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From Huntington's Cultural Threats to Empirical Failures: Desecuritizing Trump's Immigration Policy Through Douglas Massey

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Abstract

An “immigration policy” is not just about laws and borders; it deeply affects people's lives. This paper critically evaluates the “efficiency” and “legitimacy” of restrictive border controls, often justified by claims of a “cultural threat narrative”. It assesses the arguments of scholars like Samuel P. Huntington against the data-driven research of Douglas Massey, which exposes the counterproductive upshots of these policies. The analysis exhibits that harsh enforcement does not stop migration; it fuels social marginalisation, separates families, and undermines basic human rights. This paper calls for policies grounded in compassion with empathetic understanding of immigrants' perspectives and a realistic policy formulation regarding migration dynamics.

Keywords: The US immigration policy, Restrictive border controls, Cultural threat narrative, Douglas Massey, Samuel P. Huntington

Introduction

With the return of Donald Trump to the Oval Office in January 2025, the US immigration policy has again been centred on the issue of restrictive border controls. Before that, in November 2024, Donald Trump pledged to expand the Border Patrol by 10,000 agents as part of a broader immigration enforcement strategy (Iruoma, 2024). In February 2025, the Trump administration started the restructuring of federal immigration enforcement mechanisms to actualise its campaign promise of mass deportations. The strategy is underpinned by rhetoric invoking an “invasion” to justify this aggressive approach (Chishti & Putzel-Kavanaugh, 2025). In executing this mandate, the administration has repurposed federal agencies—including the Internal Revenue Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives—for roles in immigration enforcement that they had not traditionally performed. Additionally, other federal law enforcement bodies have been directed to prioritise deportation operations. Notably, the military's involvement has expanded significantly: troops have been deployed to

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the US-Mexico border, military aircraft are now used for deportation flights, and noncitizens arrested within the US have been detained at the Guantanamo Bay facility.

Latino leaders and Congressional Hispanic Caucus Democrats have critiqued the Trump administration's emphasis on high-profile immigration raids, arguing that these actions have instilled fear rather than addressing pressing economic concerns for Latino communities (Figueroa et al., 2025). Key voices in the debate, including Janet Murguía of UnidosUS and Frankie Miranda of the Hispanic Federation, note that critical issues—such as rising living costs, affordable housing, and healthcare access—remain unaddressed, despite being significant factors for Latino voters.

However, scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington advocated that robust border security is imperative to safeguard “national security” as well as to preserve a cultural and social order, arguing that the sustained inflow of Hispanic immigrants poses a cultural challenge (Huntington, 2004). According to Huntington, the influx of Hispanic immigrants who maintain their Spanish language traditions and social habits endangers the separation of the US society into two groups with divergent values, which he believes weakens the nation's Anglo-Protestant cultural values. Contrariwise, Douglas Massey challenges the ideas regarding restrictive border controls in his rigorous data-driven critique. Massey notes the arguments as “myths” and argues that such policies are not only “inefficient” at deterring unauthorised migration but also engender a host of counterproductive consequences (Massey, 2015, p. 01). Massey's analysis suggests that the problems of socio-economic exclusion, legal disenfranchisement, and the enormous fiscal burden of enforcement measures regarding the Hispanic population are not accidental byproducts but rather inherent outcomes of the US's own policy framework that prioritises restriction over integration.

With the arguments offered by Douglas Massey, it becomes palpable that restrictive border controls are neither “efficient” nor “legitimate” (Massey, 2015, p. 03; Guiraudon, 2003). He notes that such policies' moral and political foundations are problematic as they endorse marginalisation and exclusion, undermining the democratic principles of human rights. In contrast to Huntington's “cultural threat narrative”, Massey's critique offers a more robust framework for understanding the unintended consequences of restrictive border controls. Therefore, this analysis asserts that restrictive border policies fail both on the grounds of “efficiency”—by not deterring migration in a cost-effective manner—and “legitimacy”—by perpetuating significant social and legal inequities.

