

**Analyzing Trump's Policies on Migration: A Case Study of Mexican
Migrants in USA**

BSS (International Relations)



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Session:

2022-2026

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Dedication

All praises to ALLAH ALMIGHTY

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Muhammad Masood Ahmed and Afshan Masood, for their unconditional love and support, and to my supervisor, Miss Sanabil Sibtain, for her guidance and mentorship throughout my University Life.

Acknowledgement

First of all, all praises to ALLAH ALMIGHTY, the compassionate and merciful, who conferred upon me the knowledge, ability and wisdom for accomplishing many challenging tasks

I would like to express my heartiest gratitude to my supervisor, Ms. Sanabil Sibtain, for her patience, close supervision and effective guidance throughout my thesis work. Many thanks to her for believing in me, supporting me and correcting my numerous mistakes throughout my bachelor's program and thesis.

Major thanks to my dearest and loving father, Muhammad Masood Ahmed, who has supported me in my highs and lows and providing me with moral and emotional support throughout my life journey. Moreover, special thanks to my dearest and beloved mother, Mrs. Afshan Masood, whose continuous struggle and sacrifices have made me the person I am today. Furthermore, a bundle of thanks to my loving brothers Muhammad Talha Masood and Muhammad Omer Masood and my sisters Niha and Zoya for motivating me throughout my hard times.

Last but not the least I am thankful to my dearest friends more like brothers, Subhan Zuberi, Sufyan Ahmad, Shaheer Azmat, Zohaib Saleem and Kumail Mujtaba for their support throughout my university life. May Allah Pak bless them all Ameen.

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Abstract:

Migration remains a complicated issue of 21st century shaped by institutional factors, political ideologies and evolving security concerns. Traditionally, US has remained one of the most prominent countries in hosting migrants but with President Trump coming into power, the process of migration has been reshaped by “America First” slogan. Moreover, Trump’s migration policies aim at halting migration mainly illegal migration and protecting economy and native population of US from what Trump calls as “Aliens” but in reality dynamics are completely different as migration still continues even after the implementation of strict policies. By using qualitative methods, this research analyzed the relationship between politics, institutions, and migration flows, contributing to migration studies, offering critical understanding of how restrictive governance policies transforms migration flow rather than halting migration shaping both domestic and international relations.

Introduction

Migration remains as one of the most prominent concerns of the 21st century highlighting social, political and economic dynamics in our globalized world. The enactment of migration policies by governments are based on national interests, social concerns and economic demands which are then majorly influenced by political ideologies. Migration has become a vastly debated area mostly in the countries experiencing significant arrival of migrants. One of the major aspects in human history is migration driven by various economic, political, social, environmental factors etc. It is generally defined as “Movement of people away from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence, either across an international border or within a state”.¹ International migration occurs when people cross state boundaries to live in another country².

America has always been a desired place for migrants with vast number of people arriving in pursuit for better economic opportunities, personal freedom and relief from political oppression. The late 1800’s saw large number of people from different areas of world migrating to United States. People moved to America for multiple reasons including crop failures, shortages of land and work, increased taxes and hunger, with hope for a better life in United States while some moved for personal freedom or relief from religious and political oppression. Almost twelve million immigrants reached United States between 1870’s and 1880’s³

The Democrats and Republicans both have different ways of dealing with migration; Republicans prioritize security at the border and deportation of migrants living illegally. On the other hand Democrats prioritize helping migrants who are living illegally in US by providing them paths for becoming legal citizens. Pew Research Center through a survey analyze that, Democrats give more importance to migrants who entered as children in USA. These contrasting point of views align

¹“Fundamentals of migration,” International Organization for Migration, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://www.iom.int/fundamentals-migration>.

² Ibid

³ “Immigration to the United States, 1851-1900,” Library of Congress, accessed March 5, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/rise-of-industrial-america-1876-1900/immigration-to-united-states-1851-1900/>.

with the different beliefs of the two respective parties, which can further impact laws and opinions regarding migration. For this purpose it is important to understand how U.S. migration policies work, particularly President Trump's policies over the last few years and their impact on Mexican migrants.⁴

United States of America has always remained the most popular destination for international migrants with a number of 51 million migrants.⁵ According to the US Census Bureau there are 37,547,789 foreign born persons who have been legally residing in the United States which makes up around 12.5 percent of the total population. About 53 percent of these come from Latin America, 14 percent from Europe, 25 percent from Asia and 8 percent from other parts of the world. Moreover there is a huge number of undocumented migrants estimated around 10 to 13 billion who work without legal protection or documentation⁶. Mexicans are the largest number of group of migrants in the United States representing about 23 percent of the 47.8 million foreign born residents as per 2023 statistics. From this, it is evident that USA is most economically lucrative country for Mexican migrants⁷.

The process of migration is quite complex but can be best understood through the Institutional Theory of Migration. According to this theory organizations both profit driven and nonprofit mediate migration flow. Institutions play a crucial role either by facilitating or regulating migration when governments impose strict migration process and policies serving as a mediator between migrant demand and state-enforced restrictions. Institutional Theory of migration operates at meso level by focusing on how migration is not just shaped by state policies or personal choices but by

⁴ J. Baxter Oliphant and Andy Cerda, "Republicans and Democrats have different top priorities for U.S. immigration policy," September 8, 2022, accessed March 5, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/08/republicans-and-democrats-have-different-top-priorities-for-u-s-immigration-policy/>.

⁵ "Top origin and Destination countries," International Organization for Migration, accessed March 5, 2025, <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11691/files/documents/WMR-Data-Snapshot-Top-Origin-and-Destination-Countries.pdf>.

⁶ "United States of America," International Organization for Migration, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://www.iom.int/countries/united-states-america>.

⁷ Jeanne Batalova, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," last modified October 8, 2024, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states-2024>.

intermediary organizations as well. The nonprofit organizations for example humanitarian organizations facilitate vulnerable groups especially children, women and elderly by providing them basic needs and protection through certain programs. On the other hand the interest groups for example smuggling networks take benefit from strict migration policies by providing illegal means to cross borders⁸.

But the question is what institutional factors are? Institutional factors are “Conditions, formal and informal rules in the society that constrain behavior. These may stem from legislative, executive, or judicial actions, depend on administrative capabilities, informal norms, and social cohesion.”⁹ Organizations develop and adapt within the framework provided by institutions”. Institutional Factors in US-Mexico case are government agencies, courts, President Orders, humanitarian organizations and interest groups. Government institutions such as legislature, executive, judiciary and the executive orders of President plays a crucial role in the process of migration where as Non-governmental organizations such as Humanitarian organization and human right activist also play a crucial role in the process of migration

In United States the policies of migration have developed in response to shifting concerns of the national security and political ideologies. Migration policies significantly evolved after President Trump took over the office in 2017 which were largely centered on the Mexican migrants as the Trump administration enforced one of the most restrictive measures in the history of America. The migration policies of Trump are rooted in the slogan “Make America Safe Again” prioritized deportation, security on the border and ending legal and illegal immigration. This led to several policies such as “Remain in Mexico Policy”, expansion of the US Mexico border wall and family separation at the border which changed the experiences of Mexican migrants and redefined the US-Mexico relations. Mainly the institutional theory tries to explain that migration continues even

⁸ Xiana Bueno and Victoria Prieto-Rosas, *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*, ed. Danan Gu, Matthew E. Dupre (Springer Cham, 2021), p. 3215.

