

**RENT SEEKING, THE BRACERO PROGRAM
AND CURRENT MEXICAN FARM LABOR POLICY**

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This paper focuses on how official support for labor importation (specifically the Bracero program) varies with the economic rent available to specific special interest groups. The Bracero program was the largest temporary “guest worker” labor program in US history. This study examines the motives underlying the House and Senate vote on the final extension of the vote on the Bracero Program in 1963 and the current House vote on the Mexican farm labor policy in 1996. It tests whether legislators respond to the rent-seeking behavior of competing special interest groups. The actual testimony on the Bracero program is used to identify some of the competing special interest groups and to develop a prohibit model of the vote. [J4, K2, N4]

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on how official support for labor importation (specifically the Bracero program) varies with the economic rent available to specific special interest groups. Rent seeking involves wasting scarce resources to secure or maintain rents, or a profitable position (see e.g., DeLorme and Snow, 1990; Rowley et al., 1988; Tollison, 1982; Tollison and Congleton, 1995; and Basurto, 1998). Although rent seeking exists in many forms, it is commonly associated with lobbying Congress by pressure groups who are motivated by the prospect of earning economic rent. McCormick and Tollison (1981), Shughart (1990), and others suggest that legislators concerned with being re-elected allow interest groups to influence whether legislation is passed. Downs (1957), Niskanen (1971) and Becker (1983) have developed models of the political process that assume legislators weigh the electoral costs and benefits of their choices and favor policies that increase their chances of re-election over policies that lower it, *ceteris paribus*. Parker (1996) has hypothesized that as “rent-seeking has increased over

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time, Congress has increasingly been populated by members motivated by financial rather than intrinsic returns to office.” Chappel (1997: 207) disagrees and argues that it is career politicians “who ultimately seek and gain the positions of power which offer the greatest opportunities to generate rents.” This paper tests whether Congresspeople respond to the voting behavior of competing special interest groups.

This paper examines, using Congressional hearings and empirical evidence, the motives underlying the House (H.R. 8195) and Senate (S. 1703) vote on the extension of the Bracero program in 1963 as well as the current House (1996) vote on Mexican (guest worker) farm labor. We compare how the rent-seeking motives affect the 1963 vote on the extension of the Bracero program in the House (H.R. 8195) and how they affect the same vote in the Senate (S. 1703). Likewise, the effects of these motives on the House vote in 1963 are contrasted to their effects on a House vote on a current policy in 1996 (H.R. 2202).

As the largest temporary labor program in US history, the Bracero program,¹ which ran from 1942-1964, set the precedent for current policy debates and legislation on the importation of Mexican farm labor. Recently farm-state lawmakers had been urging Congress to pass legislation that would create a new farm labor program to admit foreigners to harvest crops (Idelson, 1996). The program would allow farmers to hire temporary and seasonal workers for no more than ten months at a time, if domestic workers were not available (“House Votes,” 1996). Proponents of the Bracero program, agricultural organizations and other supporters claimed that crops would not be harvested without additional labor. Furthermore, they argued that the legalized importation of Mexican farm labor would reduce the flow of illegal immigrants. The rationale for a guest-worker program such as the Bracero experience is rather straightforward to the politician. If there is a temporary shortage of domestic labor in a certain sector of an economy such as agriculture, then instead of allowing market forces to respond to the short-run problem, legislators arrange to import foreign workers by passing legislation advantageous to the employer. Politicians apparently view guest-worker programs as temporary, but as history has shown, this is not the case. Massey and Liang (1989) examined data gathered from former participants in the Bracero program and concluded that in the long run, not only are guest-worker programs not temporary but lead to repeat migration, much of it illegal.² The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief history of the Bracero program, Section 3 discusses the special interest groups supporting the Bracero program, Section 4 presents the special interest groups who were opposed to the Bracero program. Section 5 is a detailed explanation of the model and the data. Section 6 gives

¹Bracero, refers to the arms, *brazos*, or helping hands. See Gamboa (1990: 41).

²This classic study on the Bracero program gathered the data for the paper in a specific sample from four Mexican communities—two rural and two urban. To our knowledge, there has not been another study of this type.

the empirical results of the model. Section 7 offers a brief summary and some concluding remarks.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRACERO PROGRAM

The importation of Mexican farm labor to the US started long before the Bracero program in 1942. From 1917 to 1921, approximately 73,000 Mexican workers entered the US under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1917 (hereinafter IAN Act) permitting the importation of foreign workers, including agricultural laborers (Craig, 1971: 6, fn 7). While prior to 1917 Mexicans were admitted to the US to work in the fields of the Pacific Northwest and the Southwest, it was not until World War I that the importation of Mexicans started to attract attention. During World War I, farmers complained they were losing labor to industry and the military. Farmers argued that since the food production was essential to the war effort, they needed a compensation for the lack of workers. Low wages and seasonal employment made jobs undesirable for domestic workers. Consequently, it was difficult if not impossible for U.S. farmers to attract domestic labor. The IAN Act constituted the legal foundation for the importation of workers. Despite claims by farmers that the program was needed only temporarily, the program lasted until 1922, approximately three years after the war ended.

