

MAKING SENSE OF MIGRATION

Puerto Vallarta

November 8, 2010 (updated with 2014 charts)

Migration is as old as humanity and has once again become a subject of debate and often controversy. The objective of this paper is to focus on constructive solutions or at least understanding that relate to the majority of migrants who are part of predictable and potentially organized flows. This would permit a different kind of focus on those migrant flows that do not lend themselves to an organized or deliberate approach.

There are an estimated 200 million people who live outside the nation of their birth. This covers landed immigrants, illegal immigrants, convention refugees, temporary foreign workers and more. Many are adequately covered by laws and practices while at the opposite extreme others are subject to desperate conditions, exploitation and lack of rights. It is true that the poor will always be with us – it is equally true that migrants will always be part of the human condition – the only question is the degree to which we acknowledge this reality and create conditions to manage and moderate the impact on the migrant and on host societies.

There is an additional movement of people that is at least as large and in many ways of equal importance. We are in the middle of possibly the largest migration in human history and this migration does not cross borders. There are untold millions of people, predominantly in emerging economies such as China, India and others where major portions of the population are relocating from rural to urban areas with massive economic and social consequences. This internal migration is an important factor in global economic challenges and is an important factor in issues of security and international tensions – but will not be the subject of this discussion.

My own family exemplifies this reality. The 5 generations from my grandparents to my grandchildren cover virtually every variant of this list and the majority were migrants and many refugees. My grandchildren are the beneficiaries of these movements and a more enlightened world where all four are multi-racial and each carry passports of two important nations.

The issues around migration are becoming more focused and mostly in a negative direction. Europe is struggling with both new and historic patterns of migration that are suddenly deemed to be problematic for economic, social, religious and cultural reasons. The electorate is increasingly willing to abandon political correctness and support voices that state that “the emperor has no clothes”. Europe and the United States have been in our news but that simply reflects our bias. If you live in the Philippines, Russia, South Africa or Australia there are other stories. Canada is blessed by its isolation but the ocean touches our shores and has recently challenged our innocence.

A modest proposal as to goals:

1. Commit to a deeper personal understanding of the issues so that we can participate in a constructive manner within our societies.
2. Assist in the development of vocabulary for the discussion of migration. The current generally pejorative vocabulary where words like “illegal” and worse are attached to anything we do not like is unhelpful.
3. Identify, study and promote models from anywhere in the world that contribute to more constructive outcomes.

Puerto Vallarta is hosting two events which in reality are one. The fact that they are organized as two distinct events is illustrative of the problem.

On Monday and Tuesday there will be a forum organized and attended by all manner of NGO's known as "Civil Society Days" and much of the focus will correctly be on the rights or generally the lack of human rights experienced by many of the categories of migrants.

Wednesday and Thursday there will be an event known as a "Higher Dialogue" and organized by the United Nations – but less than a fully formal UN event. My limited understanding of the distinction is that the 160 participating nations do not want a UN status that might pass resolutions that actually have any meaningful power over their actions. While the Civil society groups will focus on human rights the underlying concern of the attending national Government representatives is about borders, security and control.

Then there are the migrants who are by and large absent. Most migrants have as a principal concern economic opportunity or jobs.

To a significant degree the vocabulary of the three groups passes the others like ships in the dark. Within the Trilateral there are employers who understand the meaning as well as the issues around employment and this provides a unique opportunity for us to use jobs and economic opportunity as the linkage between the legitimate but disparate interests that are concerned with the phenomenon we know as migration. We can use fancy terms like labor mobility – but it all wraps up into a package of balancing the various concerns.

I had a recent opportunity to ask the leadership of the US Chamber of Commerce in Washington as to their views and proposals on migration. They commented that they wished to be allowed to employ anyone who showed up at their doors and if the person happened to be illegal there should be no consequences to the employer. This obviously creates many opportunities for exploitation. I would have hoped they would have at a minimum have balanced that comment with the desire to help find a solution where the people they wanted and needed could have a status that treated them with dignity and offered some protection.

Migration takes on various forms around the world so there is no reason to pretend that it is something that lends itself to simple solutions. On the other hand, there are some rather basic questions that when answered with a balance of understanding and empathy can simplify matters for many of the migrant flows. Regardless of policies – there will always be situations caused by war, poverty, racism and other natural or human-engineered ills that do not fit into any set of policies. That being said – greater thought in advance of flows of human beings or responses to emergencies can create better or worse outcomes for both the migrants and the communities where they settle. We collectively fall well short of the goal of good policies for predictable and manageable flows and events. With that in mind I will suggest some of the questions and principles that we should attempt to answer or encourage those with the appropriate authority to answer to extend intelligent policy to a much higher proportion of those 200 million migrants than is true today. Then I will use as one example - a model from Canada that has been uniquely successful and if not universally applicable at least demonstrates that intelligent policy can contribute to much better outcomes.

