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**WSJ** takes a look at the war on drugs and Mexico.

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*A senior Mexican official who has spent more than two decades helping fight the government's war on drugs summed up recently what he's learned from his long career: "This war is not winnable." ...*

**Christopher Hitchens** wonders what new travel horror the public safety goobers are going to dream up for us.

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**Power Line's Paul Mirengoff** posts twice on the problems Obama has communicating to his generals.

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**John Steele Gordon** in Contentions tips us to Michael Barone's piece on population shifts.

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And here's [Mr. Barone](#). He thinks the big winner is Texas.

... No. 3 in percentage population growth in 2008-09 was giant Texas, the nation's second-most-populous state. Its population grew by almost half a million and accounted for 18 percent of the nation's total population growth. Texas had above-average immigrant growth, but domestic in-migration was nearly twice as high.

There may be lessons for public policy here. Texas over the decades has had low taxes (and no state income tax), low public spending and regulations that encourage job growth. It didn't have much of a housing bubble or a housing price bust.

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Bush's late job ratings may have been low, and Perry may be a wine that doesn't travel. But their approach to governing may not be lost even in Washington.

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**WSJ**

## **Saving Mexico**

***To weaken the cartels, some argue the U.S. should legalize marijuana, let cocaine pass through the Caribbean and take the profit motive out of the drug trade***

by David Luhn

*Mexico City*

In the 40 years since U.S. President Richard Nixon declared a "war on drugs," the supply and use of drugs has not changed in any fundamental way. The only difference: a taxpayer bill of more than \$1 trillion.

A senior Mexican official who has spent more than two decades helping fight the government's war on drugs summed up recently what he's learned from his long career: "This war is not winnable."

A man accused of involvement in a shooting of federal police officers was presented to the press at a news conference in Tijuana, Mexico, in October, holding an unloaded gun allegedly connected to the crime.

Just last week, Mexican Navy Special Forces swarmed a luxury apartment tower in a central city and gunned down Arturo Beltrán Leyva, a drug trafficker whose organization helped smuggle several billion dollars worth of cocaine and marijuana into the U.S. during the past decade, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Within days of Mr. Beltrán Leyva's death, Mexican officials were already trying to guess which of his lieutenants would take his place. Almost no one expected the death of Mr. Beltrán Leyva to slow down the business of drug trafficking or the horrific drug-related violence in Mexico that has claimed around 15,000 lives in the past three years. On Monday, hit men gunned down several family members of a Mexican naval officer who had been killed in the Beltrán Leyva raid. Four people have been arrested in connection with the killing, though Mexican authorities say the hit men are still at large.

Growing numbers of Mexican and U.S. officials say—at least privately—that the biggest step in hurting the business operations of Mexican cartels would be simply to legalize their main product: marijuana. Long the world's most popular illegal drug, marijuana accounts for more than half the revenues of Mexican cartels.

"Economically, there is no argument or solution other than legalization, at least of marijuana," said the top Mexican official matter-of-factly. The official said such a move would likely shift marijuana production entirely to places like California, where the drug can be grown more efficiently and closer to consumers. "Mexico's objective should be to make the U.S. self-sufficient in marijuana," he added with a grin.

Culiacan, Sinaloa is the unofficial capital of Mexico's drug-trafficking business. Given the shortened lifespan for drug traffickers, shrines and mausoleums honoring fallen narcos have become an integral part of the city's landscape. David Luhnaw and Jose de Cordoba report from Mexico.

He is not alone in his views. Earlier this year, three former Latin American presidents known for their free-market and conservative credentials—Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, Cesar Gaviria of Colombia and Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil—said governments should seriously consider legalizing marijuana as an effective tool against murderous drug gangs.

If the war on drugs has failed, analysts say it is partly because it has been waged almost entirely as a law-and-order issue, without understanding of how cartels work as a business.

For instance, U.S. anti-drug policy inadvertently helped Mexican gangs gain power. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. government cracked down on the transport of cocaine from Colombia to U.S. shores through the Caribbean, the lowest-cost supply route. But that simply diverted the flow to the next lowest-cost route: through Mexico. In 1991, 50% of the U.S.-bound cocaine came through Mexico. By 2004, 90% did. Mexico became the FedEx of the cocaine business.