⁹ “Institutional Factors,” Body of Knowledge on Infrastructure Regulation, accessed March 16, 2025, <https://regulationbodyofknowledge.org/glossary/i/institutional-factors/>.

though government impose strict enforcements, as different organizations mediate the migration process.

Migration policies of Trump Administration were further shaped by few executive orders that changed the course of US-Mexico relations. Executive order 13767 was one of the important executive orders of 2017's Trump Administration which initiated the process of US-Mexico border wall, allotted more funding for border security and authorized employment of 5000 further border patrol agents to the current 20,000¹⁰. After the 2024 US Presidential Election and Donald Trump coming into power, few more executive orders further reinforced restriction on migration. Executive order 13767 imposed restriction on the entry of migrants which are undocumented under any conditions to the United States. The Patrol Agents at border are now instantly turning people away. According to this order those who reached the US soil are restricted from appealing for provisions like asylum. Furthermore, it restricts undocumented people who can't verify reasonable medical and criminal histories from entering.¹¹

Executive order 14165 prohibited the use of the CBP One which is US. Custom and Border Protection mobile application, an app, functional for the last 2 years, that facilitates migrants. It permitted around 936500 asylum seekers in the territory of Mexico to arrange appointments at the border ports of US. The administration of Biden in June 2024 prohibited access to asylum for people who crossed the border between ports of entry. The identical executive order reassumed the "Remain in Mexico" program which entails non-Mexican seekers of asylum to await their hearing dates of US inside the territory of Mexico.

Executive order 14157 in 2025 pursued to label Latin Americans and Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The order aimed at giving more power to US legal authorities over the human trafficking and drug smuggling through illegal networks¹²

¹⁰ Philip L. Martin, "President Trump and US Migration after 100 Days," *Migration letters* 14, no. 2 (2017): 2, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://migrationletters.com/index.php/ml/article/view/335/328>.

¹¹"Trump's Executive Orders and Latin America: Key Things to Know," Washington Office on Latin America, January 24, 2025, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/trumps-executive-orders-and-latin-america-key-things-to-know/>.

¹²ibid.

The focus of this research is on analyzing Trump administration's migration policies by taking the case study of Mexican migrants in the United States. It analyzes how these policies impact migration experiences and the US-Mexico Relations. The research has employed institutional theory of migration while significantly explaining decade's old migration of Mexicans in America, its causes and impacts at a larger scale.

Statement of the Problem

The migration policies under the Trump administration significantly changed the experiences of Mexican migrants, emphasizing security and enforcement over human trafficking and drug smuggling through illegal networks at the border but also limited pathways for legal migration. Policies such as cross border restrictions, stricter asylum regulations and increased deportations not only disturbed patterns of traditional migration but also highlighted humanitarian and legal concerns. Such policies highlighted the problems faced by migrants exposing them to severe risks including deportations, separation from family and manipulation by illegal networks. Even with these restrictive measures and policies migration continues to be the most prevalent phenomenon where intermediary organizations (Legal or illegal) play a very important role in the entire process.

Research Questions

- 1- What role political ideology and institutional factors in Trump's Administration play in the process of Mexicans migrating to USA?
- 2- How do these policies impact the process of migration at domestic and international level?

Research Objectives

- 1- To assess institutional factors that influence the process of migration of Mexicans in USA.
- 2- To analyze political ideology at play during Trump administration that impact the process of migration, domestically and internationally.

Significance of the Study:

This study is significant in understanding the complex process of migration especially in the USA who calls itself the most pluralistic country. Furthermore, this study vitally provide an insight into

the institutional factors that hinders or supports the process of migration of Mexican in the US. Moreover, the findings of this study have the potential to contribute to understanding the migration flow in the United States keeping in mind the policies of Trump Administration regarding migration. This study has contributed in the fields of migration studies and students of international relations, migration and sociology.

Literature Review

The policies of Trump administration related to migration had a major impact on the US-Mexico border as it impacted both human security and migration. These strict policies were justified in the name of protecting national security and caused serious distress among the migrants. Furthermore, Calvin Ericke Zrada and Angel Damayanti in the article titled “*Trump’s Immigration Policy at the US-Mexico Border and the Impact on Human Security*” examine effects of Trump’s policies on migration, human security and the US-Mexico border issue using the lens of foreign policy and securitization theory. The authors argue that the policies of Trump administration are extremely embedded in securitizing migration.¹³ Trump’s administration justified stricter policies such as creation of border wall, zero tolerance policy and increased patrol enforcement by depicting undocumented Mexican migrants as a threat to US sovereignty and security.¹⁴ Moreover, according to the authors, the criminal activities such as smuggling and trafficking were not reduced as the number of crimes primarily human trafficking and drug related crimes remained high even with increased enforcement. This aligns with the institutional theory which emphasizes that migration still continues through the facilitation of illegal and unauthorized networks. Furthermore, the authors highlight the implications on human security as well. It exposes an alarming increase in the violation of human rights especially family separation, sexual abuse and even the death among migrants. Because of the zero-tolerance policy, around 2300 children were separated from their families which led to the increased trauma and harassment among the migrants¹⁵. Although the aim of Trump administration was to halt migration but instead of halting

¹³ Angel Damayanti and Calvin Ericke Zrada, “Trump’s Immigration Policy at the US-Mexico Border and the Impact on Human Security,” *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 9 (2022): 2620, accessed April 15, 2025, <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/download/12714/8247/15369>.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p 2623.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.2629.

it led to the increase in the number of migrants because of the involvement of the intermediary organizations.

Issues related migration between United States and Mexico have increasingly increased under the first tenure of Trump Presidency. Gia Mosashvili and Zurab Davitashvili in their thesis “*U.S.-Mexico Relations and Migration as an Impeding Factor: Trump's Presidency (2016-2020)*” analyze the effects of Trump Presidency on the US-Mexico relations. The bilateral relations were significantly impacted by the rising flow of Mexican migrants especially because of the construction of border wall and termination of “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals”¹⁶. Their thesis highlights the broader economic, social and environmental consequences of these policies, emphasizing that despite harsh control Mexicans continued migrating which reflects the institutional theory of migration that proposes that such policies do not stop migration but in fact changes its pattern. Furthermore, Trump justified these harsh policies by aligning the migration issue with national security and sovereignty. These types of harsh policies had significant impact and consequences on the US-Mexico relations, effecting diplomatic ties and economic cooperation after the replacement of North American Free Trade Agreement into United States Mexico-Canada Agreement.¹⁷

Different scholars analyze the adverse effects of Trump administration’s migration policies and it’s crystal clear that these policies increasingly increased led to the rise in human trafficking and effected Mexico from several angles. Nikoloas Kouloglous in the article “*The Trump Era and Counter Migrant Smuggling: A New Geopolitical Order on the US-Mexico Borders?*” analyzes the adverse effects of the border and immigration policies of the administration of President Trump. Policies such as strict border control procedures especially the zero-tolerance policy and the border wall construction unintentionally led to a surge in the smuggling activities of people and drugs. The strict border control security had a significant impact as these policies provided risky flow of migration through unsafe and covert routes with migrant smuggling networks