Given the dynamics, to draw an answer to the (research) questions—*how do the structural inefficiencies contribute to the long-term failure of the policies in achieving sustainable and just border management, and how are restrictive border controls both inefficient and illegitimate?*—this paper revolves around seven sections. The first section sheds light on the conceptual and analytical framework, defining “efficiency” and “legitimacy”. The second section deals with the legal and ethical appraisals of the discourse of “legitimacy” in the US immigration with critical perspectives. The third section focuses on the paradox of “efficiency”, while the fourth section discusses the debate on “legitimacy” in border control. The fifth section sheds light on the human toll of the US immigration enforcement. The sixth section comparatively and critically evaluates Massey's contribution vs. Huntington's. Before the concluding remarks, the seventh section offers some policy suggestions and alternative approaches, with consideration of the empathetic aspects of immigrants and their flow. Finally, the paper



concludes with the argument that restrictive border controls are neither efficient nor legitimate.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework: Defining “Efficiency” and “Legitimacy”

In the critical debate of migration, it is essential to define the concepts of “efficiency” and “legitimacy” as they are germane to border control policies. In this regard, “efficiency” refers to the extent to which restrictive border actions can succeed in their planned objectives—primarily, the dissuasion of unauthorised migration—in a way that is both cost-effective and sustainable (Facchini & Testa, 2015). This includes assessing whether such policies successfully deter illegal border entries, the related financial expenditures on enforcement agencies, and the overall impact on migration flows (Cornelius, 2001). Efficiency, thus, is measured by the number of migrants deterred as well as by the economic and administrative costs incurred in the process.

On the other hand, “legitimacy” covers a wide area of issues, including legal, moral, normative, and socio-political dynamics (Fassin, 2011). A policy is regarded as legitimate when legal approval supports it alongside respect for fair treatment and human rights. A legitimate state action requires valid enforcement practices that align with principles of justice and equality while also being successful and permissible (Sandven, 2024). The legitimacy of the immigration policy depends on finding the right balance between safeguarding borders and defending the human rights of all individuals, regardless of immigration status.

However, to study the “efficiency” and “legitimacy” of border restriction policies, the analytical framework of this paper uses two notable contributions in this regard put forward by Samuel P. Huntington and Douglas Massey in their articles, subsequently *The Hispanic Challenge* (2004) and *The Real Hispanic Challenge* (2015). In this regard, this study will put more focus on Massey’s explanation of the efficiency and legitimacy regarding border restriction policies using his empirical findings. In contrast to Huntington’s “cultural threat narrative”, through evidence-based research, Massey debunks the arguments (referring to them as “myths”) of Huntington and demonstrates that migration restrictions have not stopped the Hispanic population from moving to the US and have created more severe problems than they prevented (Massey, 2015, p. 01-02). The paper compares these views to determine if border control restrictions are “efficient” and “legitimate”.

Missing “Legitimacy” in the US Immigration Policies: Legal and Ethical Appraisals with Critical Perspectives

“Legitimacy” is composed of many issues, like “legality, morality, and democracy” of immigration policies. There are moral and legal ramifications of the policies, as this discussion explores the compatibility of these policies, their effect on systemic and individual justice, as well as human rights, and the norms of the rules-based order.

Legal Foundations and Human Rights

Roos & Zaun (2014) and Yong (2018) argue that there can be no suitable and acceptable immigration policy that does not have any compliance with domestic law and international legal obligations. Being a party to many international treaties, the US has obligations that protect the rights of human beings regardless of their status, including the status of migrants.

Every person has the same inherent rights, such as those set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) that belong to all nations, the US included (Joseph, 2010). As an example, Article 14 of the UDHR establishes the right to seek asylum due to persecution, and Article 13 of the ICCPR prohibits the arbitrary expulsion of foreigners (OHCHR, 1966; United Nations, 1948). Those terms are meant to ensure that someone cannot be sent home where they may have their life or liberty threatened. However, the recent US policies under the Trump administration, such as the end of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for/and banning individuals from countries including Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, and Nicaragua—have given rise to doubts over whether the US is fulfilling these international obligations (Blanes et al., 2025). In addition, a fundamental tenet of international refugee law is that of “non-refoulement”, which forbids the return of people to countries where they may face persecution. In this regard, Trump’s immigration ambition clashes with the law on sending migrants to perilous countries, violating the prohibition on torture (CVT, 2025; The New York Times, 2025). In particular, the US has faced scrutiny for practices that would seemingly violate the principle of “non-refoulement”, for instance, forced deportations to human rights-abusing nations. Non-refoulement is more than a rule of law; it is an affirmation of human dignity and justice for which a nation stands.