That change in the supply chain came as Colombia waged a successful war to break up the country's Cali and Medellín cartels into dozens of smaller suppliers. Both moves helped the Mexican gangs, who gained pricing power in the market. Before, the Colombian cartels told Mexicans what price they would pay for wholesale cocaine. Now, Mexican gangs play smaller Colombian suppliers off of each other to get the best price. Mexican gangs are "price setters" instead of "price takers."

Some Mexican officials say privately that the U.S. should seriously consider allowing cocaine to pass more easily through the Caribbean again in order to squeeze Mexican gangs. "Would you rather destabilize small countries in the Caribbean or Mexico, which shares a 2,000-mile border with the U.S., is your third-biggest trading partner and has 100 million people?" one official said.

Today, the world's most successful drug trafficking organizations are found in Mexico. Unlike Colombian drug gangs in the 1980s, who relied almost entirely on cocaine, Mexican drug gangs are a one-stop shop for four big-time illicit drugs: marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines and heroin. Mexico is the world's second biggest producer of marijuana (the U.S. is No. 1), the major supplier of methamphetamines to the U.S., the key transit point for U.S.-bound cocaine from South America and the hemisphere's biggest producer of heroin.



*An agent carries marijuana plants at a large plantation found near San Cristobal de Coyutlan in August.*

This diversification helps them absorb shocks from the business. Sales of cocaine in the U.S., for instance, slipped slightly from 2006 to 2008. But that decline was more than made up for by growing sales of methamphetamines.

In many ways, illegal drugs are the most successful Mexican multinational enterprise, employing some 450,000 Mexicans and generating about \$20 billion in sales, second only behind the country's oil industry and automotive industry exports. This year, Forbes magazine put Mexican drug lord Joaquin "Shorty" Guzman as No. 401 on the world's list of billionaires.

Unlike their rough-hewn parents and uncles, today's young traffickers wear Armani suits, carry BlackBerrys and hit the gym for exercise. One drug lord's accountant who was arrested in 2006 had a mid-level job at Mexico's central bank for 15 years.

Recently, Mexico's deputy agriculture minister, Jeffrey Jones, told some of the country's leading farmers that they could learn a thing or two from Mexican drug traffickers. "It's a sector that has learned to identify markets and create the logistics to reach them," he said. Days later, Mr. Jones was forced to resign. "He may be right," one top Mexican official confided, "but you can't say things like that publicly."

Mr. Jones says he stands by his comments.

Because governments make drugs illegal, the risk associated with transporting them translates to high rewards for those willing to take that risk. The wholesale price of a single kilo of cocaine, for instance, costs \$1,200 in Colombia, \$2,300 in Panama, \$8,300 in Mexico, and between \$15,000 and \$25,000 in the U.S., depending on how close you are to the Mexican border. At a retail level on the streets of New York, it can run close to \$80,000. With markups like that, the business is bound to keep attracting new entrants, no matter what governments do to stop it.

Governments also have a hard time stopping the drugs trade because, like any good business, trafficking organizations innovate and adapt. Mexican customs has stumbled upon a long list of ingenious methods to transport cocaine, including one shipment of liquefied cocaine smuggled in red wine bottles. Another recent bust yielded 800 kilos of cocaine—worth an estimated \$40 million—stuffed inside a batch of frozen sharks.

After Mexico restricted the importation of pseudoephedrine to slow the manufacture of methamphetamines, drug gangs found another way to make the drug using different, unrestricted chemicals widely used in the perfume industry. "I've always thought these guys had a good research and development arm," says one exasperated Mexican official.

Advocates for drug legalization say making marijuana legal would cut the economic clout of Mexican cartels by half. Marijuana accounts for anywhere between 50% to 65% of Mexican cartel revenues, say Mexican and U.S. officials. While cocaine has higher profit margins, marijuana is a steady source of income that allows cartels to meet payroll and fund other activities.