1. **Is migration across borders a human right** or any other kind of right? Given that borders are arbitrary and the location of birth is an accident of history beyond the control of the person being born – how do we answer that question?
2. **Migration is often caused by “push”.** The push is a consequence of war, poverty, natural disaster, discrimination and other issues. Since some kind of push will always exist – how is that built into the debate about a legitimate structure for migration?
3. **Migration is also a result of “pull”.** The nature of the pull ranges from the slave trade, building railways and other infrastructure, silicon valley, seasonal needs, imbalances such as Germany after WWII or the Gulf states today or simply demographic challenges. There is a resistance to international conventions that add legitimacy and protection to the targets of this pull.
4. **Migration policies are often an unspoken balance between economic and social needs and forms of exclusion based on objections that are not publicly stated.** We need to acknowledge that both the migrant and the host face consequences and the debate needs to allow for reasonable expression of the causes and impact of dislocation.
5. **Migration has a multi-generational impact.** Too many migrant decisions are based on immediate factors and policies reflect this short term perspective. The consequences impact both the host and the migrant – we need to encourage policies that will result in success across the generations.
6. **Migration can have a dramatic impact on the host society – both positive and negative.** We must allow for legitimate expression of these concerns. We cannot state that a host society is obligated to accept whatever the consequences may be. On the other hand, good policy and examples can help create the conditions for successful migrant flows – but not every group of migrants can succeed in every host community.
7. **Political correctness may not lead to the best outcomes for either host or migrant.** The debate about migration requires empathy for those who drew the short straw in the lottery of life – but it must acknowledge the consequences on host societies. We need to simultaneously focus on the dignity of the person and a world of communities that will be increasingly diverse but can sustain a positive harmony.

A Canadian example:

More specifically, an example from the Province of Manitoba that differentiated itself from the Canadian immigration policies and those of the other provinces and has enjoyed unique success.

- Manitoba is not intuitively a place that is top of mind as a destination for immigrants.
- Winnipeg has the coldest annual mean temperature on earth for a city of its size.
- The closest City with a larger population is 1500 km west, 800 km south in the United States or 1800 km to the east and we will ignore the distance north to Moscow.
- In the late 1990's we were losing our young and educated children to the charms of the greater world to seek opportunity - and at retirement many of their parents head for warmer climates .

- When a population is stagnant and aging there is little opportunity to initiate anything – yet Winnipeg has a very loyal and sophisticated population with a strong culture in the arts and many entrepreneurs – but we needed people and momentum.

The Province of Manitoba negotiated a unique partnership with the Federal Government that allowed the Province to “nominate” or in effect select its own immigrants subject only to the usual health and security concerns.

- The Canadian immigration program is enlightened and successful by global standards – but in practice it results in the great majority of immigrants locating in either Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. These cities were being swamped with the challenge of integrating people from around the world while smaller and more remote provinces and cities such as ours were desperate for immigrants and skilled workers but the system did not produce those results – therefore the new experiment.

What was different about the Manitoba system?

1. The Canadian system placed an exceedingly high value on advanced education – but many arrivals could not get their foreign credentials recognized and we have the classic anecdotes of the foreign doctor driving a taxi in Toronto. Manitoba placed a higher value on skills that were genuine such as trade skills where credential recognition and language were much less of a factor – but the skills were in great demand.
2. A genuine job offer for the principal applicant to Manitoba was the factor awarded the greatest value. This assured that the credential issues had already been dealt with and it assured immediate economic stability to the family. Equally important – an immigrant person and family that experiences successful employment and participates in schools and community is much more likely to remain in that City – and that has been the overwhelming experience.
3. Great value was placed on links to communities, families, ethnic or religious groups that were already successfully established in the Province and could provide support to new arrivals and contribute to successful integration.
4. A vocabulary was developed that included the term “likely to succeed”. A person with a history of regular employment in their own country, a stable family, a skill that was in demand and a welcoming community in Manitoba was likely to succeed – and the results have demonstrated the wisdom of this policy.
5. Finally – too much of anything is not a good thing. We observed around the world that large scale immigration of primarily one group into a host community frequently resulted in lack of integration and eventual resentment and worse. Manitoba deliberately targeted streams that matched immigrant communities that had already demonstrated success in settlement and integration – and successfully balanced flows from a variety of continents and countries to avoid the kind of concentration that results in a failed immigration policy.
6. The program was directed by the Provincial Government but it must be recognized that the business community (CEO’s of locally owned companies who were personally invested in the success of the community) , a group which sought to energize the economy and community provided the political and much other support that allowed the local Government to act with confidence. There has remarkably been a virtually total consensus among every sector of society about the benefits of this very aggressive immigration program.