Ethical Considerations and Justice

Aside from the legality, the “ethical soundness” of immigration policies is essential. Carens (2010) has shown that, in fact, the right to free movement is a basic human right that deserves respect regardless of the fact that the international community has far from agreed on the matter. Ethically, the US’s “restrictive” immigration policies that block the door to better lives or safe, secure homes must come under the spotlight. At the heart of the ethical debate is the trade-off between a state’s prerogative to regulate entry and an individual’s right to enter. If immigration invokes significant state interests, such interests must be compared and balanced against an unequivocal moral duty to assist the most vulnerable segments of the population (Bader, 2005; Weiner, 1996). Immigration law is undergirded by an ethical foundation that is compromised by pandemic-era policies that target marginalised groups or that rely on discriminatory baselines (Lambrinou, 2023). In addition, according to the ethical principle of justice, immigration policies should be fair and equitable. Policies that separate families, lock up kids, or deny them due process are antithetical to the rule of law, justice, and human rights. These not only miffed individuals but also erode the ethical fabric of the nation.

Democratic Norms and Public Participation

As democratic legitimacy fits into the equation, it means that any immigration policy should represent the democratic will and democratic values of the people. Since the very beginning of the second tenure, the Trump administration has been violating legal norms in its push to remove noncitizens (Villarreal, 2025). The US immigration laws and policies would be enacted through open legislative processes and thus would be open to judicial review. Moreover, immigration policies should, of course, be subjected to independent monitoring and checks, whether by the judiciary or by civil society groups, going beyond asymmetric decisions by executive orders (Choi et al., 2025). In particular, the absence of accountability and transparency in specific immigration enforcement practices (e.g., surveillance technologies and biometric data) creates notable obstacles to the realisation of democratic norms (Zuboff,



2019). Also, democratic legitimacy is intrinsically tied to public participation. In recent times, under Trump, the US immigration policies lack fully participatory and inclusive processes that involve all relevant stakeholders—immigrant communities, advocacy groups, and even ordinary people (Watson & Zars, 2025). Such unilateralism leads to the perceived illegitimacy of policies and invites social unrest and discontentment.

Balancing Sovereignty and Human Rights

A primary issue in evaluating the legitimacy of immigration policy is, therefore, the need to reconcile state sovereignty with international human rights norms (Cornelisse, 2010). It is the sovereign right of a state to manage its borders and set limits on what constitutes immigration. That said, this right is not unlimited and should be enjoyed in accordance with international human rights law (Bosniak, 1991). In the context of the US, parallel controversies occur over the meaning and intelligibility of international human rights law. Although the US has not signed on to all major international human rights treaties, it has ratified important instruments, including the ICCPR, which impacts the US's obligations to migrants. It is, therefore, a national policy challenge to ensure that these international commitments are incorporated into the national context, especially when national security concerns are raised.

However, the US immigration policies cannot be judged only on national interests or political expediency. Such an evaluation should take into account not just legal obligations but also ethical principles and democratic norms. Policies that contravene international human rights standards or disadvantage vulnerable groups naturally undermine democratic processes and lack legitimacy. To retain any semblance of moral authority and the ability to call on others to uphold democratic values, the US must make sure its immigration policies reflect human rights ideals and commitments to the rest of the world. This is the only way for the US can create an immigration policy that works and that the world will see as “legitimate”.

The Paradox of “Efficiency”: How Strict Border Controls Backfire

As voiced by Huntington, a strong border policy system is crucial for both national security and the preservation of a culturally homogenous society. In this perspective, stringent border restrictions are considered “efficient” by Huntington to prevent an inflow of culturally diverse Hispanic people, who are viewed as “threats” to the established cultural and social order of the US and a challenge to the status quo, i.e. the Anglo-Protestant cultural values (Huntington, 2004). Douglas Massey's study, however, presents a persuasive counterargument to these assumptions by showing that severe border restrictions not only inadequately dissuade unlawful migration but also impose significant economic and social costs and imperil the socio-cultural security of Hispanic immigrants. In his article, he marked the argument of Huntington on “restrictive border policies (are efficient) reduce the size of the Hispanic population” as a “myth” (Massey, 2015, p. 03). With data and evidence, Massey's argument debunks that such policies are not “efficient” to control—and ultimately reduce—the Hispanic population.

To support his argument, Massey exhibited that the budget for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) grew from \$63 million in 1975 to \$5.1 billion in 2003 (Massey, 2015, p. 03). Likewise, the budgetary appropriations for the Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have seen notable surges, indicating a substantial and persistent strive to implement border regulations (see Figure 1). Massey also argued that the

heightened enforcement made crossing the border more dangerous and costly. Being less likely to return to Mexico and instead of engaging in cyclical migration, they tended to remain permanently, thereby increasing the size of the undocumented Hispanic population in the US.