Marijuana is also less risky to a drug gang's balance sheet. If a cocaine shipment is seized, the Mexican gang has to write off the expected profits from the shipment and the cost of paying Colombian suppliers, meaning they lose twice. But because gangs here grow their own marijuana, it's easier to absorb the losses from a seizure. Cartels also own the land where the marijuana is grown, meaning they can cheaply grow more supply rather than have to fork over more money to the Colombians for the next shipment of cocaine.

Several U.S. states like California and Oregon have decriminalized marijuana, making possession of small quantities a misdemeanor, like a parking ticket. Decriminalization falls short of legalization because the sale and distribution remain a serious felony. One of the big reasons for the move is to reduce the problem of overcrowded and costly prisons.

While this strategy may make sense domestically for the U.S., Mexican officials say it is the worst possible outcome for Mexico, because it guarantees demand for the drug by eliminating the risk that if you buy you go to jail. But it keeps the supply chain illegal, ensuring that organized crime will be the drug's supplier.

Making pot legal might actually increase violence south of the border even more in the short term, with drug gangs fighting over a smaller economic pie of the remaining illegal drugs. But it would eventually reduce the overall financial clout of cartels.

If more radical options like legalizing prove impossible, then some analysts say Washington and Mexico City should at least refocus the battle against drugs along economic lines.

Until recently, Mexican police almost never looked at a cartel's finances. During a 2006 raid of a drug trafficker's Mexico City home, police found a hand-written ledger describing the cartel's cocaine business for a single month: the price paid to Colombian suppliers (\$3,500 per kilo), the sale price here in Mexico (\$8,200 per kilo) and the cartel's net profit of \$18 million. Police didn't bother to keep the piece of paper, according to people who participated in the raid.

"We've been attacking the players rather than attacking the industry. We need to focus on shrinking their markets and raising their operating costs," said Alberto Islas, a 40-year-old with an economics degree from MIT who runs a private security consulting company in Mexico City.

For the first time, Mexico's government is paying more attention to drugs as a business. A new 2% tax on cash deposits greater than \$1,250 in bank accounts gives tax authorities a better picture of Mexico's cash economy—the currency of the drugs trade. Just this year, authorities found five people with unexplained cash deposits of more than \$4 million, including one from a man who doesn't even have a formal job.

Mexican customs is also trying—for the first time—to disrupt the flow of guns and money that return from the U.S. to Mexico in exchange for the drugs. Disrupting that flow is crucial to cartel finances: Mexican gangs send drugs north, and get cash and guns in return.

For decades, people crossing into the U.S. from Mexico have been subjected to rigorous checks, but Mexico never bothered to check people coming back from the other direction. Now, cars coming from the U.S. will be blocked by a mechanical arm. License-plate photographs will be run against a criminal database in



Mexico City, while a scale and vehicle-scanning system will determine if the car may be overloaded with contraband. Dogs trained to locate weapons and money will roam the area.

"Cash is king. Every bit of money we seize hits the cartels directly on the bottom line," says Alfredo Gutierrez Ortiz, the head of Mexico's tax authority.

But Mr. Gutierrez has also been around long enough to know Mexico is not going to stamp out the drugs trade here entirely.

"We must raise the transaction cost, make it too expensive for them to use Mexico as an export platform relative to other countries," he said. "But the demand itself—well, that's not going to go away."

## Slate's fighting words

### Flying High

*Why are we so bad at detecting the guilty and so good at collective punishment of the innocent?*  
by Christopher Hitchens

It's getting to the point where the twin news stories more or less write themselves. No sooner is the fanatical and homicidal Muslim arrested than it turns out that he (it won't be long until it is also she) has been known to the authorities for a long time. But somehow the watch list, the tipoff, the many worried reports from colleagues and relatives, the placing of the name on a "[central repository of information](#)" don't prevent the suspect from boarding a plane, changing planes, or bringing whatever he cares to bring onto a plane. This is now a tradition that stretches back to several of the murderers who boarded civilian aircraft on Sept. 11, 2001, having called attention to themselves by either a) being on watch lists already or b) weird behavior at heartland American flight schools. They didn't even bother to change their names.