¹⁶ Gia Mosahvili and Zurab Davitashvili, “U.S.-Mexico Relations and Migration as an Impeding Factor: Trump's Presidency (2016-2020)” (master’s thesis), Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, 2020), 38, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343240833_USMexico_Relations_and_Migration_as_an_Impeding_Factor_Trump's_Presidency_2016-2020.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.72.

exploiting the implementation measures. The policies remained ineffective because migration through illegal networks continued, remained unsuccessful in identifying the root causes of migration such as social and economic adversity and in fact strengthened the role of illegal organizations in facilitating migrant flow.¹⁸ The rise in smuggling activities highlighted the poor effectiveness of border enforcement to restrict illegal migration. The “Remain in Mexico” policy pressurized Mexico to house migrants in poor conditions while they waited for their hearings of asylum. Mainly this placed pressure on Mexico to act as a buffer zone for migrants that were seeking asylum.

Migration policies under Trump administration are particularly important from the time of Covid-19 pandemic in the context of measures related to border security. These policies had several consequences for migrants seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border, moreover, Garret and Sementelli in the article “*COVID- 19, asylum seekers, and migrants on the Mexico– U.S. border: Creating states of exception*” analyzes the consequences of migration policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. The use of Migrant Protection Protocols, Title 42 and the Zero-Tolerance Policy by the Trump administration led to a state of exception alongside the US-Mexico border where the legal rules were halted under the excuse of human health concerns. These were claimed as measures to protect United States from asylum seekers which were seen as a potential threat mainly from Central American region by highlighting concerns over national security and public health. Many migrants were expelled without granting them the chance to seek asylum claims by using strict policies, especially the Title 42, using public health law as a reason. Even though the infection rate of COVID-19 was much higher in the US compared to other countries such as Mexico and those in Central America. These measures portrayed migrants as carriers of infection and national security risk fueling xenophobic sentiments and undermining international human rights commitments. The Zero Tolerance policy resulted in criminal trials for migrants with no previous criminal background, escalating the pain and suffering among migrants seeking refuge.

¹⁸ Nikolas Kouloglou, “The Trump era and counter migrant smuggling: a new geopolitical order on the US–Mexico borders?” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 48, no.2 (2023): 228, accessed April 15, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2023.2174305>.

The implementation of these policies during this period were driven by a wider agenda where the executive branch used fear as tool to justify harsh measures at the border.¹⁹

Legal barriers like strict border control and enforcement are not crucial for stopping migrants from entering²⁰. For instance the job opportunities also foster migration, which the as per authors are more intimately tied to economic conditions and social networks than legal constraints. Keeling's argument verifies the institutional theory of migration which asserts that restrictive laws do not stop migration by any means, but rather drives migrants to unlawful, alternative but not necessarily prohibited migration routes. It matches to the legal restrictions in the experience of Mexican migrants under the Trump era the policies increased but migration went on through other paths.

United States till now has been a favorable destination for migrants as many individuals from different parts of the world are attracted to the several positive aspects in United States including jobs opportunities, relief from political oppression and personal freedom as Jorge Durand, Douglas Massey, and Emilio Parrado in the article, '*The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States,*' provides historical background on the Mexican migration patterns²¹. Such structural economic changes both in U.S. labor market demand and wage differentials and in Mexico, where the rural population moves away have had long standing effects on migrants. The important underlying connection between socioeconomic conditions of the two nations leads to the border policies. This serves to strengthen the point that Trump's hard line stance on migration was influenced by long standing push and pull forces which drive migration of Mexicans in USA.

There are many reasons for government to impose strict migration policies and one of the reason is cheaper price of labor provided by migrants. When migrants are willing to work on low wages it sparks a sense of heat among the native population as they believe that the migrants are exploiting the labor markets and the impact is faced by the native people as they feel that their job

¹⁹ Terence M. Garrett, Arthur J. Sementelli, "COVID-19, asylum seekers, and migrants on the Mexico–U.S. border: Creating states of exception," *Politics and Policy* 50, no. 4 (2022): 880, accessed April 17, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12484>.

²⁰ Drew Keeling, "Why legal barriers are not critical to deterring immigrants," last modified May 12, 2008, <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/why-legal-barriers-are-not-critical-deterring-immigrants>.

²¹ Jorge Durand, Douglas S. Massey and Emilio A. Parrado, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (1999): 520, accessed April 17, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2567043>.

opportunities are undermined. As Gordon Hanson and Antonio Spilimbergo in the paper ‘*Political Economy, Sectoral Shocks, and Border Enforcement*,’ analyze how economic changes within U.S. industries affect America’s use of border enforcement strategies. When the domestic sectors are faced with labor supply provided by migrants at a cheaper price, according to their research, political pressure rises to increase the enforcement.²² This is a useful theory when applied to Trump’s ‘America First’ slogan which described Mexican migrants as a threat to American jobs. But the authors indicate that enforcement has another unplanned effect while it does not necessarily lead to limiting migration but the rise in dependency on smuggling networks. Many people believe that Trump’s harsh policies are against the migrants right but from another angle Trump is trying to secure the rights of American people.

One of the major impact of these policies are faced by families as Human Rights Watch report titled *US: Family Separation Harming Children*, families reveals how Trump’s Zero Tolerance Policy negatively affects children and their families²³. It describes the period of tension for children who are forcibly separated from their families at the border. It increases trauma, long term mental health risks and failures by U.S. authorities to keep family reunification records. These are clear consequences of how policies which depend on political ideology can seriously sever the migrants off their basic human rights and increase their vulnerability further and call the urgent need for the institutional support through humanitarian organizations.

Michel Beine and other Paris School of Economics colleagues examine the implications of Trump’s executive orders in the policy report “*The Consequences of Trump’s Migration Policies*”²⁴. However, these measures tightened legal entry pathways and border access in the U.S., while imparting a rise on formal migration, overburdening Mexico’s border capacities, and staining U.S.-Mexico diplomatic relations, they find. The authors point out that the policy measures aimed at preventing migration backfired by encouraging migrants to take more

²² Gordon H. Hanson and Antonio Spilimbergo, “Political Economy, Sectoral Shocks, and Border Enforcement,” *American Economic Review* 89, no. 5 (1999), 616, accessed April 17, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/117063>.

²³ “US: Family Separation Harming Children,” Human Rights Watch, July 11, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/us-family-separation-harming-children-families>.

²⁴ Michel Beine, et al., “The Consequences of Trump’s Migration Policies,” *Paris School of Economics*, February 2025, accessed April 17, 2025, <https://www.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/app/uploads/2025/02/The-consequences-of-Trumps-migration-policies.pdf>.

dangerous routes. This reaffirms that the geopolitical costs of harsh immigration enforcement reflect the inefficiency of institutional mediators and networks in countering policy changes.