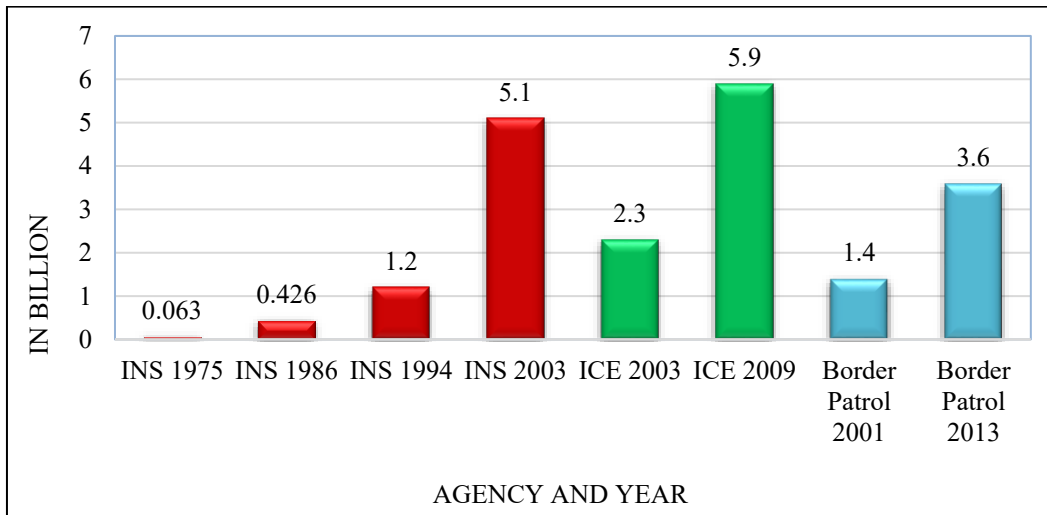


Figure 1: The US Immigration Enforcement Budgets (1975-2013). Data Source: Office of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Borrowed from the Article by Massey (2015). The graph is prepared by the author.

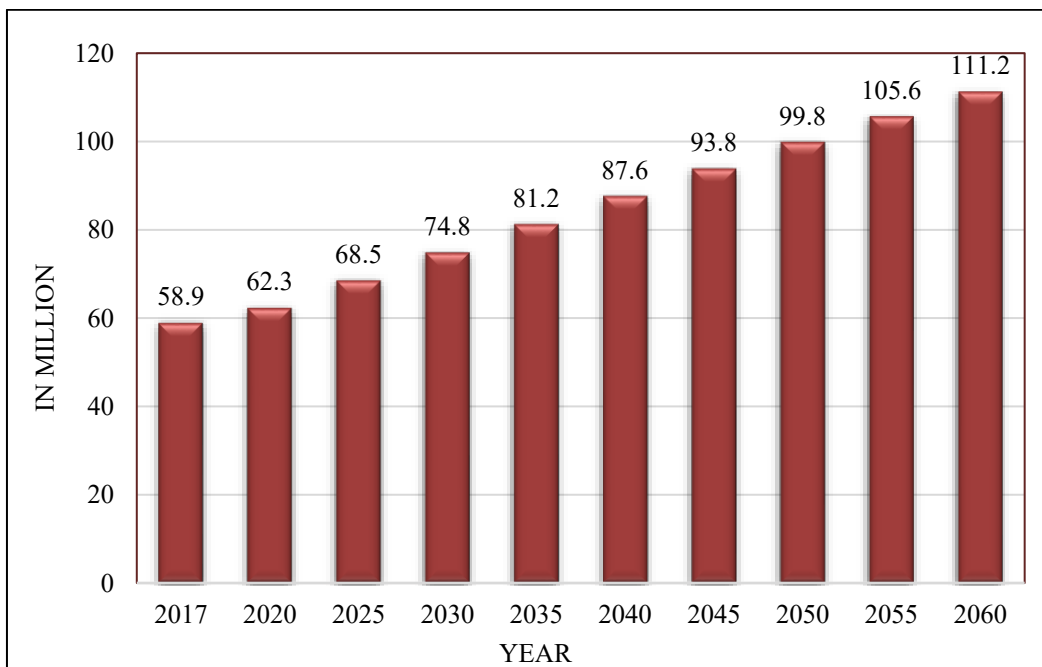


Figure 2: Projected Hispanic Population in the United States. Data Source: (The US Census Bureau, 2017). Prepared by the author.