7. It should be pointed out that family reunification and refugee flows remained in place within the Federal priorities and system – but the nominee program allowed for a dramatic change in the demographic, social and economic outlook for Manitoba.

So what were the results after 10 years?

Chart 1 – Compare Canada and US legal immigration as a % of population.

If the US would have sustained the same percentage of Canada over the last decade this would have resulted in a doubling of legal immigrants into the US. If applied over the past decade this increase would equal the estimated illegal immigrant population. The current rate of immigration to Manitoba – if applied to the USA would result in a tripling of legal immigration.

Chart 2 – Compare Canada and Manitoba immigration as a percentage of population from the years 1980 to 1999.

Note Manitoba historically matched the Canada experience until 1985 then diverged in a radically negative manner from the Canadian experience.

Chart 3 – Same chart during the immigration experience of the last 10 years. The difference is dramatic and Manitoba now has a rate of immigration much higher than the Canadian average. The difference is the impact of the nominee program.

Chart 4 – Chart comparing the flow of immigrants from the nominee program compared to all other immigrant flows into Manitoba. The impact of the nominee program is dramatic and obvious.

Chart 5 – Compare the unemployment rate in Manitoba with the national unemployment rate as a percentage over the years from 2000. Manitoba has historically experienced relatively low unemployment. The important fact is that very rapid immigration and population increase did not have any negative impact on the unemployment.

Chart 6 – Chart the provincial unemployment rate and the number of immigrants who arrived in Manitoba in each year since 2000. Considering that the global recession coincides with the years of increasing immigration this supports the local belief that successful immigrants create jobs since they require homes and services.

Chart 7 - Immigration to Manitoba as a % of population compared to the overall experience of Canada. Note that we reversed the impact of policies that did not work for smaller provinces and cities.

Other results based on research:

- The proportion of immigrants who settled in rural centers rather than Winnipeg fully match the existing distribution of population. This is a radically different result than the Federal program.

- After 3-5 years the rate of home ownership among nominees is greater than the local population.
- The great majority of nominees have remained in Manitoba and 95% indicate they have no plans to relocate.
- Over 90% could communicate successfully in English after 5 years although the values placed on language at entry were lower than the federal program
- We have yet to identify an immigrant from this program who has been on welfare – after more than 60,000 arrivals.
- Success breeds imitation and other provinces are now developing and promoting similar programs. Although Manitoba has 3.6% of the population of Canada it has welcomed 50% of the nominees over the past decade.
- Success creates a new problem – the Federal Government now wants to slow down the Manitoba program because it operates within a national immigration cap – and our success slows down family re-unification in the larger Cities like Toronto that were historically complaining about too many arrivals.
- In the meantime Manitoba has set new goals of immigrant arrivals that are 50% higher than today and would result in a provincial population growth rate double the national growth rate.

The Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program is a unique and successful story that may not apply everywhere – but there is no reason it could not be a model for many countries in Europe and American states. The policy fully addresses the “pull” questions, it meets all of the requirements for rights and dignity for those who do arrive and while it does not create opportunity for every person seeking to relocate it does create a variety of circumstances and opportunities for potential migrants who are not generally welcomed because of the lack of academic credentials. At the same time if there is a large and diverse immigrant flow that is seen to be economically and socially successful it provides an umbrella under which it is possible to introduce and integrate some of the more difficult immigrant flows such as convention refugees – and this has been the case in Manitoba.

The New York Times sent a reporter to study the Manitoba Nominee Program in order to compare the policies and the sensibilities that drive the approach to immigration in Manitoba with those in the state of Arizona.

There are better policies and there are worse policies. Migration itself is not really an option, it exists because there is a need for it to exist in both directions. We can do little to change that reality but we can change our understanding and our policies.