Research Gap

Although ample existing literature has analyzed various policies of Trump administration including that of migration, mainly its reasons, causes and impacts. However, this research has aimed filling the gap by studying it under the institutional lens where intermediary organizations (legal or illegal) significantly determine the migration process and flow. This study has analyzed the institutional factors related to migration of Mexicans and its impacts at domestic and international level.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of migration aims to understand the logic and motivation of individuals and households to move domestically or internationally from one place to another. As already discussed above, migration process is quite complex but can be best understood through the institutional theory of migration. The research employed institutional theory on migration primarily with the work of Douglas S. Massey and his colleagues in the 1993. They based their work on literary work of figures like Emile Durkheim and Thorstein Veblen. Institutional Theory proposes that “migration flow is mediated by organizations both profit driven and nonprofit and focuses on how migration is not just shaped by state policies or personal choices but by intermediary organizations as well. Intermediary organizations may include both legal and illegal organizations.” These organizations play an important role in facilitating migration when government impose strict policies. Migration has become a highly contentious issue between United States and Mexico. Although the policies of Trump administration aimed at halting Mexicans but instead of halting it, it contributed to the increase in Mexican migrants. This further aligns with the institutional theory that predicts that migration continues even when the states impose strict policies. The nonprofit organizations for example United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees facilitate vulnerable groups especially children, women and elderly by providing them basic needs and protection through certain programs. Government of Mexico is acknowledged and supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to provide help and support to the people who have been forced to

leave their homeland. UNHCR works to provide long-lasting solutions that uphold integration in the country.²⁵

On the other hand the interest groups for example smuggling networks take benefit from strict migration policies by providing illegal means to cross borders. In Western Hemisphere, Barrio 18 also known as 18th street Gang ranks as one of the biggest youth gangs. Although Barrio 18 has cells functioning from Central America to Canada, it has faced several challenges by the Nayib Bukele government following a crackdown launched by the government in March 2022. Almost ten thousand alleged Barrio 18 members were jailed during this crackdown. The reason for Barrio 18 to spread south into Central America and Mexico was driven by a change in US immigration policies in the mid of 1990s, which surged the range of criminal charged for which foreign-born residents could be deported to their homeland.²⁶

Research Methodology

This research study is qualitative in nature as it provides an insight in the process of migration involving humans, human security, institutional factors and political ideology. This research employed analytical research design owing to the complex nature of the study and its related aspects. Both the primary and secondary sources of data are used. Primary data sources include interviews and statements of statesmen and data from official websites. Secondary data includes books, journal articles and website sources.

Limitations of the Study

The research faced few limitations in terms of acquiring unobscured data where the government authorities limit the original facts and figures regarding migration and the process of Mexicans migrating to USA. On the other hand the activists and human security organizations provide

²⁵ “Mexico,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed April 25, 2025, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/mexico>.

²⁶ “Barrio 18,” Insight Crime, November 14, 2023, <https://insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/barrio-18-profile/>.

counter arguments and data. Furthermore, it's an ongoing process where Trump administration adds to the executive order quite frequently.

Organization of the Study:

Introduction

Chapter 1: Political Ideology and Institutional Factors Shaping Migration of Mexicans under Trump's Administration

Chapter 2: Impact of Migration Policies at Domestic and International Level.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Way Forward

Conclusion.

Chapter 1:

Political Ideology and Institutional Factors Shaping Migration of Mexicans under Trump's Administration

1.1: Introduction

Migration of Mexicans to USA has always been influenced by who has been in power and how do they institutionalize the process of migration. This means political ideology and institutional factors are always at play when dealing with migrants. Unlike many previous presidents, Donald Trump placed migration at the very center of his campaign and administration agenda. He tied it directly to his "America First" narrative and described Mexican migrants not only as workers but as a risk to national security, culture and identity of America. It was no longer just about economics or labor demand but about fear, xenophobia and control. His administration did not halt the policies of migration but significantly changed the route and mechanism of migration. For instance, undocumented migrants and asylum seekers gradually found themselves forced into illegal paths, facing stricter implementation and lesser legal protection. The impact of this was not the eradication of migration but reformation of experiences of migrants, Furthermore this shift changed the people perception about migrants and migration, portraying them as aliens and less as contributors to the society.

1.2: The Border Wall as a Political Tool

The dynamics of migration in the United States changed radically with the Trump administration coming into power. The main part of this shift was the symbolic and political power of the planned border wall between US and Mexico. Even though the wall was never fully constructed, it became one of the most important factor of Trump's presidency and political ideology. Moreover, instead of acting as a physical barrier it served as a political instrument to justify strict measures by the states institutions such as Department of Homeland Security. The slogan "America First" was not only linked to the protection of jobs but to redefine as to who belongs to the United States. By having directly attributing migration as a threat to the preservation of American identity, Trump directed a feeling of exclusionary membership. Those who were inside the political community

were characterized as real Americans while those outside particularly Mexican migrants were characterized as threat, outsiders and criminals.

Political strategy played a decisive role in shaping the policies of migration during Trump's presidency. As Matteo Neri-Laine and Hillel Rapoport in the policy brief "*The consequences of Trumps' migration policies*" analyze that from the beginning of his campaign to his time in office, migration was always used as a political weapon to mobilize public support. Trump's speeches and policy proposals, portrayed him as the protector of American interests against foreign invaders.²⁷ Promises such as the construction of the wall, mass deportations, and strict migration policies became rallying points that strengthened his position for the presidency. Beyond campaign rhetoric, Trump's political agenda converted into concrete policy proposals which aimed to redefine the US migration policy.

These included efforts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, build more detention facilities along the southern border, end birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants, and limit asylum procedures via mobile applications, such as CBP One mobile application.²⁸ Taken together, these measures were part of a wider agenda of exclusionary nationalism which aimed at limiting the flow of legal and illegal migrants, in the name of strengthening the identity of American nation.

The administration of Trump completely altered the process of migration as compared to the past administration's approaches to migration. Although the previous administration usually pursued a balance between the economic need for migrant labor and the political imperative of border control, Trump's administration identified migration particularly from Mexico and Central America as a security crisis rather than a socioeconomic or humanitarian issue. This change was evidently imitated in policies such as the separation of families at the border, "Remain in Mexico"

²⁷ Matteo Neri-Laine, "The consequences of Trump's migration policies," last modified February 17, 2025, <https://www.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/en/news/policy-brief-on-the-consequences-of-trumps-migration-policies/>.

²⁸ *ibid*

program and the use of economic tariffs to force Mexico into enforcing United States migration demands.²⁹

These actions presented a profound change in the narrative surrounding migration as it was no longer seen as a multifaceted process determined by economic interdependence or humanitarian responsibility, but as a threat to national security. By depicting Central American and Mexican migrants as a significant threat, Donald Trump didn't only justified harsh measures but also created an atmosphere of fear and division within the society of US. This had a huge impact as this effected the relation of US-Mexico, raised serious concerns over human rights violation and the ethical cost of migration policies based on limitations.

