



# Straddling the Border: Immigration Policy and the INS

*Lisa Magaña*

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With the dual and often conflicting responsibilities of deterring illegal immigration *and* providing services to legal immigrants, the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is a bureaucracy beset with contradictions. Critics fault the agency for failing to stop the entry of undocumented workers from Mexico. Agency staff complain that harsh enforcement policies discourage legal immigrants from seeking INS aid, while ever-changing policy mandates from Congress and a lack of funding hinder both enforcement and service activities.

In this book, Lisa Magaña convincingly argues that a profound disconnection between national-level policymaking and local-level policy implementation prevents the INS from effectively fulfilling either its enforcement or its service mission. She begins with a history and analysis of the making of immigration policy which reveals that federal and state lawmakers respond more to the concerns, fears, and prejudices of the public than to the realities of immigration or the needs of the INS. She then illustrates the effects of shifting and conflicting mandates through case studies of INS implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Proposition 187, and the 1996 Welfare Reform and Responsibility Act and their impact on Mexican immigrants. Magaña concludes with fact-based recommendations to improve the agency's performance.

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