Making Sense of Migration

Art DeFehr



Chart 1

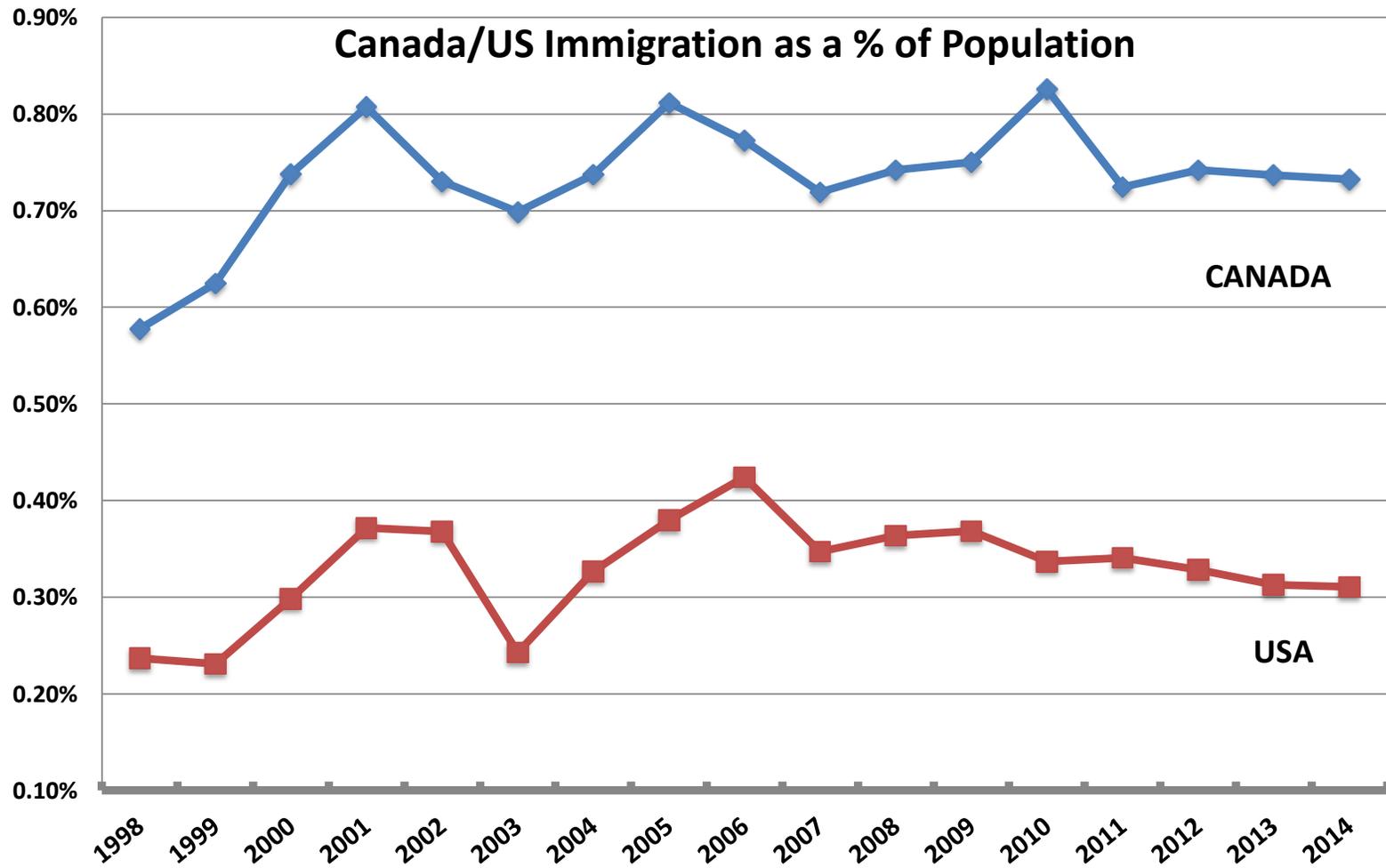


Chart 2

Canada/Manitoba Immigration