1.3: Political campaigns and Media as an Instrument

Media acted as the most divisive resource when it came to migration during Trump's campaign. In the article "*The Media during the Rise of Trump: Identity politics, Immigration, 'Mexican' Demonization and Hate-Crime*" Orestis explains that the coming of Trump administration into power was closely related to the media's focus on migration and politics of identity. Media portrayed Mexicans with negative stereotypes which didn't only create feelings of ostracism but also justified actions of hostility and hate speech. This strengthened political ideology and media narratives which created a sense of fear, where migration was seen as a threat to security and national identity³⁰

Moreover the media did not simply reflect political strategy but increasingly strengthened it. Trump's framing of migrants as threats, media channels helped normalize hostility and gathered

²⁹ Arkadiy A. Eremin. "U.S. Migration Policy Radicalization (2017—2019): Case of Mexico and Central America," *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2021): 108, U <https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/25960>.

³⁰ Zuckerman et.al, "The Media during the Rise of Trump: Identity Politics, Immigration, "Mexican" Demonization and Hate-Crime", *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 15, no.1 (2021):468, <https://ojs.aaai.org/index.php/ICWSM/article/view/18076>.

public support for harsh policies. In this way, ideology and media hype collaborated to shape both public perception and the potential outcomes.

The restrictive migration policies were largely ineffective in decreasing migration flows as Trump administration emphasized on tough border control. By militarizing the border and limiting legal routes of mobility, the administration instead of addressing the issue strengthened the smuggling networks and forced the migrants to resort to more risky and irregular migration routes. Politically this absolutist position stretched Trump's popularity within his electorate and supported him to present himself as a protector of American sovereignty. But in reality it failed to address the underlying causes of migration, including economic inequality, violence and instability in Mexico and Central America. Instead of preventing migration, it further worsened the humanitarian situation at the border and put migrants in greater danger³¹.

During the political campaigns, Trump persistently relied on protectionist and anti-globalization arguments, justifying his discriminatory migration policies by framing himself as the protector of the American workers from illegal aliens, putting migration at the core of his political rhetoric. The southern border was presented as the "source of evils," symbolizing all who were considered against the American way of life. Trump's refusal to join the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants further highlighted how his administration has refused to cooperate with international humanitarian efforts. This was a clear political manifestation of domestic populism that did not consider global responsibility.³²

1.4: Executives Orders and Their Role:

Traditionally, policies of migration in the United States have been shaped through a balance of legitimate authority and judicial action, guaranteeing accountability across government branches.

³¹ Nikolas Kouloglou, "The Trump era and counter migrant smuggling: a new geopolitical order on the US–Mexico borders?," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue canadienne des études latinoaméricaines et caraïbe* 48, no. 2 (2023): 15, <https://idps.univ-paris13.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-Trump-era-and-counter-migrant-smuggling-a-new-geopolitical-order-on-the-US-Mexico-borders-Eprint.pdf>.

³² Arkadiy A. Eremin . "U.S. Migration Policy Radicalization (2017—2019): Case of Mexico and Central America," *Conceptualizing the Problems of World Politics through the Prism of IR Theory* 21, no. 1 (2021): 109, <https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/25960>.

However policies of migration under President Trump reflected president’s direct control rather than collaboration among state institutions, Donald Trump’s frequent use of executive orders and emergency declarations represented a growing centralization of authority. This move reflected his broader approach of governing through unilateral action bypassing the slow pace of legislation to directly show his stance that he was delivering on his campaign promises.

Following executive orders will be studies and analyzed:

1.4.1: Executive Order 14159 (Protecting the American People Against Invasion)

Executive Order 14159 canceled the Biden administration’s enforcement priorities on only dangerous criminals and instead made all undocumented migrants a priority for action. It covered anyone who entered the country without permission, stayed without papers, or already had a deportation order.³³

Department of Homeland Security announced new reimbursement opportunities for state and law enforcement agencies who facilitates U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), remove and arrest rapists, gang members, terrorists and pedophiles from American communities. “ICE greatly expanded cooperation with local agencies, with 287(g) agreements rising by 609%—from 135 to 958. Through the 287(g) Task Force Model, local officers receive training, tools, and resources to enforce immigration laws while carrying out their normal police work. At present, law enforcement from 40 states are involved, with 8,501 trained officers and more than 2,000 others still in training.”³⁴

This order also set penalties against anyone who facilitates illegal migration and threatens NGOs such as catholic agencies which facilitates undocumented migrants.

³³ Summary of Executive Orders and Other Actions on Immigration,” Center for Migration Studies, February 13, 2025, <https://cmsny.org/publications/essential-but-ignored-low-earning-immigrant-healthcare-workers-and-their-role-in-the-health-of-new-york-city/>.

³⁴ “DHS Announces New Reimbursement Opportunities for State and Local Law Enforcement Partnering with ICE to Arrest the Worst of the Worst Criminal Illegal Aliens,” *Homeland Security*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/09/02/dhs-announces-new-reimbursement-opportunities-state-and-local-law-enforcement>

1.4.2: Executive order 14165 (Securing our Borders)

Executive order 14165 provides permission for the building of a border wall along the US-Mexico border and resumes “Remain in Mexico” program and shutdown the CBP app which was used to list appointments for asylum. Furthermore this order also ended the use of “catch and release program” which permits seekers of asylum to await their hearing in their community.

The construction of the border wall depends on the approval of funding by Congress through the budget bill. This effectively reduced transparency and eliminated a regulated mechanism for managing asylum claims. The shutdown left many asylum seekers with no alternative but to attempt unauthorized entry, often turning to illegal networks and smugglers. The policy thus risked encouraging precisely the type of irregular migration it sought to prevent.³⁵ Role of Executive orders in migration policies under Trump administration highlights the range to which his government was dependent on unilateral authority to deter the legal and authorized routes of migration. By increasing detention, harsh enforcement policies and discouraging asylum processes, these orders both reformed migration policy and intensified political narratives of crisis and invasion

1.4.3: Executive order 13767

This new direction was intensified by executive order 13767 signed in January 2017 which imposed strict conditions on the arrival of migrants that were undocumented under almost all conditions. Moreover this order created a number of obstacles for migrants looking to move into United States raising focus of the government on increasing border security. The consequences of this order were too much impactful as it didn't result in the effective implementation of migration laws but also strengthened the idea that migrants from countries of Latin America were a serious threat to US society and sovereignty. These actions were included in the broader agenda of the trump administration of deterring migration, mainly from countries having most number of migrants that are undocumented.³⁶

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ Trump's Executive Orders and Latin America: Key Things to Know,” Washington Office on Latin America, January 24, 2025, accessed March 8, 2025
<https://www.wola.org/analysis/trumps-executive-orders-and-latin-america-key-things-to-know/>.

1.4.4: Executive order 14157

Furthermore executive order 14157 labeled Latin American and Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), stating migration as a national security issue.³⁷ This action didn't only aim at halting human trafficking or drugs smuggling but was mainly a major step that marked a huge change in the perception in which migration was viewed. By labeling cartels as terrorist organization, this executive order strengthened the powers of enforcement agencies to confront these issues in a more aggressive way.

The role of institutions in the process of migration were restructured by Trump's narratives and a vast number of executive orders. Instead of functioning as process of protection or control, the institutions of state were seen as instruments of deterrence. The opening of detention centers, the enforcement of the 'Remain in Mexico' policy, and the cancellation of humanitarian aid were all examples of the mobilization of governmental structures in order to restrict rather than control human mobility. The shift in institutional focus represented a larger political agenda that privileged border control over humanitarian considerations.