Between 1920 and 1930, various groups petitioned Congress to restrict the movement of Mexicans to the United States. Unwilling to relinquish not only an abundant, but a cheap source of labor, each year farmers discouraged Congress from restricting the program (Scruggs, 1963). Moreover, during 1929-1933, farmers continued to claim that there was a shortage of domestic workers. Although agriculture was one of the few sources of employment, low wages deterred most of the unemployed, who preferred to continue to search for work elsewhere. In the 1930's, the Mexican population was perceived to be a burden to communities. Therefore, the US decided to deport many of the Mexicans. Nevertheless, the importation of Mexican farm labor to the US continued sporadically throughout the interwar years (Craig, 1971).

However, the US suffered from severe labor shortages as a result of World War II and in 1942 the US signed an agreement with Mexico, establishing what became known as the Bracero program. The primary purpose of the program was to supplement domestic agricultural labor that had been drafted by the military (see Garcia y Griego, 1981; Kiser and Kiser, 1979; and Scruggs, 1963).

The Bracero program should have expired with the end of hostilities in 1945; however, farmers pleaded for an extension. Farmers were successful in their efforts and the program was extended until 1947. Between 1942 and 1947 the program remained virtually unchanged. From 1948 to 1951 the U.S. returned to the IAN Act of 1917 as a legal basis for importing Mexican workers. With the exception of a few revisions, the agreement remained the same from 1948 to 1951

and “more than 200,000 legally contracted braceros were imported for work on United States farms” (Craig, 1971: 63).

In 1951, once more the U.S. entered into an agreement to contract Mexican farm labor. The program was set to expire at the end of 1953, but under pressure from farmers, Congress extended it until December 31, 1955. Beginning in 1960, the influence that supporters and critics of the Bracero program exercised shifted.³ While groups opposed to the program applied more pressure to Congress, farmers were forced on the defensive. Farmers petitioned Congress for a two-year unamended extension. The extension bill passed the House, but the Senate limited the duration of the extension to six months. While the program should have expired in December 1961 it was extended at the end of 1963, and Congressional supporters of the program began to fight for yet another extension. Testimony was heard from both sides, settling on another year’s extension. Several members of Congress made it very clear that they would not support further extension of the program. Therefore, in 1964 no effort was made to that end (“Migratory Farm Labor,” 1965).

3. RENT SEEKING: PRESSURES AFFECTING SUPPORT FOR BRACERO PROGRAM

A. Farm Interest

Farmers argued persuasively for the Bracero program. During World War I and World War II, farmers complained of labor shortages and insisted on an additional source of labor. Farmers continued to claim that domestic workers were lazy, unreliable, and unwilling to perform “stoop” labor. Farmers disguised their desire for cheap labor in concern for their crops, which they claimed would

³The growers had become upset over the Department of Labor’s administration of the Bracero program and the new regulations of Secretary of Labor Mitchell in November 1959 that forbade interstate recruitment through government agencies of domestic farm-workers in states or areas, providing low wage and substandard working conditions. Adding to the discontent of farmers was a report by a committee of four prominent consultants appointed by the Secretary of Labor, Mitchell, to make an independent study of the Bracero program that concluded that the use of Mexican workers was having an adverse effect on the wages, working conditions, and the employment of domestic farm workers (USCH, 1961:127). The pro-Bracero forces tried to reduce the power of the Secretary of Labor, Mitchell, by making the administration of the Bracero program a joint endeavor of the Agriculture Department. The Agriculture Department did not favor such a move. Many uncommitted Congresspeople, who had supported the Bracero program, balked at any efforts to undermine the powers of Mitchell and his control of domestic farm workers. Therefore, two factors caused the shift: clumsy political tactics by the pro-Bracero group and the increasing number of groups who as a result of the Department of Labor’s report and other disclosures gave a closer examination to the importation of Mexican labor. (Craig, 1971: 160).