as a % of Population to 1999

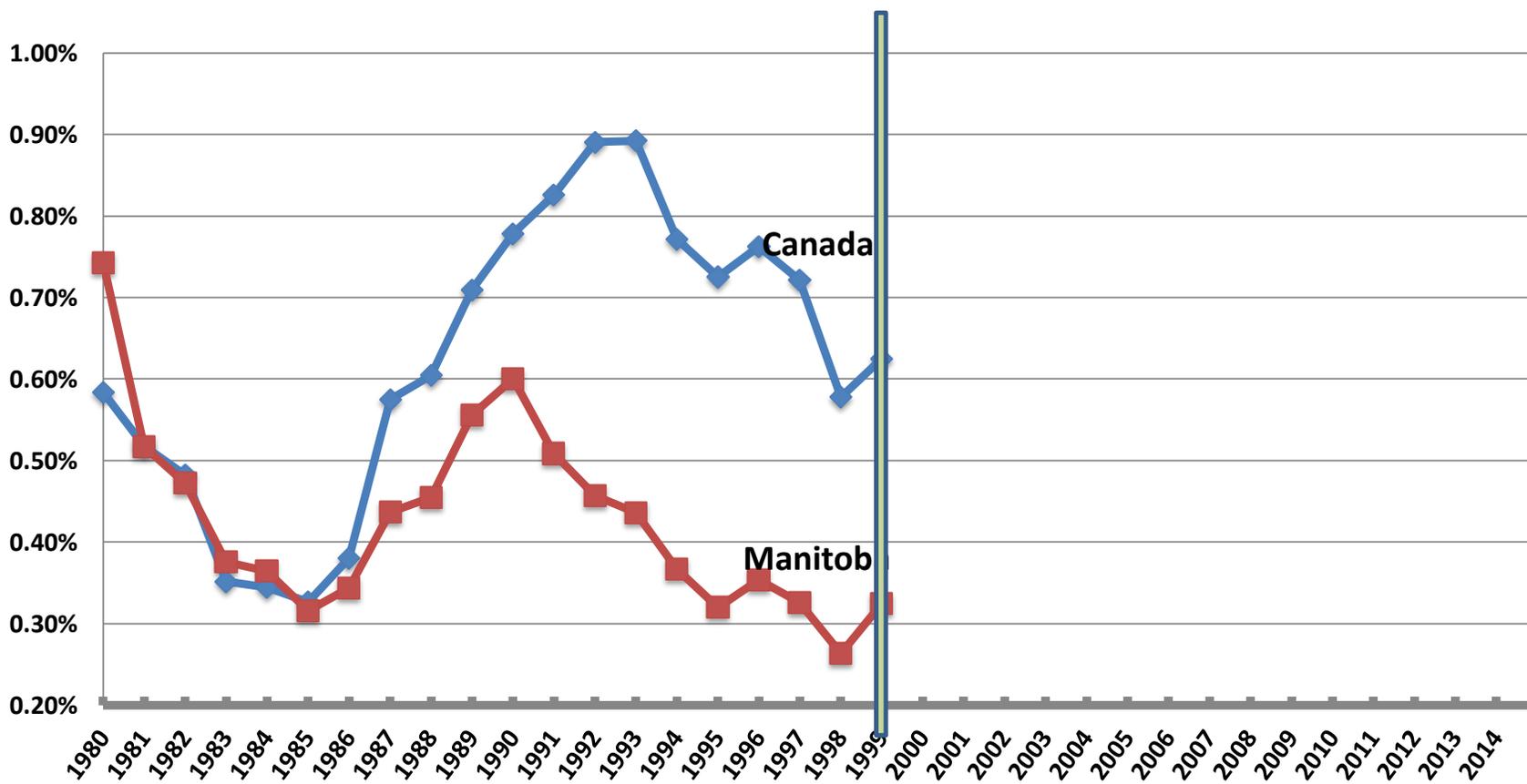


Chart 3

Canada/Manitoba Immigration as a % of Population