From an analytical perspective, such measures show the extent to which institutions may be repurposed to strengthen political discourses of security and exclusion. According to Institutional Theory, restrictive policies do not generally halt migration but rather change the patterns of migration by forcing migrants to adopt more dangerous and informal routes. Consequently, instead of solving the underlying problem of irregular migration, these institutional strategies are reproducing cycles of risk, vulnerability and exploitation uncovering the unintended consequences of deterrence driven governance.

1.5: Division in the Society: "Us vs. Them"

The stance "Us vs. Them" divide was a core ideology of Trump administration. In his election rallies, Trump repeatedly characterized Americans as hardworking, law abiding citizens "we" while characterizing migrants as dangerous outsiders "they". Trump's speeches, such as his 2016 Arizona address, frequently promised to prioritize the jobs and safety of Americans. For example in his Michigan address in 2025, he stated that migrants were violating the rights of American

³⁷ Ibid.

people by taking jobs , overusing resources and being disloyal to the United States. This created a “us” versus “them” divide, framing Americans as the actual owners of the national resources and migrants as a threat to national resources.

This idea aligns with the concept of “ideological square” given by Van Dijk, which highlights positive traits of the in group “US” while negative traits of the out group “them”. By continually contrasting “us” versus “them,” Trump was able to construct a unified narrative among his supporters, reinforcing the perception of migrants as outsiders, and simultaneously fostering a sense of unity among his base.³⁸

The effects of such a stance were impactful. It was a policy that considered migrants to be a homogeneous group that were associated with danger This application was used as an argument to tighten enforcement and to reduce humanitarian safeguards.

1.6: Migration Policies Then and Now

In United States, policies of migration continually changed with different administration coming into power according to their own goals and interest. The administration of Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden each employed different strategies that reflected their moral values, political aims and understanding of national security. These shifts highlights that the policies of migration can be centered between humanitarian concerns and strict control depending upon who is in power.

The administration of Barack Obama analyzed that the deportation of all undocumented migrants was neither humanitarian nor practical. During the presidency of Obama around 11 million undocumented migrants were living in the country, His government instead chose to prioritize its limited resources on specific groups. Through memoranda issued by the then officials such as John Morton (2010–2011) and Jeh Johnson (2014), the administration created an organized system of enforcement priorities. Priority 1: Serious criminals and threats to security (terrorism, espionage, or violent crimes), Priority 2: Recent border crossers and those with multiple or significant

³⁸ “Teun A. van Dijk in Discourse Analysis,” *Discourse Analyzer*, August 15, 2024, <https://discourseanalyzer.com/teun-a-van-dijk-in-discourse-analysis/>.

misdeemeanors, Priority 3: Those who violated removal orders or engaged in visa or identification fraud.³⁹

President Obama's approach to migration highlighted prosecutorial discretion, permitting immigration officials to look at certain conditions such as humanitarian factors, family ties, military service and long term residence before imposing strict conditions. This approach was practiced to avoid unnecessary deportations mainly for migrants which were acting as a positive asset to the society of United States. But regardless of these humanitarian aims, Obama's presidency marked a high number of deportation which was criticized by the international community.⁴⁰

In contrast, President Trump's attitude towards migration was completely different from President Obama. Donald Trump administration saw unauthorized migrants as a major threat to US society and economy. President Trump "Executive order 13768" allowed migration officials to remove any unauthorized migrant regardless of social ties or criminal background. During the presidency of Donald Trump prosecutorial discretion was highly discouraged and US migration authorities were ordered not to excuse any migrant group from implementation and even negligible violations were considered same as harmful crimes. This zero tolerance approach highlighted a political goal that meant to discourage migration through harsher actions such as punishment or fear.⁴¹ Although this policy resulted in a large number of arrests but at the same time it overburdened government resources, resulted in family separations and targeted innocent migrants with zero criminal history. From an analytical point of view, President Trump's approach substituted fairness and pragmatism with political aims and harsher measures weakening the bond between state and migrant communities.

³⁹ "Comparison of the Obama, Trump, and Biden Administration Immigration Enforcement Priorities," Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, April 21, 2021, <https://leitf.org/2021/04/enforcement-priorities/>.

⁴⁰ "Comparison of the Obama, Trump, and Biden Administration Immigration Enforcement Priorities," Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, April 21, 2021, <https://leitf.org/2021/04/enforcement-priorities/>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

On the other hand, Biden administration focused on restoring practical migration enforcement policies by looking at humanitarian factors. This approach was much similar to the Obama administration. Similar to the Obama administration, the Biden administration emphasized on the need for prioritization in Department of Homeland Security due to limited resources and the impracticality of removing all unauthorized migrants from the United States. Furthermore the then DHS secretary David Pekoske announced that DHS's interim migration enforcement priorities are undocumented immigrants who pose a threat to 1) national security; 2) border security and; 3) public safety.⁴²

From all of the above we can see that different administrations have different sets of goals, priorities and actions when it comes to migration. President Obama and President Biden shared similar ideology that also looked at humanitarian conditions as well as the benefits of migrant workers to the United States society but on the other hand Donald Trump made migration a complex process and consider unauthorized migrants as a threat to US society and economy focusing on "America First" priority.

Conclusion:

Conclusively, in-depth study of migration policies under President Trump shows an intense change in the process of Mexicans migrating to United States. The Presidency of Trump placed migration as a central political issue reflecting it as a threat to national security and nationalism. His ideology rooted in the slogan "America First" labeled Mexican migrants not as the part of US economy and society but as aliens. This justified the expansion of harsh actions such as construction of border wall, "Remain in Mexico" and family separation programs. Institutional Theory proposes that "migration flow is mediated by organizations both profit driven and nonprofit and focuses on how migration is not just shaped by state policies or personal choices but by intermediary organizations as well. Intermediary organizations may include both legal and illegal organizations. Therefore by closing authorized pathways and limiting asylum access, the administration unintentionally empowered smuggling networks and increased the vulnerability of migrants to exploitation. As Institutional Theory explains, organizations both profit driven and nonprofit mediate migration

⁴² Ibid

flow. Institutions play a crucial role either by facilitating or regulating migration when governments impose strict migration process and policies serving as a mediator between migrant demand and state-enforced restrictions.

Chapter 2:

Impact of Migration Policies at Domestic and International Level

2.1: Introduction

For two centuries, the United States and Mexico have built deep diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties while repeatedly clashing over borders, migration, trade, and the drug war.⁴³ While migrants play a crucial role in US economy, Mexico relies on the remittances and US investments for strengthening their economy. The US-Mexico relationship has long been shaped by major inequalities. One distinct example of this is the trade imbalance, which gives United States a major leverage over Mexico and align it with American foreign policy interests. As Jorge Schiavon analyzes that, “whenever the United States government feels risk to its national security it uses it’s economic and trade influence to outline Mexico’s actions.”⁴⁴

2.2: USMCA as a Strategic Tool:

Under the administration of President Trump, issues such as migration and drug trafficking were outlined as threat to national security, and the USMCA trade agreement became a key tool for exercising this implementation.⁴⁵ Donald Trump during his second election campaign announced several strict actions against Mexico, such as strict military action against drug cartels, mass deportations, ending birthright citizenship, and the most important imposing tariffs. These actions were implemented in the executive orders which were signed on the first day of his office. Similar to his previous tenure, Donald Trump has sustained using tariffs as an instrument to force Mexico into cooperation.