lie fallow without the continuation of the farm labor program. Young, representing the National Cotton Council, insisted that the farmers' view of the situation needed to be considered (USCH, 1960). Tolbert, representing the National Farm Labor Users Conference and the California Farm Labor Association, stated, "[S]hould those people be deprived of the use of this imported farm labor they are certainly going to the far corner of the country to recruit labor in an attempt to keep their farms going and when they do that it automatically will affect the labor supply and operation of farms throughout the United States" (USCH, 1955: 111). Farmers alleged that the number of domestic workers interested in farming was rapidly declining and no reasonable level of compensation would entice domestic workers to perform "stoop" labor. Moreover, supporters maintained that providing domestic workers with benefits similar to those granted to braceros would bankrupt farmers. Furthermore, even if domestic laborers were available, farmers complained they were completely unreliable.⁴ Therefore, it was indispensable to supplement domestic labor with Mexican workers. Henderson of the Michigan Farm Association commented, "He is free to leave his employment and break his contract the day after arrival in Michigan if he so chooses" (USCH, 1955: 127). On the other hand, the Mexican worker is "prohibited by the terms of his contract from freely moving about and selecting his own employment." Farmers managed to secure a position enabling them to capture rents at the expense of domestic workers for 22 years.

B. Local Religious Institutions' Interest

The local churches, supported by growers, found it in their interest to support the Bracero program. Just as religious organizations (Iannaccone, 1998) at the national level were in pursuit of economic rents, so were Catholic churches at the local level. If local churches supported the program, farmers in their congregation would be supportive in return. Likewise, certain local Catholic churches, for example St. Paul's Episcopal Church in El Centro, California, had a large percentage of Mexican parishioners. Reverend Alford of St. Paul's commented on the situation, "[T]he bracero is not a stranger in the Imperial Valley, but he is a good neighbor, seeing a wonderful opportunity to come and make some money doing some of our hard agricultural jobs; he is happy to come, he is better remunerated here than he is at his home" (USCS, 1961: 143).

Serving a community consisting primarily of citrus growers, Reverend Vickers,

⁴McLellan, an AFL spokesman for the domestic workers in Texas, says, "Yet, in spite of the abundance of skilled domestic agricultural labor in South Texas all winter, the USES still permits the recruitment of braceros into the same geographic area" (USCH, 1955:164). McLellan also pointed out, "No real labor shortage exists in a State where 123,000 citizens must travel beyond the boundaries of that state to seek employment and at the same time, more room for 95,000 imported Mexican contract workers" (USCH, 1955: 164).

Director of the Riverside-San Bernardino Counties Council of Churches who represented a number of local churches, remained sympathetic to the position of braceros and farmers and conducted an investigation of the Bracero program in his area.

Results of my investigation of wages paid braceros in the citrus industry do not support oft-heard claims that the Mexicans are slave labor. As is required in all parts of the country, the Mexicans are guaranteed the prevailing wages received by American workers on any job where they are employed (USCH, 1961: 118).

Furthermore, he found that braceros, within his area of investigation, did not consider themselves mistreated (USCH, 1961). Thus, it appears that local religious groups supporting the program were involved in rent-seeking activities just like organizations at the national level.

4. RENT SEEKING: PRESSURES AFFECTING OPPOSITION TO THE BRACERO PROGRAM

Debate regarding the Bracero program intensified after World War II (see "Mexican Farm Labor," 1961: 1358). Special interest groups claimed farmers no longer suffered from a shortage of labor. Domestic workers were not offered attractive wages or good working conditions. Several religious organizations and organized labor were the primary source of opposition to the Bracero program. They focused on three major issues: low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of job availability (see *Congressional Quarterly*, March 1961).

A. National Church Interest

At the national level, nearly all religious organizations, in particular the Catholic church, under the influence of the Vatican, disapproved of the Bracero program and wanted it terminated. Even religious groups not entirely opposed to the program nevertheless expressed reservations and approved of only an amended program stipulating a specific, guaranteed date of termination. The following religious organizations in the 1950s opposed the wartime emergency labor program: the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ, the National Council of Churches, and by the 1960s the National Council of Churches of Christ and the Minnesota Council of Churches (Craig, 1971).

Although seemingly concerned with the welfare of domestic workers, religious organizations were likely driven by less altruistic motives. Ending the importation of Mexican workers would allow the church to capture economic rents

resulting from an increase in wages of domestic workers, which would result in more donations.⁵ Rev. McGowan, Director of the Social Action Department, National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), cited principal recommendations from the San Antonio (1943) and Denver (1944) seminars sponsored by the Social Action Department, NCWC: “[T]he greed of powerful employers have [SIC] combined to create in Texas dreadful and widespread misery. The evil men who are driving tens of thousands of our poor people into slow starvation will be held to strict accountability by the God of eternal justice” (USCH, 1958: 431).