So that's now more or less the routine for the guilty. (I am not making any presumption of innocence concerning Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.) But flick your eye across the page, or down it, and you will instantly see a different imperative for the innocent. "[New Restrictions Quickly Added for Travelers](#)," reads the inevitable headline just below the report on the notoriety of Abdulmutallab, whose own father had been sufficiently alarmed to [report his son](#) to the U.S. Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria, some time ago. (By the way, I make a safe prediction: Nobody in that embassy or anywhere else in our national security system will lose his or her job as a consequence of this most recent disgrace.)

In my boyhood, there were signs on English buses that declared, in bold letters, "No Spitting." At a tender age, I was able to work out that most people don't need to be told this, while those who do feel a desire to expectorate on public transport will require more discouragement than a mere sign. But I'd be wasting my time pointing this out to our majestic and sleepless protectors, who now boldly propose to prevent airline passengers from getting out of their seats for the last hour of any flight. Abdulmutallab made his bid in the last hour of *his* flight, after all. Yes, that ought to do it. It's also incredibly, nay, almost diabolically clever of our guardians to let it be known what the precise time limit will be. Oh, and by the way, any passenger courageous or resourceful enough to stand up and fight back will also have broken the brave new law.

For some years after 9/11, passengers were forbidden to get up and use the lavatory on the Washington-New York shuttle. Zero tolerance! I suppose it must eventually have occurred to somebody that this ban would not deter a person who was willing to die, so the rule was scrapped. But now the principle has been revisited for international flights. For many years after [the explosion of the TWA plane over Long Island](#) (a disaster that was later found to have nothing at all to do with international religious nihilism), you could not board an aircraft without being asked whether you had packed your own bags and had them under your control at all times. These two questions are the very ones to which a would-be hijacker or bomber would honestly and logically *have* to answer "yes." But answering "yes" to both was a condition of being allowed on the plane! Eventually, that heroic piece of stupidity was dropped as well. But now fresh idiocies are in store.

Nothing in your lap during final approach. Do you feel safer? If you were a suicide-killer, would you feel thwarted or deterred?

Why do we fail to detect or defeat the guilty, and why do we do so well at collective punishment of the innocent? The answer to the first question is: Because we can't—or won't. The answer to the second question is: Because we can. The fault here is not just with our endlessly incompetent security services, who give the benefit of the doubt to people who should have been arrested long ago or at least had their visas and travel rights revoked. It is also with a public opinion that sheepishly bleats to be made to "feel safe." The demand to satisfy that sad illusion can be met with relative ease if you pay enough people to stand around and stare significantly at the citizens' toothpaste. My impression as a frequent traveler is that intelligent Americans fail to protest at this inanity in case it is they who attract attention and end up on a no-fly list instead. Perfect.

It was reported over the weekend that in the aftermath of the Detroit fiasco, no official decision was made about whether to raise the designated "threat level" from orange. Orange! Could this possibly be because it would be panicky and ridiculous to change it to red and really, really absurd to lower it to yellow? But isn't it just as preposterous (and revealing), immediately after a known Muslim extremist has waltzed through every flimsy barrier, to leave it just where it was the day before?

What nobody in authority thinks us grown-up enough to be told is this: We had better get used to being the civilians who are under a relentless and planned assault from the pledged supporters of a wicked theocratic ideology. These people will kill themselves to attack hotels, weddings, buses, subways, cinemas, and trains. They consider Jews, Christians, Hindus, women, homosexuals, and dissident Muslims (to give only the main instances) to be divinely mandated slaughter victims. Our civil aviation is only the most psychologically frightening symbol of a plethora of potential targets. The future murderers will generally not be from refugee camps or slums (though they are being indoctrinated every day in our prisons); they will frequently be from educated backgrounds, and they will often not be from overseas at all. They are already in our suburbs and even in our military. We can expect to take casualties. The battle will go on for the rest of our lives. Those who plan our destruction know what they want, and they are prepared to kill and die for it. Those who don't get the point prefer to whine about "endless war," accidentally speaking the truth about something of which the attempted Christmas bombing over Michigan was only a foretaste. While we fumble with bureaucracy and euphemism, they are flying high.