⁴³ “1810 – 2025 U.S.-Mexico Relations,” Council on Foreign Relation, accessed October 17, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-mexico-relations>.

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Jaime Arturo Padilla Ugarte, “The US–Mexico Relationship in the Trump 2.0 Era,” last modified February 5, 2025, accessed October 17, 2025, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-us-mexico-relationship-in-the-trump-2-0-era/>

But the new President of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, has responded confidently to the actions and ideas of Donald Trump. President Claudia made it clear that if the United States imposes tariffs on Mexico, the Mexican government will respond by placing tariffs on major products that United States depends on such as cars, agricultural goods, and gas. In a letter addressed to Trump, Mexican President advised for dialogue and negotiation instead of confrontation, highlighting that imposing tariffs will not resolve the real issues of illegal immigration or drug trafficking between the two countries.⁴⁶.

This marked a turning point in US-Mexico relations, highlighting Mexico's growing potential in safeguarding its sovereignty and influencing its position in North America limiting US's dominance and the development of a more balanced dynamic where economic interdependence is no longer a single sided instrument of influence.

2.3: Expansion of Expedited Removal Under Trump's Second Term:

The approach of Trump's administration to migration both domestically and internationally marked a substantial change in the US migration policy, focusing on enforcement, deportation, ending illegal and limiting legal migration to the United States. After winning the Presidential election and returning to the office, Donald Trump instantly resumed his first term migration policies as on the second day of his office he expanded the use of expedited removal to "the full scope of its statutory authority." Moreover the Department of Homeland Security has not officially issued a detailed data on how many migrants are removed from within the United States but the migrants arriving at the border are placed under this expedited removal with the record low illegal border arrivals.

The process of expedited removal helps Trump administration to quickly carry out deportations without any delays that come with the hearing of courts or appeals. As this process was used by previous administration, Trump administration is also relying on this process as it allows immigration officials to quickly determine whether an outsider has legal right for residing in the United States or not if not, the immigration official issues a removal order. This expansion was multifaceted as it didn't only target people who had recently crossed border but also those waiting

⁴⁶ Ibid.

for asylum claim and long term residents. This use of power completely transformed the migration enforcement practices⁴⁷. Internationally, Trump administration followed a strategy of compelling nearby countries to regulate migration flows.

Since taking office, Trump has highly increased the use of Third-Country deportations which is an unusual way of expanding the US immigration law. Under diplomatic pressure and financial compensation, many neighboring countries have agreed to accept the deportees. But people argue that these kind of migration policies violate the standards of International Human Rights Law and place helpless migrants at threat for example relying on Illegal organizations to help them move across borders illegally. Mexico ,Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, Costa Rica , El Salvador , Eswatini ,Panama are the countries that have agreed to receive deportees with no existing ties to their nation ⁴⁸

2.4: Restricting Asylum Access: The Impact of Trump’s ‘Remain in Mexico’ Policy:

Under the Trump administration significant changes were made to asylum procedures, mainly affecting migrants from Mexico. One of the major legal impact of the Trump administration related to the migration policies was the limiting the cases of asylum through multiple ways. One of the most prominent process was the Migrant Protection Protocols which are the action of the United States government whereby certain non US citizen entering or seeking admission to the U.S. from Mexico illegally or without appropriate legal process may be reverted to Mexico and wait outside of the United States for the duration of their immigration process, where Mexico will provide them with all proper humanitarian safeties for the period of their stay.”⁴⁹

The MPP created a system where the process of asylum was done outside the United States and increased no of cases denying asylum due to missed hearings and limited lawyer access. But the

⁴⁷ Muzaffar Chishti and Kathleen Bush-Joseph, “*Trump Administration’s Expansion of Fast-Track Deportation Powers Is Transforming Immigration Enforcement*”, Migration Policy Institute, 2025), accessed October 18, 2025, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trump-expedited-removal>.

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Metzler, “What Are Third-Country Deportations, and Why Is Trump Using Them?” last modified September 3, 2025, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/article/what-are-third-country-deportations-and-why-trump-using-them>.

⁴⁹ “Migrant Protection Protocols,” *Department of Homeland Security*, January 24 2019, accessed October 15 2025, <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols?> .

critics argue that the impact of Remain in Mexico policy on restriction of migrants was unclear. According to nonpartisan migration policy “Remain in Mexico may have given a perception that crossing the border was difficult but it was unclear whether the program was an effective deterrent on its own”⁵⁰ As the result of this policy many migrants that were sent back home under this program made multiple attempts to cross the borders. Alfonso Mercado in the “‘*Remain In Mexico*’: *Stories Of Trauma And Abuse*” explains that moving through the Rio Grande via the Gateway International Bridge from Brownsville, Texas to Matamoros, Mexico they saw rows of worn out tents behind wire fences lined up against the street as soon they crossed the border.⁵¹

Almost 2500 families were forced to live in poor conditions due the Migrant Protection Protocols also known as Remain in Mexico Policy. Even though the policy mainly excluded vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children, disabled people and those facing life threatening conditions. In February 2020, a group of trainees and psychologist visited a camp and saw Maria who had escaped Honduras with her six years old daughter after several family members were killed in gang violence.⁵² When Maria reached the U.S.–Mexico border to ask for asylum, she was shocked to learn she first had to wait just to get a number, and then wait again for her first check by Customs and Border Protection.

Even after she passed her “credible fear” interview, she was told she must stay in Mexico while her court dates were scheduled. This was part of the Migrant Protection Protocols. At the same time severe storm passed through south Texas and the refugee camps where migrants were living were destroyed while some individuals drowned in the Rio Grande.⁵³ From this we can see that MPP didn’t only deny safety to migrants but also impacted their psychological and physical wellbeing.

⁵⁰ “The “Migrant Protection Protocols”: an Explanation of the Remain in Mexico Program,” *American Immigration Council*, February 1, 2024, accessed October 15 2025, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/migrant-protection-protocols/>.

⁵¹ Mercado et al. “‘Remain In Mexico’: Stories Of Trauma And Abuse: Two families’ stories—a separation at the border and an assault in a migrant shelter— show the horrific dimensions of US migration policy,” *Health Affairs* 40, no. 7 (2021): 1170, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/epdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.02331>.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

2.5: Public Health as Policy: The Use of Title 42 to Restrict Migration:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States government used a rarely known public health law called Title 42, which allowed border officials to expel migrants and asylum seekers immediately without hearing their cases. Between March 2020 and May 2023, this policy was used almost three million times to turn people away at the border. Title 42 was created in 1944 to control the spread of disease, the rule was revoked by the Trump administration and later continued by the Biden administration, becoming one of the most restrictive migration measures in recent the history of United States.⁵⁴ In practice, Title 42 blocked countless people from exercising their legal right to seek asylum, including many who were fleeing violence, poverty or persecution. While the policy's supporters claimed it was effective in stopping illegal migration, data suggests the opposite.