A significant proportion of undocumented immigrants also entered as minors and are already well-integrated (in terms of coping with the English language and education). Massey also showed that from 1975 to 1986, the undocumented population reached about 3.2 million in the US. From 1990 to 1996, the growth resumed at roughly 350,000 additional persons per year (Massey, 2015, p. 04). Similarly, if we look at the recent data, we discern that the border patrol budget of the US has increased in a greater number, reaching 5.4 billion US dollars in 2024 (see Figure 03). Rather than shrinking, the Hispanic population has increased over the years (see Figure 02), and the restrictive policies have resulted in a large, permanently undocumented community that is socially and economically marginalised.

Such restrictive policies, instead of producing a corresponding reduction of the Hispanic population, have resulted in unforeseen effects. The outcome of these measures—where heightened enforcement results in less return migration—illustrates that the policy was inherently “inefficient”.

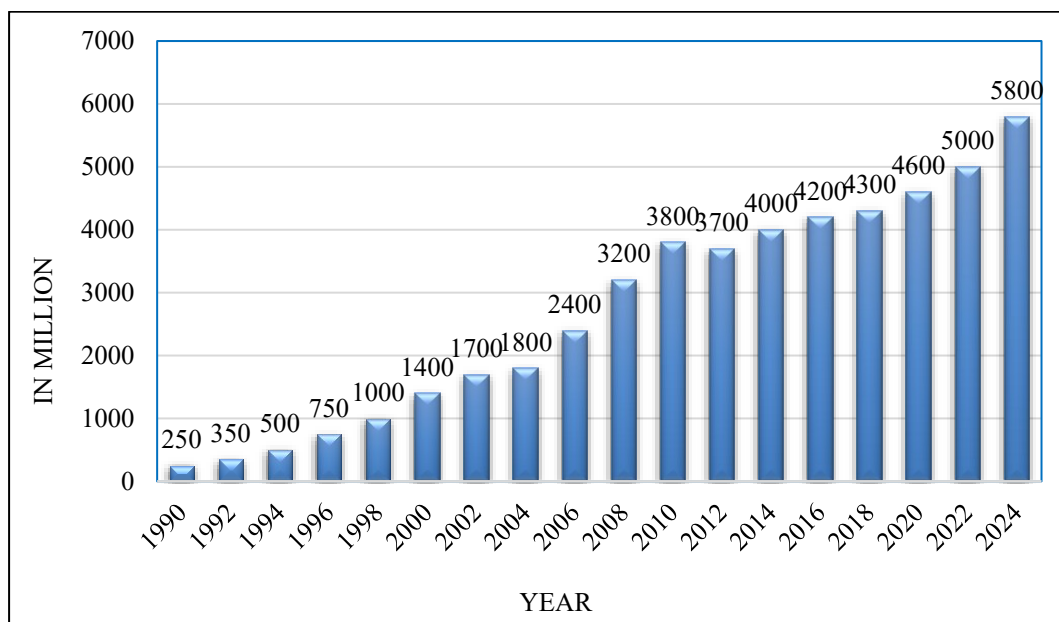


Figure 3: The US Enacted Border Patrol Program Budget (1990-2024). Data Source: (Statista Research Department, 2024). Prepared by the author.

Debate on “Legitimacy” in Border Control

A policy is deemed valid and “legitimate” if it is founded on justice, upholds human dignity, and aligns with democratic principles (Fassin, 2011). Any immigration policy must undergo a stringent ethical evaluation and should foster integration instead of exclusion.

However, Huntington’s advocacy for stringent border restrictions against the Hispanic population is argued to be closely linked to a “cultural justification” that asserts these actions are essential for safeguarding “national identity” (Yzaguirre et al., 2004). Huntington argues that the continuous influx of Hispanic immigrants constitutes a substantial cultural challenge that may divide the United States into disparate, culturally incompatible factions. When examined critically and via a data-driven perspective of Massey and other scholars,

Huntington's viewpoint appears mostly ideological and problematic, depending on a deterministic interpretation of culture that does not address the actual realities of immigrant integration (Citrin et al., 2007; Massey, 2015).