Because these religious groups were comprised primarily of agricultural domestic laborers, it was not surprising the church was preoccupied with the economic well-being of its members. The following is an excerpt from testimony submitted by the Council for Christian Social Action, United Church of Christ. “In our generally affluent society it is a tragic fact that half a million American migratory workers are earning a precarious, meager living in seasonal agricultural work. Most of these workers live in abject poverty” (USCS, 1961: 155). Furthermore, “When they arrive at the point of promised employment they frequently find that unfavorable weather and over-recruitment have greatly reduced the amount of work available.” Dudley (USCS, 1961: 157), a representative for the Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ, remarked, “In addition, the Mexican program has depressed agricultural wages substantially for American workers and thus adds to the unemployment and even poverty of many of our people.” The national religious organizations’ attempt at rent seeking was not very successful, as the guest-worker program survived over two decades of debate.

In the 1960s, congressional supporters, feeling the pressure of increasing opposition to the Bracero program, “realized that political reality dictated an end to the program” (Craig, 1971: 196). Father Vizzard of National Catholic Rural Life Conference urged an end to the program. “They are human beings who are considered in the literal sense of the word a ‘commodity’ to be bought at the lowest possible price. They are American farm workers” (USCH, 1963:

⁵The Catholic Church Mexico (CCOM) was opposed to the migration of braceros to the US for the following reasons. First, it contributed to the disruption of family life when the father was away from home. Second, the migrants might lead an immoral life during their stay in the U.S. Third, the most fundamental basis for the Catholic church concern was the migrants’ contact with Protestantism. CCOM wanted to keep their followers at home. In 1953, the Vatican became involved and even allowed Mexican priests to accompany the braceros to the U.S. to provide secular and spiritual aid (Craig, 1971: 19-20). Therefore, the Vatican solved the jurisdictional dispute over their Catholic followers. The Catholic Church in the U.S. would remain in the good graces of the Vatican by encouraging the bracero to return to Mexico so the CCOM could retain their own domestic followers. If the migrants lingered in the U.S., they might become Protestants. The Protestant faith wanted braceros deported to increase the wages of their domestic farm workers. They no doubt visualize braceros as harder to convert since the migrants are Spanish.

296). Religious organizations, predominately the Catholic church, spent resources lobbying Congress to have the program terminated, raising returns to churches by increasing the incomes of domestic workers. The church recognized that members who were poverty-stricken would be unable to support the church.

The Catholic church, under the influence of the Vatican, was preoccupied not only with domestic followers, but with Mexicans, of whom 98% adhered to the Catholic faith (USCH, 1960). Ekelund, et al. (1996: 60-61) used neoclassical theory to analyze the Catholic church as a firm and show how the medieval Church tried to block entry by potential rivals. We also find this attempt to exclude rivals with the Bracero program. A number of Catholic bishops expressed their concern: "Almost all of the Spanish-speaking migratory workers are Catholic. In some instances the approach by groups of other faiths causes confusion among the migrants and disturbs their religious and cultural integrity" (USCH, 1960: 74). The Church wanted to maintain its monopoly position of domestic workers by having Mexican labor deported, fearing it would lose its Mexican congregation to other faiths. Consequently, the Catholic church at the national level fought to end the Bracero program.

B. Union Interests

Unions, like religious organizations, employed resources to lobby Congress to terminate the Bracero program. Recruiting foreign labor at a cheap wage rate, farmers were able to capture economic rent at the expense of domestic workers. The termination of the program would have forced markets to clear at a higher wage rate. Not all growers employed braceros. Where farmers were not using braceros, wages were considerably higher (USCS, 1961).⁶ Therefore, there appeared to be no shortage of domestic agricultural labor, as farmers claimed. According to labor organizations, domestic workers were simply unavailable at such a low wage rate.

Biemiller, legislative director, testified on behalf of the AFL-CIO, and stated that while the intention of the program was to offset seasonal wartime emergency labor shortages, many Mexicans secured year-round employment (USCH, 1961: 69). Furthermore, he maintained, "[T]hat about 60 percent of all Mexicans employed at peak work are working on crops which are now in surplus supply." As long as farmers could secure cheap Mexican labor, domestic agricultural workers had little opportunity for employment.⁷ Schutt, the Assistant Director of

⁶(USCH, 1955: 17-35) show the wages for various geographic areas, various farm activities, and various products. Thus, there were wage differentials based on different products, activities and geographical areas. The source also shows the average wages per state.