Encounters at the border actually increased during the years Title 42 was in practice, showing that it failed to serve as a real deterrent. Migrants attempting numerous times to cross border after being removed increased as well as the number of those who accomplished to arrive without being interrogated, identified as "gotaways"⁵⁵

2.6: Zero Tolerance Policy and its Impact:

"Zero Tolerance Policy was announced by Trump in 2020 which aimed to deter migration and asylum. The impact of this policy was long-lasting as it resulted deliberate and permanent separation of families of migrants, as well as the extended detention of people, including seekers of asylum and children which were living in poor conditions. Many kids became orphaned as a result of this policy, with the government admitted that it lacked measurements to reunify families. Furthermore eleven migrant children have died following their stays in camps and services on the southern border, the first such deaths in decades.⁵⁶ These measures were defined as compulsory

⁵⁴ Chishti et al, "*Title 42 Postmortem: U.S. Pandemic-Era Expulsions Policy Did Not Shut Down the Border*", Migration Policy Institute, (2024), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/title-42>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey R. Baker and Allyson McKinney Timm. "Zero-Tolerance: The Trump Administration's Human Rights Violation against Migrants on The Southern Border," *SSRN Electronic Journal* 13, no. 581(2020):584, <https://drexel.edu/~media/Files/law/law%20review/v13-3/baker-mckinney-timm-13-drexel-l-rev-581.ashx>.

for the protection of security at border but primarily violated migrants human rights many of them were running away from violence and in quest of protection.

Human rights are rooted in peace and justice and are basic principles that the United States and other states have assured to protect. However, in this scenario the migration policies under Donald Trump significantly violated human rights, portraying that national security and sovereignty are the most important factors of the state prosperity. According to a report of 2018, From October 2017, around 700 minors had been separated from individuals assuring to be their guardians, including around 100 minors under the age of four.⁵⁷ This practice not only caused immediate trauma to families but also raised significant concerns about the welfare of the separated children and the lack of proper systems in place to reunite them with their parents.

America has always been a desired place for migrants with vast number of people arriving in pursuit for better economic opportunities. Migration has always played an important role in the economy of United States, increasing growth through innovation, labor and cultural diversity. American Immigration Council after analyzing the data of US Census Bureau states that migrants around 48 million of those that live in United States generated almost 1.6 trillion dollars in the economic output of the United States in 2022.⁵⁸ Furthermore they contributed 579 billion dollars in state, local and federal taxes. According to the Congressional Budget Office, migration can play a major role in reducing United States Federal Budget deficit by around 897 billion dollar over the next decade. Every year United States offers a specific number of temporary visa to foreign workers which allows US employers to hire migrants for impermanent jobs. H2A and H1B are two of the major visa programs of the United States.⁵⁹

President Trump claims that H1B visa has been intentionally exploited to replace American workers with lesser paid foreign labor. This widespread misuse has not only weakened job opportunities for American citizens but also created an uneven labor market by driving down wages. From an analytical point of view these measures have created a series of obstacles in order to attract and keep overseas professionals mainly in technical fields such as STEM (science,

⁵⁷ibid., p.599

⁵⁸ Diana Roy, "How Does Immigration Affect the U.S. Economy?," last modified October 30, 2024, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-does-immigration-affect-us-economy>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

technology, engineering and mathematics), leading to challenges to both economic prosperity and national security.⁶⁰

2.7: Restriction on Entry

Donald Trump stated that “accordingly, by the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered:

Section 1. Restriction on Entry. (a) Pursuant to sections 212(f) and 215(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), 8 U.S.C. 1182(f) and 1185(a), the entry into the United States of aliens as nonimmigrants to perform services in a specialty occupation under section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), is restricted, except for those aliens whose petitions are accompanied or supplemented by a payment of \$100,000 — subject to the exceptions set forth in subsection (c) of this section. This restriction shall expire, absent extension, 12 months after the effective date of this proclamation, which shall be 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025.”⁶¹

If we analyze it critically, this policy and order shows a very strict and protectionist approach to U.S. migration policy, especially against skilled migrant workers coming under the H-1B visa program. By invoking his legal authority, Trump presented restriction as a legitimate exercise of executive power. But it becomes evident that this order reflected his administration’s nationalist and restrictive approach towards migration.

By adding a \$100,000 payment condition, Trump changed a merit based visa process into the one that favors the wealthy countries. This proclamation made it difficult for skilled professionals and small firms to work because they were unable to bear such a high cost.

Legally, Donald Trump based his order on sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act but its selective interpretation raises concerns about the misuse of executive authority for political agendas. Moreover, economically the restriction of H1B visa can undermine United States

⁶⁰ “Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers,” *The White House*, September 19, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/restriction-on-entry-of-certain-nonimmigrant-workers/>.

⁶¹ “Restriction On Entry On Certain Non-Immigrant Workers,” *The White House*, September 19, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/restriction-on-entry-of-certain-nonimmigrant-workers/>.

competitiveness by limiting the number of skilled migrants needed for progress in science and technology.

President Trump's strict migration policies were seen as actions to safeguard national interests, but the outcomes of these policies were seriously consequential. Though President Trump aimed to preserve jobs for American citizens, critics warned that mass deportations and reduced migrant labor could heavily effect the economy of United States. According to the Peterson Institute for International Economics, by removing between 1.3 and 8.3 million undocumented immigrants could seriously affect the United States real GDP by more than 7 percent by 2028.⁶² This would not only significantly lead to higher inflation or losses of job but will also impact overall demand of consumers highlighting that migrants instead of burdening the economy, are deeply involved in its running. This proves that how politically driven migration polices can lead to unintentional economic consequences

Migration routes and networks between the Mexico and United States have transformed mainly due to the strict implementation measures and border policies of the United States. The increased militarization at border crossing have led many migrants to take more illegal routes. As authorized entry became problematic, dependence on smuggling networks grow making migration a much risky process. The smuggling networks most of the time force migrants to provide them a huge cost and expose them to violence and abuse. Even though US migration policies aimed to deter unauthorized migration, they have unintentionally led to strengthening the influence of illegal networks. This shift points out unintended impacts of strict migration policies, forcing poor migrants into dangerous conditions instead of addressing the root causes of migration.

Migrant smuggling refers to making money by helping a person to stay or arrive in a country without having any legal permission to do so. Financial and material gain drive migrant smugglers to do such kind of activities. They are not motivated by humanitarian or altruistic reasons. Smuggling of migrants affects sovereignty of states over their borders and is a serious criminal act under the domestic law of many states.⁶³ These networks profit from the lesser legal pathways accessible to migrants, offering high cost and unsafe services that mainly involve manipulation

⁶² Diana Roy, "How Does Immigration Affect the U.S. Economy?," last modified October 30, 2024, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-does-immigration-affect-us-economy>.

⁶³ "Migrant smuggling Faqs," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed November 4, 2025, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/human-trafficking/migrant-smuggling/FAQs.html>.

and deception. