allow for extensive biometrics screening for people who are exiting the United States. Although this effort will require substantial cooperation on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border, it could provide an opportunity to help reverse dreamers.

By documenting children who are departing the United States, this initiative can help track U.S. citizens who are vulnerable to gang affiliation and human trafficking. We do not want our own citizens to fall victim to these nefarious activities when preventative measures can be in place. This initiative could also coincide with an obligatory registration process for immigrants who are in removal proceedings and taking their children with them to Mexico. This registration would acknowledge reverse dreamers' departure and ensure that they are protected under both the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State by documenting their reentry into the United States.

B. FINAL THOUGHTS

The U.S. and Mexican governments need to prioritize and officially track how many U.S.-born children are residing in Mexico. The current estimated population of reverse dreamers living in Mexico is around the total population of the state of Delaware.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Michael Hardin and Philip S. Kaplan, *Privacy Impact Assessment for the United States–Mexico Entry/Exit Data Sharing Initiative*, DHS/CBP/PIA-050 (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, 2017), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/privacy-pia-cbp-usmexicoentryexitdatasharinginitiative-december2017.pdf>.

²⁰⁴ Hardin and Kaplan.

²⁰⁵ Prior estimates of 600,000 reverse dreamers, from 2016, were comparable to the population of Delaware. “QuickFacts: Delaware,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DE>.

We must start now to prepare these American children for a successful future, and we can do so with better documentation processes and consular assistance. Documentation, along with academic and social adaptation programs, will allow both the United States and Mexico to better prepare for the future of these U.S.–Mexican residents.

While this thesis focuses on U.S.-born Mexicans, it applies to all children who similarly live in the shadows of Latin American and Asian countries. We must be proactive about our homeland security measures, and see the long-term importance of preventing terrorism, gang affiliation, crime, fraud, and economic and social drain among citizens who are vulnerable and disenfranchised.²⁰⁶

The solution cannot be isolated to one country; to help reverse dreamers, we need a shared vision for a brighter future. The United States and Mexico share a destiny, which has been intertwined since the formation of each nation. This thesis vividly foreshadows a developing future in which the Mexican and U.S. governments have created a populace of forgotten children. This analysis of what the future holds for reverse dreamers creates a platform to better understand how Mexico and the United States created a population of neglected children with U.S. citizenship, but seemingly no country to call home. This population of abandoned children must be provided for to better the present and guarantee a just and bright future for both nations.

²⁰⁶ Joseph, “The Uprooting of the American Dream.”

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