⁷(USCH, 1960: 377-378) indicate that domestic workers desired and sought work.

the United Packinghouse Food and Allied Workers, pointed out that the Bracero proponents ignored the basic laws of economics in their argument:

It is axiomatic that if labor is in short supply, the price of labor will rise. This rise in turn calls out new responses on the part of the potential labor force, until the demand is satisfied. A quick glance at the wage impact of braceroism indicates that the normal laws of economics have been held in abeyance in agriculture through the controls exercised by the contract national program (USCS, 1961: 287).

The scarcity that the farmer referred to did not exist, according to opponents of the Bracero program. Opponents, such as unions, insisted there was simply a depression of wages.

5. THE MODEL

This paper adopts an underlying empirical model of legislative voting behavior based upon previous empirical studies, notably Tosini and Tower (1987), Davidson, Davis, and Ekelund (1995), Lloyd and McGarrity (1995), and Kahane (1996). The congressional testimony by various individuals and groups also provides the basis for our model. We test whether the House and Senate vote on the guest-worker bills may be explained on the basis of competing special interest groups.

A. Dependent Variables

The dependent variable VOTEYES used in the model is of a binary discrete nature, yes or no, measuring whether the Congressperson voted for, announced for, or paired for (yes = 1) or voted against (no = 0) the guest-worker bills in 1963 and 1966 (see *Congressional Quarterly*, 1963, 1966).⁸ Data on earlier votes on the Bracero program are incomplete; accordingly, the vote on the final extension of the Bracero program in 1963 is chosen as the starting point for comparison. Because of the discrete values of the dependent variable, probit analysis is employed to determine the cumulative probability that the dependent variable takes on a value of 1 given the value of the independent economic and political variables.

⁸State data as opposed to data for each voting district were used in the 1963 and 1996 House votes. Generally, the model could be strengthened if the data on a number of the variables were specific to a congressional district, since across districts within a state (for which a House member is responsive), some may have no farms, have varying rates of unemployment, etc. The data did not permit this disaggregation.

B. Independent Variables⁹

We believe that the House and Senate vote may be explained on the basis of competing special interest groups. Beginning with the final extension of the Bracero program in 1963, a comparison is made between the House and Senate voting patterns (House Bill H.R. 8195 and Senate Bill S 1703). Moreover, a comparison is made between the final House vote in 1963 and a vote on similar legislation, the 1996 House Bill (H.R. 2202) on Mexican farm labor, to determine how factors that influence the vote have changed over three decades.

Determined outside the model, exogenous independent variables influence a legislator's decision to vote "yes." The independent variables include party affiliation (DEMOCRAT), whether the Congressperson's state is among the ten states contracting the largest number of braceros for 1960 (TOP10), the percentage of the labor force unemployed for the state (UNEMPLOYMENT), union membership by state (UNION), the number of farms in the state (NUMBERFARMS),¹⁰ and the percentage of Catholics in the state (CATHOLIC). The independent variables DEMOCRAT and TOP10 are dummy variables assigned a 1 if the respective criterion is met by the Congressperson and a 0 otherwise. The remaining independent variables are measured by state for each Congressperson.

The probability of a "yes" vote is hypothesized to be positively related to the variable TOP10, negatively related to the variables DEMOCRAT, UNEMPLOYMENT, UNION and CATHOLIC, and may be either positively or negatively related to the variable NUMBERFARMS.

C. DEMOCRAT

The variable DEMOCRAT is a dummy variable representing party affiliation to determine whether party influences the vote of the individual legislator. A 1 is assigned to a Congressperson who is a Democrat and a 0 to one who is a Republican (see *Congressional Quarterly*, 1963, 1965). A negative coefficient is expected for DEMOCRAT, indicating the Democrats were more likely supporters of domestic workers' strong desire to defeat the guest-worker programs.¹¹

⁹The means of these are available upon request.

¹⁰The mean for NUMBERFARMS was derived from the addition of the number of farms for each congressperson (senator) for each state divided by the total number of representatives (senators). For the House the total was divided by 403 (some representatives were absent). For the Senate the total was divided by 93. This is why the mean for the House is greater than the mean for the Senate. (The same method was used for the UNION variable.)

¹¹See e.g., *Congressional Quarterly* (May 12, 1961: 794 and August 4, 1961: 1358).

D. TOP 10

TOP10 is a dummy variable for the top ten states that contracted braceros for 1960 (see *Congressional Quarterly*, 1961).¹² The top ten states are Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, and Wyoming.¹³ A 1 is assigned if the Congressperson is from one of the ten states recruiting the largest number of braceros and a 0 otherwise. The variable TOP10 is an indicator of those states that are most affected by policy either terminating or restricting the importation of Mexican farm labor. The dependent variable VOTEYES is expected to be positively related to the variable TOP10.