In this respect, Massey criticises the “legitimacy” of severe border restrictions by emphasising their human and ethical ramifications. Massey argues that these regulations render migration a “criminal act”, fostering a milieu in which people are compelled into “illegality” not by will but by the stringent limitations of the state's policy-oriented framework itself (Massey, 2015, p. 03-04). Moreover, Massey's explanation is further corroborated by compelling empirical evidence. He records that deportations have significantly increased over time—from an average of 29,000 per year between 1975 and 1995 to around 189,000 per year after 2001, culminating at 438,000 in 2013 (Massey, 2015, p. 04). These statistics underscore both the human toll of these policies and their ineffectiveness in fulfilling the commitment to reduce unlawful migration. Massey's evidence-based assessment illustrates that the “legitimacy” of rigorous border restrictions is fundamentally compromised by their detrimental effects on human rights and social cohesiveness. Therefore, the policy of strict border restriction is “illegitimate”, while the states should focus on the socio-cultural causes behind the migration and the broader implications of these policies and ensure the human rights of the migrants.

Human Toll of the US Immigration Enforcement: Some Case Studies

Immigration debates often revolve around numbers and statutes, yet their real weight is measured in human lives. The following case studies trace the journeys of children, students, workers, and families whose safety, health, and futures were upended by recent US immigration actions. By spotlighting medical crises, school disruptions, wrongful deportations, and mental-health fallout, these narratives reveal how policy decisions cascade far beyond courtrooms and detention centres.

Case Study 1: Medical Parole for a 4-Year-Old Girl

A gut-wrenching example is a Mexican 4-year-old girl with short bowel syndrome requiring 14 hours of IV nutrition per day (Associated Press, 2025). She came to the US–Mexico border in 2023 with her mother when they needed medical care not available to them in Mexico. In April 2025, her humanitarian parole was revoked, jeopardising her access to life-saving treatment. The decision to let their parole stand was all but confirmed, as public outcry combined with the intervention of lawmakers and advocacy groups whittled away the state's determination to pull the child from the treatment in California (Paúl, 2025). By the time their parole was subsequently restored in June 2025, her mom brought her to the US on a one-year humanitarian parole, and the girl, who continues to receive treatment at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, now lives in Bakersfield, California. Lawyers derided the absence of correspondence from government movement specialists after the procedure disappointment and called for a more receptive and empathetic framework. This case is one of many ways that the humane immigration policy saves the health and lives of the more vulnerable.



Case Study 2: Detention of a High School Student

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer arrested Marcelo Gomes da Silva, an 18-year-old high school student from Brazil, leaving his home in Milford, Massachusetts, in June 2025, as he was on his way to volleyball practice (Ramer & Willingham, 2025). Marcelo's father was being pursued by ICE, but when they found him, they arrested him due to his expired student visa. The detention ignited outrage, students leaving campus, and educators condemning the action. Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey also urged that he be freed, saying he was an honours student and involved in activities in his neighbourhood since the age of 5. Marcelo and his brother were picked up by ICE as soon as they got out of court, but a judge ordered that ICE would not be allowed to move Marcelo outside of Massachusetts unless they gave 48 hours notice to do it so he could get a lawyer to try to work out his release while the immigration proceedings were going on (Ramer & Willingham, 2025).

Case Study 3: Family Separation and Deportation

Even though a judge ordered him not to deport him, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Salvadoran immigrant, was deported in March 2025 while awaiting a ruling on his legal status here and whether he will be allowed to stay in the country under the TPS (Finley, 2025). He was taken to El Salvador's maximum-security Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT), a place infamous for its brutal treatment of those held there. While the US government initially referred to the deportation as an error, officials later justified it by describing Garcia as an MS-13 gang member, although the characterisation was based on unproven assertions (Reuters, 2025). Those allegations have been disputed by Garcia's family and legal representatives, who say that Garcia is not a gang member. The case has garnered national attention, with political leaders and human rights groups condemning moves by the government. A federal judge ordered that the government work to bring Garcia back, but diplomatic freezes with El Salvador have complicated efforts. By the way, Garcia, instead, was deported in 2025, despite having a legal status, and protests broke out around the country, lawsuits were filed against the decision, and Garcia was eventually granted a permanent resident status (Romero, 2025). However, it did not last long. His case highlights just how easily someone with TPS can become subject to, in this case, wrongful deportation, despite being here legally.

Case Study 4: Impact on Immigrant Workers

The removal of protections for migrants under the Trump administration led many companies to fire migrant workers, resulting in them losing their jobs. In Florida, Walmart fired workers who could not prove that they had lawful permission to work, a situation created by previous administrations' cancellation of the TPS (Zilber, 2025). The change in policy has terrified immigrant workers (who make up a large part of the retail and hospitality sectors). The reason such policies face antagonism is, for the most part, the economic insecurity stemming from them, highlighting the necessity for reforms that place value in the rights and livelihoods of workers.