## Power Line

### [What a mess](#)

Posted by Paul Mirengoff

Earlier this month, the [Washington Post reported](#) that the administration's delay in formulating a new strategy for Afghanistan was caused in part by confusion over the mission. President Obama had given Gen. McChrystal one concept of the mission in March, McChrystal had developed a new strategy based on that mission over the summer, but the White House opted in September for a new, somewhat different concept of the mission. Thus, the administration had to return to the drawing board, and its plan was not unveiled until December.

Now, after Obama has announced the new strategy and it is being implemented, [the Post reports](#) that there is still serious disagreement about just what the strategy is. According to the Post, the military sees its mission as mounting a comprehensive counterinsurgency operation, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale than originally envisaged.

But apparently many within the White House don't see the strategy that way. For example, Joe Biden has said that "the strategy has fundamentally changed" and that "this is not a COIN [counterinsurgency] strategy." It is not clear, at least from the Post's report, exactly what the new strategy is if not a somewhat

scaled-back version of the counterinsurgency strategy that McChrystal originally proposed. What is clear is that even after nearly a year of back and forth, the folks who count still are not on the same page when it comes to fighting this war.

The Post suggests that part of the gap between the military's view of its mission and that of the White House stems from the military's commitment to counterinsurgency. In this account, the military is straining to bend the mission back in the direction of what McChrystal wanted all along, a direction the White House has not really embraced.

But the real problem appears to be what the Post calls "ambiguity over the meaning of the July 2011 deadline" for beginning the withdrawal. And the fault for this clearly lies with the administration. At times, administration spokesmen have indicated that a serious drawdown will begin in July 2011. At other times, they have made it sound, instead, as if the drawdown will be less drastic and more contingent on conditions on the ground. Thus, one senior military officer in Afghanistan is quoted by the Post as saying that he and his fellow soldiers "don't know if this is all over in 18 months or whether this is just a progress report that leads to minor changes."

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the military is resolving the White House's ambiguity in favor of trying to win the war they have been tasked with fighting. Indeed, Secretary of Defense Gates has stated that "we are in this thing to win" and that "from a moral perspective, when you ask soldiers and families to sacrifice, we do that to win."

Yet, Obama did not use either the word "win" or the word "victory" in his speech at West Point in which he announced the new strategy. And he has said he is uncomfortable using the term "victory" in the context of the fight against "non-state actors."

The real problem, then, seems to be this: from the military's perspective, fighting a war for any reason other than to win makes no sense, but from Obama's perspective it makes no sense to fight this war to win. The administration, though, isn't quite prepared to tell the military (or the nation as a whole) that we should not to fight to win. So it sends mixed signals and hopes for the best.

This is a recipe for disaster.

## Power Line

### [Lawyers at war](#)

Posted by Paul Mirengoff

The inability of commanders in the field to provide their troops with clear instructions has been a chronic problem throughout the history of warfare. Battles have been lost as a result. Generals Grant and Sherman are often singled out for their ability during the Civil War to give exceptionally clear orders, and some of their success has been attributed to this skill. (Sherman's clarity carried over into the field of politics where he famously stated "if nominated I will not run; if elected I will not serve.")

It isn't surprising that, during the heat of battle, commanders struggle to put their quickly formed ideas into precise words. But what should we make of President Obama's [apparent failure](#) during the course of many months to communicate his precise intentions for carrying out the war in Afghanistan?

Clearly, it is not due to the intense pressure of the battlefield. We must conclude, I think, that Obama is either incompetent at formulating his thoughts or he is intentionally introducing ambiguity into his war plans. The former possibility is extremely difficult to reconcile with what we know about Obama. Thus, it seems likely that Obama's ambiguity about Afghanistan is intentional.



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This may well be Obama's purpose when it comes to Afghanistan. Like many politicians, Obama likes to tell people what they want to hear. Constituencies important to Obama want to hear divergent things about Afghanistan. His base wants to hear, at a minimum, that we will be out of that country soon. A critical mass of mainstream voters wants to hear that he we won't be there for a lengthy period of time. The military wants to hear that we will fight to win.

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If so, it is inexcusable. It is one thing (though not desirable) for a president to confuse the public; it's another thing for a president to confuse his generals. One cannot wordsmith one's way around the difficult decisions associated with conducting a war. I suspect only a lawyer would think of trying.