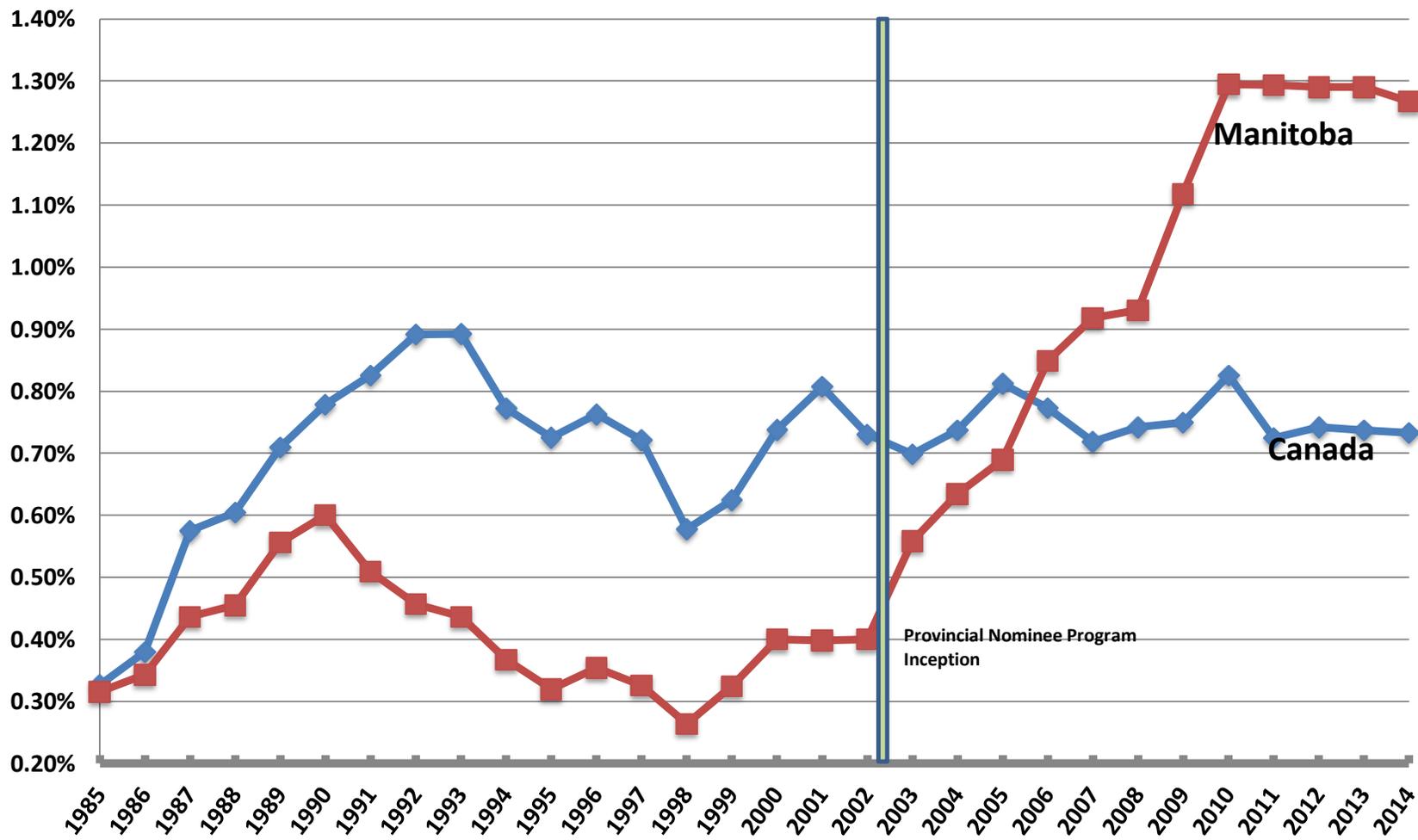


Chart 4

Nominee vs Other Immigrants

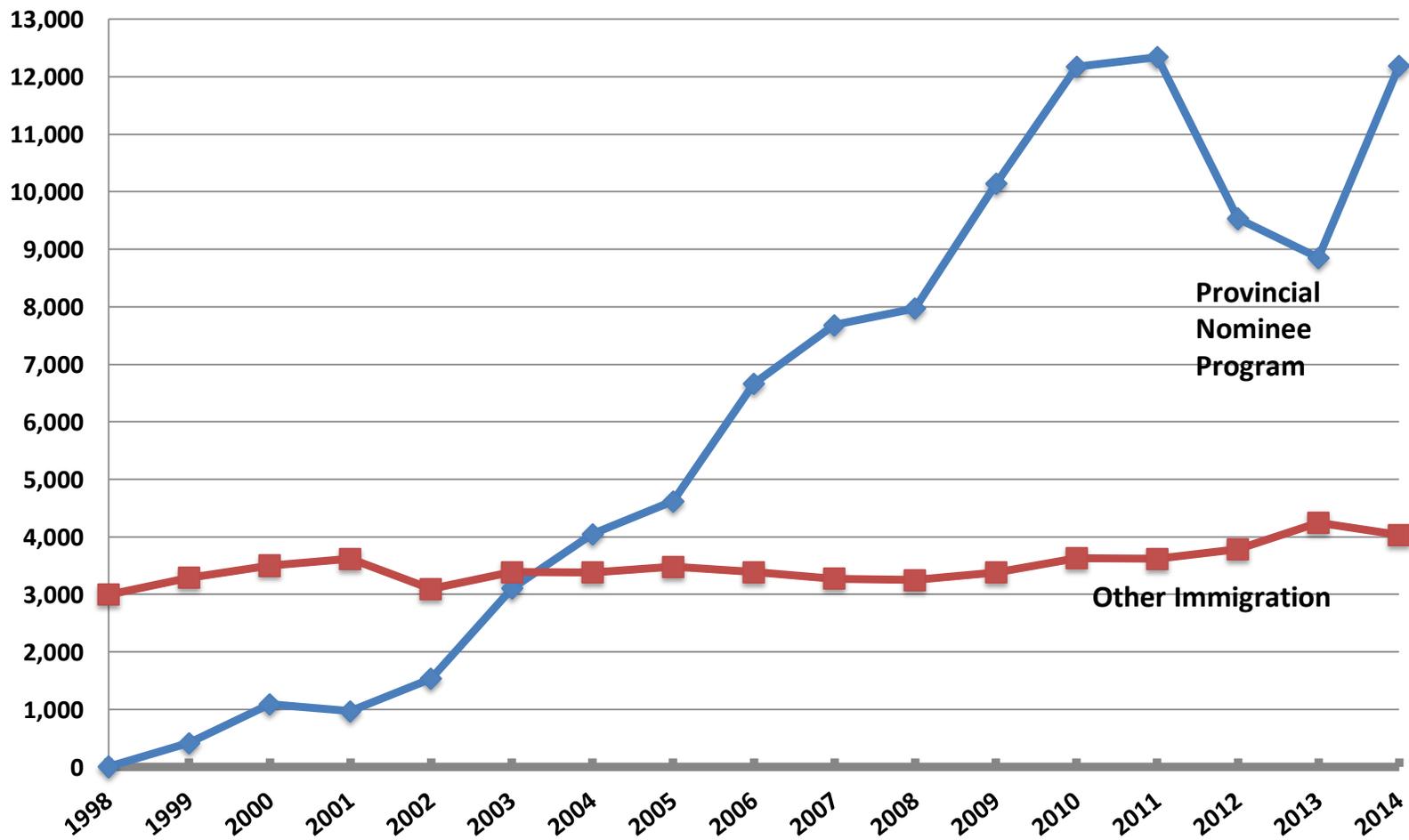