Case Study 5: Deportation of a US Citizen

Mark Daniel Lyttle, a US citizen with bipolar disorder and cognitive impairment, was deported to Mexico in 2008 because of clerical errors and racial profiling (Finnegan, 2013). His case

underscores both systemic failures in the immigration enforcement system and the risks of wrongful deportation for people with disabilities. His deportation and the years spent in court taking on the government should remind us all how critical it is to protect due process rights for anyone inside our borders, without regard to immigration status (Brumbach, 2010).

The case studies offer strong evidence of how harsh immigration policies have real-life consequences for individuals and families. These narratives bring to the fore the discourse surrounding policies on immigration, adding layers to the analysis of their real-world impacts and demonstrating a pressing need for reforms from the top down that prioritise the human dignity and rights of refugees and displaced persons.

Comparative Evaluation: Weighing Massey vs. Huntington

Based on the above discussions, coming back to the critical review of the literature, we see that Douglas Massey's analysis is robust for its reliance on empirical data and historical trends, based on a solid foundation for assessing the "efficiency" and "legitimacy". His claim is anchored in quantifiable evidence that increased enforcement does not deter migration but rather transforms what might have been temporary or cyclical flows into a permanently undocumented population. In contrast, with the "cultural threat narrative", Huntington contends that the influx of immigrants with distinct linguistic and cultural practices will fragment American society, undermining its traditional Anglo-Protestant foundations. However, this perspective largely ignores the well-documented adaptive and assimilative processes, as empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that Hispanic immigrants, like previous waves of immigrants, tend to assimilate over time—adopting the English language and integrating it into the socio-economic fabric of the country (Citrin et al., 2007). By relying on an ideologically driven narrative rather than empirical validation, Huntington's argument fails to account for the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural integration, while Massey's arguments, based on empirical data, exhibits how state-driven border restriction cannot be "efficient" and "legitimate", if they do not consider the perspectives of immigrants and think of long-term solution (Saenz et al., 2007). In this respect, only the policies based on compassion, pragmatism, and empathetic understandings of the immigrants' perspectives can embolden policy decisions of any state, including the US.

Alternative Policy Approaches: A Call for Compassionate and Pragmatic Reform

The US immigration policy is undergoing a most tumultuous period, especially under the current Trump administration, which has pushed toward a more restrictive approach that includes increased deportation, the creation of a "remigration" office and the rescission of temporary protections for hundreds of thousands of migrants. The policies are not without controversy and criticism regarding undermining human rights and social cohesion. In contrast, a strong need to look for different policy strategies that need to focus more on practical aspects as well, so that immigration systems can be effective plus humane.

Humanitarian Parole and Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

Both humanitarian parole and TPS are important tools that allow people to be present in the US temporarily based on special humanitarian circumstances or the dangers escalating in their countries of origin (Schoenholtz, 2019). The case of a child needing life-saving treatments in



the US and granted humanitarian parole, only to have it rescinded (though it has been restored), is an example of why humanitarian parole is crucial. Filling them in and protecting them from loss can also deliver immediate benefits to at-risk groups, such as displaced people escaping conflict and people in need of urgent medical services.

Community-Based Alternatives to Detention

Detention centres have long served as the front line of US immigration enforcement, but increasing criticism over their cost and impact on human rights has put them under the microscope more and more in recent years. Studies such as those by Estevez (2022) show that community-based case management systems with legal assistance and monitoring, as opposed to detention, are a better and more humane solution. These alternatives can minimise the trauma of detention, costs, and increase compliance with immigration proceedings.

Restoring Due Process and Access to Legal Representation

That everyone has the right to an attorney and a level playing field is vital in maintaining the rule of law. Current policies have important legal and ethical consequences related to the broad practices of expedited removal and diminished due process rights. While the immigration system should encourage the provision of strong legal aid services, the protection of the right to a fair hearing should also be preserved to strengthen the credibility of such services and prevent illegal deportation (Dauscher, 2021).

Pathways to Citizenship and Legal Status

Massey & Malone (2002) argue that granting reasonable citizenship opportunities to those who have deep roots growing in the US (impossible to remove) would allow for a full involvement and contribution to society, helping build society rather than breaking it apart. Temporary legal status with a path to permanent residency programs that encourage people to come forward, and be part of the community, solve underground economy commitment problems and create a class of permanent residents who may be socially assimilated.