## Contentions

### [Texas Bloom](#)

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The Census Bureau has come out with its annual state-by-state head count and it makes for interesting reading. There is no one better than Michael Barone at the art of looking at numbers and bringing them to life. He notes that Texas had the highest population gain (and third highest in percentage terms) and thinks he knows why:

Texas had above-average immigrant growth, but domestic in-migration was nearly twice as high. There may be lessons for public policy here. Texas over the decades has had low taxes (and no state income tax), low public spending and regulations that encourage job growth. It didn't have much of a housing bubble or a housing price bust. Under Govs. George W. Bush and Rick Perry, it has placed tight limits on tort lawsuits and has seen an influx of both corporate headquarters and medical doctors.

Because of its population growth, Texas is likely to gain four new House seats in 2012. Florida, Utah, Arizona, and Nevada will each gain one. For the first time since it became a state in 1850, California will not gain any seats in the House, and New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois will all lose a seat and Ohio will probably lose two.

No wonder the Obama administration is in such a hurry to lock in its far-left policies. As Barone explains, "Americans have been moving, even in recession, away from Democratic strongholds and toward Republican turf."

Every year roundabout Christmastime the Census Bureau releases its population estimates for each state for the 12 months ending on July 1. The numbers look dry on a sheet of paper (or on an Excel spreadsheet on your computer), but they tell some vivid stories. The more so when they reflect, as the numbers for 2008-09 do, the effects of a sharp downward shift in the nation's economy.

Given the recession, it's not a surprise that percentage growth, at 0.86 percent, was the lowest in this decade, just a tad below the rate in 2002-03 and well below the peak years of 2000-01 (which doesn't include Sept. 11) and 2006-07. Immigration is down sharply, and some indicators suggest that illegal immigrants, in particular, are returning to their countries of origin.

Also, internal mobility is down. In times of economic troubles, people tend to stay put. When we think of the 1930s, we tend to think of the Okies leaving the Dust Bowl for the green land of California. But the Okies were the exception. The vast bulk of Americans in the Depression decade stayed home and tended their gardens.

One thing that stands out from the 2008-09 numbers is that Americans are no longer flocking to the resorts of the Sun Belt. Florida's growth was well below the national average, as it was in the previous year, in contrast to its torrid growth over most of the last century.

California grew at only a little more than the national average, entirely because of immigrant inflow and high immigrant birth rates. More Americans are leaving California and Florida than moving in.

The same is true of Nevada and Arizona. For most of the last two decades, they have been our two fastest-growing states; Las Vegas and Phoenix have become major metropolises in the desert.

But now they're metropolises in trouble, with the nation's highest foreclosure rates and collapsed construction and real estate industries. Nevada was only the 16th-fastest-growing state in 2008-09, and that's only because of (decreased) immigrant inflow. Arizona, the fastest-growing state in the previous year, now ranks No. 7.

Immigration into Nevada, Arizona and California continues, though at lower rates than earlier in the decade. Interestingly, several Northeastern states -- New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island -- continue to attract large percentages of immigrants, but even they (except for Massachusetts) suffer from domestic outflow. Public policies -- high taxes and welfare benefits -- may account for these seemingly contradictory trends.

In contrast, this recession has seen several states move from below-average to above-average population growth. They include Oklahoma, with its energy-based economy; Tennessee, one of the few states without an income tax; and South Dakota, with its thriving credit card economy.

The state with the fastest population growth in 2008-09 was demographically tiny Wyoming, the nation's largest coal producer, which has had a higher rate of domestic in-migration than any other state. Just behind, at No. 2, was Utah. With the nation's largest birth rates and largest families, Utah demographically resembles the America of the 1950s.

No. 3 in percentage population growth in 2008-09 was giant Texas, the nation's second-most-populous state. Its population grew by almost half a million and accounted for 18 percent of the nation's total population growth. Texas had above-average immigrant growth, but domestic in-migration was nearly twice as high.

There may be lessons for public policy here. Texas over the decades has had low taxes (and no state income tax), low public spending and regulations that encourage job growth. It didn't have much of a housing bubble or a housing price bust.

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Bush's late job ratings may have been low, and Perry may be a wine that doesn't travel. But their approach to governing may not be lost even in Washington.

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