Chart 5

MANITOBA vs. CANADIAN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

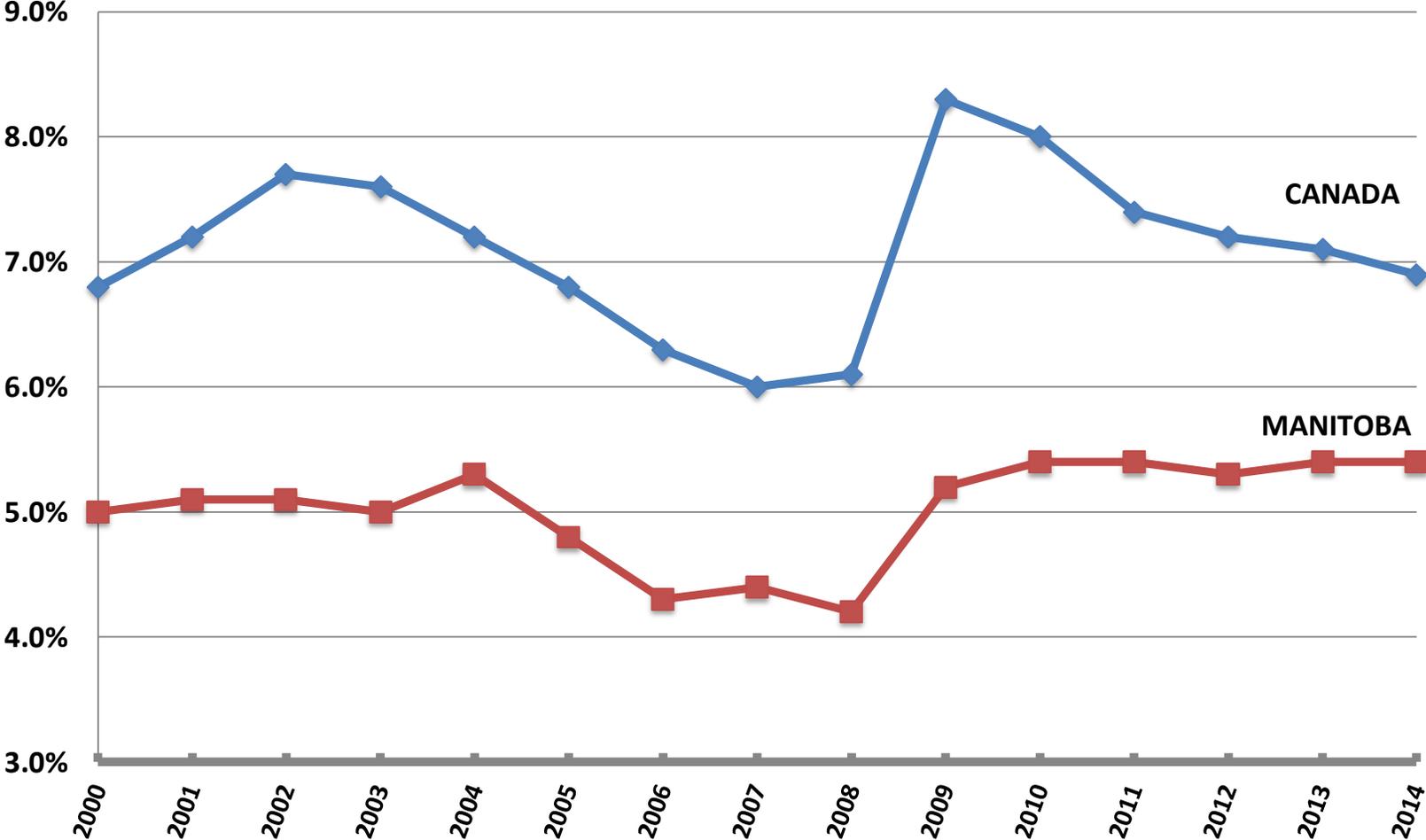