E. UNEMPLOYMENT

If a state has a high rate of overall unemployment (UNEMPLOYMENT), a legislator may consider the importation of foreign labor unnecessary, a burden to communities, and unpopular. Accordingly, a high rate of unemployment is anticipated to decrease the likelihood that a Congressperson will vote for legislation dealing with the importation of Mexican farm labor. Therefore, the expected sign for unemployment is negative. The data for 1963 were collected by state employment security agencies cooperating with the U.S. Department of Labor. The source of the unemployment rates for 1996 is USDL (1997: Table C-3).

F. UNION

The independent variable UNION is a measure of union strength. Unions were opposed to the importation of Mexican farm labor. During congressional hearings, union members testified that the importation of Mexican farm labor created wage depression and a decline in job availability for domestic workers (USCH, 1955: 203). Therefore, the probability of a “yes” vote is expected to be negatively related to the number of workers in a state who are members of a union.

¹²We have run regressions between per capita income and the Top 10 variable and found that they are not significantly correlated whether they are run in cardinal or ordinal values.

¹³Originally, a variable SW was used as opposed to TOP10. The variable SW defined the southwestern states, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas (World Book, 1995: 103). The Southwest is apparently the region most affected by the importation of Mexican farm labor. However, this variable was not as powerful an indicator of states that are affected by the termination or restriction of the program as the variable TOP10. TOP10 does not include Florida, although that is one of six states mentioned in the congressional hearings as having used 95% of all foreign agricultural workers in 1959.

The data for UNION for 1963 House and Senate vote are taken from the *U.S. Union Sourcebook: Membership, Finances, Structure, Directory*. Data for labor union membership for the 1996 House vote are taken from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996*, furnished by the BLS.

G. NUMBERFARMS

The variable NUMBERFARMS is a surrogate for the strength of agricultural interests in a certain state.¹⁴ Two distinct arguments can be made about this variable. A high number of farms in a particular state indicates an ample group of farmers. However, it also indicates a great number of domestic agricultural workers. Depending on which group has a stronger influence, the likelihood of a “yes” vote may increase or decrease. Therefore, the expected sign for the variable NUMBERFARMS is ambiguous. The number of farms in 1959 is recorded in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1968, 1996*.¹⁵

H. CATHOLIC

Religious organizations at the national level were opposed to the importation of Mexican farm labor. This was especially true for the Catholic church. The variable CATHOLIC measures the impact of the Catholic church on congressional voting patterns on the importation of Mexican agricultural workers. Our interpretation of the hearings is that religious groups at the national level such as the Catholic church were convinced the importation of Mexican workers was detrimental to the social and economic well-being of domestic workers. Religious groups were seeking economic rent that would be paid to them in donations if domestic workers received higher wages. Moreover, the Vatican did not want to lose its Mexican followers to other faiths and wanted them to stay in Mexico. Thus, if a large percentage of a state’s population is Catholic, a Congressperson from that state will likely vote against the extension of the Bracero program. The data for the variable CATHOLIC, showing the percentage of Catholics by state, are extracted from the *1997 Catholic Almanac* for the 1996 House vote and from the *1961 National Catholic Almanac*, for the 1963 House vote.

¹⁴If there was a significant difference in average farm size, there could be a difference in agricultural interests. We were unable to find any data for the relevant time period that showed average farm size by state.

¹⁵Alaska had fewer than 500 farms in 1963. Therefore, the data for that year do not include Alaska. Some states (or districts) may have few large farms (corporate) with numerous farm hands, whereas other states may have numerous small (family) farms.

6. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The results of the probit analysis are shown in Tables 1-3. Tables 1-2 examine the 1963 vote, whereas Table 3 shows the results of the 1966 vote. The first column reports the coefficient and t-statistic for the six independent variables. The tables also include the marginal effects of each independent variable, reported in the second column. The marginal effect is the derivative of the probability of a ‘yes’ vote of the independent variable under consideration evaluated at the sample mean. The signs of all the variables are the same for the House vote in Table 1 and the Senate vote in Table 2 for 1963, the final extension of the Bracero program.

Table 1. Probit Analysis of House Voting Patterns on the Final Extension of the Bracero Program in 1963

House – dependent variable = VOTE (yes = 1, no = 0)

Variable	Probit Results	Marginal Effects ^a
	Coefficient (t-statistic)	Partial
Constant	2.617 (5.123)***	1.044
DEMOCRAT	-1.294 (7.825)***	-0.516
TOP10	0.924 (4.913)***	0.368
UNEMPLOYMENT	-0.152 (2.096)**	-0.060
UNION	-0.000004 (3.246)***	-0.0000002
NUMBERFARMS	0.000003 (0.210)	0.0000001
CATHOLIC	-0.041 (5.793)***	-0.016

Note: ^aThe derivative of the probability with respect to the particular independent variable evaluated at the sample mean.