International Cooperation and Regional Solutions

International cooperation is necessary to address the root causes of migration, including violence, poverty and political instability (Frost, 2017). We can take steps to alleviate the pressures that lead to mass migration, such as working with origin countries to strengthen conditions and nurture development. The fact that you can then have regional collective frameworks that redistribute refugees and migrants and do not put all of the burden on one nation, which also starts to create fairer solutions.

Public Engagement and Policy Reform

Immigration policy depends heavily on public perception. According to the data, voters want more compassion and commonsense solutions to immigration, like stopping our deportation raids at sensitive locations and protections for those with TPS. By getting people talking about immigration, the US can help build support for reform while ensuring that policies live up to our values of compassion and justice.

Comprehensive Asylum System Overhaul

It is also essential to bolster the asylum system itself, so that backlogs are removed and claims are processed in a timely manner rather than left languishing. These involve the expansion of immigration judges, legal orientation programs, and infrastructure at ports of entry. An efficient asylum process means less uncertainty and a greater chance that those fleeing persecution receive protection.

By adopting such above-discussed alternative approaches that emphasise compassion and pragmatism, the US can develop an immigration system that upholds human rights, promotes social cohesion, and addresses the complexities of global migration. Implementing these reforms requires a commitment to justice, collaboration, and a recognition of the shared humanity of all individuals. As processing numbers increase for returning to Mexico or Central America under strict new control policies, the humanitarian implications of such policies are widely questioned in the US. Instead, it can create an immigration system based on human rights and social cohesion by adopting alternative approaches centred on compassion and pragmatics.

Concluding Remarks

The examination of rigorous border restrictions for “efficiency” and “legality” reveals that these policies do not fulfil their stated goals and often intensify the problems. Regarding legitimacy, restrictive policies have consistently criminalised migration, leading to human rights abuses, economic instability, and family separations, all of which erode democratic norms and the concepts of equity and justice. Eventually, the ineptitude of strict border restrictions as a deterrent, together with their detrimental effects on millions of illegal immigrants, highlights the pressing need for a more compassionate and pragmatic strategy. Policymakers should transcend punitive approaches and establish policies that enable lawful migratory channels, promote integration, tackle the economic and political factors influencing cross-border mobility, and uphold the basic rights and dignity of all persons.

The analysis reveals that the Trump administration’s approach to immigration enforcement is fundamentally flawed. Despite high-profile promises, such as the expansion of the Border Patrol by 10,000 agents and the orchestration of mass deportation campaigns, empirical data and expert critiques consistently indicate that these policies are not only inefficient but also ethically problematic. Moreover, the deployment of military assets to the US–Mexico border and the unprecedented use of facilities like Guantanamo Bay for detaining noncitizens underscore a shift toward a punitive, fear-based strategy. This approach neglects the socio-economic drivers of migration and fails to address the underlying needs of both immigrant communities and the broader American public, such as affordable housing, healthcare, and economic stability. Scholarly perspectives, notably those advanced by Douglas Massey, critique this model as being inherently unsustainable, asserting that strict border enforcement not only fails to deter migration but also exacerbates social and economic inequities.

In general, the US immigration policy has always been a complex issue that goes beyond binary discussion of “pro- and anti-immigration”. Specifically, under the Trump administration, the policies are mostly marked as “anti-immigration” policies, with restrictive measures. A key insight in this regard is the pertinence of the “efficiency” of restrictive immigration policies and their “legitimacy”. Over the years, the notion that tougher



enforcement will discourage illegal migration has proven wrong and double-edged: it often has the opposite effect, and history has shown that harsher border enforcement leads to a permanent class of undocumented workers who end up getting all the same jobs anyway. This must be kept in mind once more, as the contemporary findings highlight the need to evaluate immigration policies by the degree of their intended outcome, but also their wider societal outcomes.

In addition, “legitimacy” is not limited to legal issues, but also includes ethical and human rights issues. Separating families, prolonging detentions, criminalising migrants and asylum seekers—all of this raises profound moral questions. Beyond the well-founded national interests of these measures, their human cost begs for a re-evaluation of their legitimacy, reminding governments to weigh the dignity and rights of people against the ephemeral, ambiguous and contentious concept of national interest. The nuances of immigration are far too baffling for black and white to work effectively, even if people find that approach easier. In sum, the Trump administration’s immigration policies, built on a rhetoric of crisis and cultural threat, are predisposed to failure due to their reliance on strategies that undermine both “efficiency” and “legitimacy”. Only with this approach can the US implement effective and humane immigration policies that will consider both the interests of the nation and the fundamental rights of the immigrants.

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