Chart 6

Manitoba Unemployment compared to Immigration

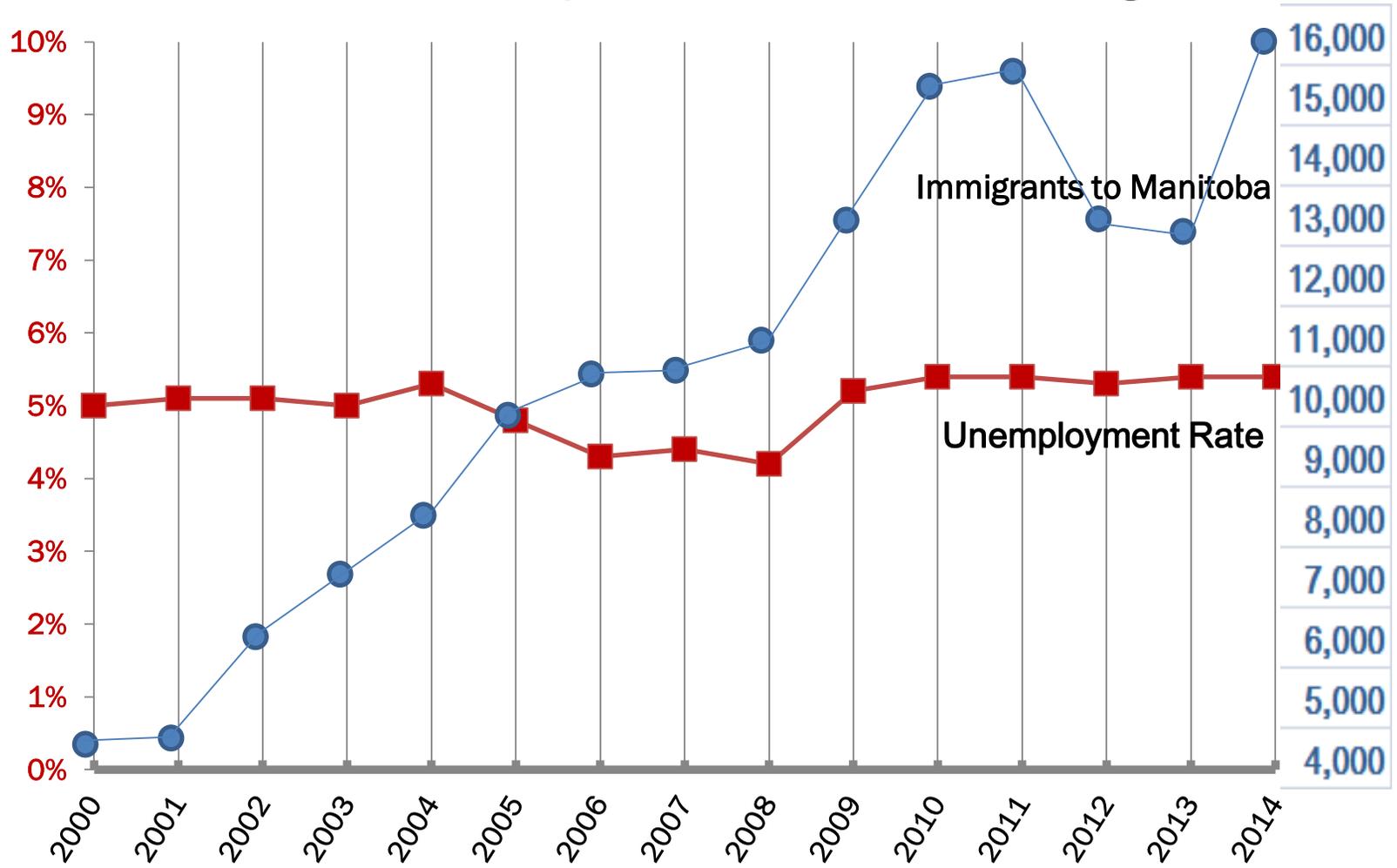


Chart 7