**Significant at the 5% level (two-tail test)

***Significant at the 1% level (two-tail test)

The variable DEMOCRAT has a negative coefficient that is significant at the 1% level in both the House and the Senate vote. This confirms that a Democrat is more likely to vote against the bill.

Table 2. Probit Analysis of Senate Voting Patterns on the Final Extension of the Bracero Program in 1963

Senate – dependent variable = VOTE (yes = 1, no = 0)

Variables	Probit Results	Marginal Effects ^a
	Coefficient (t-statistic)	Partial
Constant	2.525 (2.564)**	0.930
DEMOCRAT	-1.279 (3.117)***	-0.471
TOP10	0.853 (1.950)*	0.314
UNEMPLOYMENT	-0.098 (0.728)	-0.036
UNION	-0.0000004 (0.958)	-0.0000001
NUMBERFARMS	0.000003 (0.884)	0.000001
CATHOLIC	-0.053 (3.613)***	-0.019

Note: ^aThe derivative of the probability with respect to the particular independent variable evaluated at the sample mean.

*Significant at the 10% level (two-tail test)

**Significant at the 5% level (two-tail test)

***Significant at the 1% level (two-tail test)

The variable TOP10 has a positively significant coefficient at the 1% level in the House and Senate vote in 1963. The positive coefficient supports the hypothesis that members of Congress from states that have contracted braceros are more likely to vote for the extension of the Bracero program. The Senate result lends weaker support for that hypothesis, as the TOP10 coefficient is significant at the 10%. The lesser significance of the coefficients in the Senate vote than the House vote is not surprising, considering there are fewer degrees of freedom for the Senate analysis.

The coefficient for the variable UNEMPLOYMENT is negative as predicted. While statistically significant at the 5% level in the House, it is not significant in

the Senate vote.¹⁶ The partial for the marginal effect of UNEMPLOYMENT indicates that a one-percentage-point increase in a state's unemployment rate causes a 6% increase in the probability that the representative in the House votes against the bill.

The coefficient for UNION is significant at the 1% level in the House vote but not in the Senate vote. This suggests that a Congressperson from a state with high union membership increases the chance he or she votes "no" by a minimal amount.¹⁷

While the variable NUMBERFARMS has a positive coefficient, indicating a Congressperson is more likely to vote for the program if there are many farms in that state, it is not significant in either the House or Senate vote. Our *a priori* thoughts were that the coefficient of this variable was ambiguous.

The pressures of religious groups, in particular the Catholic church, are reflected in the negatively significant coefficient for the CATHOLIC variable.¹⁸ The coefficient is significant at the 1% level in both the House and the Senate vote in 1963. This result supports claims that legislators are strongly influenced by the Catholic church and are more likely to vote "no" with a high percentage of Catholics in their state. The marginal effect is similar for the House and the Senate. The partial for the marginal effect of CATHOLIC indicates that a one-percentage-point increase in a state's Catholic population rate causes an approximately 2% increase in the probability that the representative in the House will vote against the bill.¹⁹

The 1996 House vote probit results are in Table 3. These results are compared with the House vote in 1963 to determine the factors that affect the vote on the final extension of the Bracero program in 1963 to those factors that affect current policy on the importation of Mexican farm labor. In the 1996 vote the only two variables whose coefficients are significant at the 1% level are DEMOCRAT and CATHOLIC. In 1963, all the variables in the probit models of the House with the exception of NUMBERFARMS were significant at that level. For the same reason that no action was taken to extend the Bracero program after 1964, legislators in 1996 rejected current policy on the importation of Mexican farm labor. Pressure from interest groups, such as religious organizations against the program, has ultimately been too strong to ignore. The CATHOLIC and DEMOCRAT variables appear to play an important role in the decision of

¹⁶Since Senators are up for re-election every four years rather than two, and since they represent a larger geographic area of a state rather than a smaller district they may be more insulated from economic conditions, which could contribute to the lack of significance in the Senate vote. It seems that the UNION result minimizes the claim that domestic workers are disadvantaged.

¹⁷The UNION results also show that Mexican labor was used even outside the agricultural sector.

¹⁸The CATHOLIC variable represents the Church at the national level.

¹⁹Multicollinearity does not exist between the CATHOLIC and the TOP10 variables.

legislators in the past as well as current policy. Furthermore, variables that are significant in the 1963 House vote lose their significance because of the diminishing role of agriculture in the US. For instance, the sample means for NUMBERFARMS is much less in 1963 than in 1996, providing evidence that agricultural influence on legislators may be shrinking in the US.

Table 3. Probit Analysis of House Voting Patterns on Current Mexican Farm Labor Policy in 1996

Variables	House – dependent variable = VOTE (yes = 1, no = 0)	
	Probit Results	Marginal Effects ^a
	Coefficient (t-statistic)	Partial
Constant	0.763 (1.762)*	0.288
DEMOCRAT	-1.697 (10.669)***	-0.640
TOP10	0.116 (0.573)	0.044
UNEMPLOYMENT	0.106 (1.303)	0.040
UNION	0.003 (0.159)	0.001
NUMBERFARMS	-0.000002 (1.063)	-0.0000008
CATHOLIC	-0.040 (4.309)***	-0.015

Note: ^aThe derivative of the probability with respect to the particular independent variable evaluated at the sample mean.

*Significant at the 10% level (two-tail test)

***Significant at the 1% level (two-tail test)

In 1996 better measures of factors that affect voting behavior were available than in 1963. More specifically, a probit analysis is run replacing the variable UNEMPLOYMENT with AGUNEMPLOYMENT,²⁰ the agricultural unemployment

²⁰LeVasseur, a representative of the BLS, provided the agricultural unemployment rates for 1996 and stated that similar information is unavailable for 1963.

rate for 1996. The coefficient of the variable UNEMPLOYMENT is not significant in Table 3. A possible explanation for this is that this variable does not capture the unemployed agricultural workers very well. The results of the probit analysis using the variable AGUNEMPLOYMENT are similar to those using the variable UNEMPLOYMENT.²¹ That is, the more precise measure for the coefficient of the variable AGUNEMPLOYMENT is not significant, confirming the declining significance of agriculture in the US.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper investigates, using Congressional hearings and empirical evidence, the motives underlying the House and Senate voting patterns on the final extension of the Bracero program and a 1996 House Bill on Mexican farm labor policy. This paper tests whether Congress responds to competing special interest groups who want to earn economic rent. (There could be other rent-seeking benefits besides re-election.) The cited Congressional hearings provide evidence to identify various competing special interest groups and help to establish the foundation of our probit model. The Congressional hearings show that U.S. farmers sought to preserve a cheap source of labor by having the Bracero program extended after World War II. Unions desired a higher wage and fought for a termination of the program. The rent-seeking position of religious organizations depends on whether one looks at the national or the local level. At the national level, churches opposed the Bracero program because they wanted higher wages for domestic workers which could be translated into additional funds for the Church. The Vatican also wanted Mexican labor deported, fearing it would lose its congregation to other faiths. Local churches were in support of the program responding to observations made directly within their parish or local area. These were churches serving communities primarily consisting of growers and Mexicans who often were members of the congregation.

As predicted for the House vote on the extension of the Bracero program in 1963, the probit results show the probability of a "yes" vote is positively related to the top ten states that contracted the largest number of braceros and negatively related to the Democratic party, state-wide unemployment percentage, state-wide union membership, and percentage of Catholics in the state. The probit analysis, therefore, reveals that votes cast by legislators in the House are significantly influenced by all the independent variables with the exception of the number of farms in the state, which was also found not to be significant in the Senate. The factors that significantly influence both the House and the Senate are party affiliation and the percentage of Catholics in the Congressperson's state. The House vote in 1963 was found to be quite different from the House vote on current Mexican farm labor policy in 1996. The only influential factors on current

²¹These results are available upon request.

Congressional House voting appear to be the percentage of Catholics and Democratic party. This result implies a possible decline in the rent-seeking ability of US agriculture interests in the US economy.

The records show religious organizations and unions lobbied against the agricultural organizations and farmers to terminate the program in 1963. Congress decided the program would not be extended past 1964. The attempt by agriculture to have the House Bill passed in 1996 also failed. The House rejected attempts to loosen regulations, convinced the program would increase the flow of illegal immigration. In 1998, the Senate passed a version of the Bracero program and a vote is expected on a House Bill (*Wall Street Journal*, 1998).

We believe that this paper and its approach are both historically interesting and important. It deals with the problems of the changing structure of the US labor force, especially with the dwindling domestic labor supply for low-end jobs, and how it is dealt with politically. This may be one of the most important economic problems for our country over the next several decades as the number of low-end (especially service jobs) represents the fastest-growing job sector. Some studies have shown that US GDP grows with the number of both illegal and legal immigration, contrary to the domestic worker replacement hypothesis.

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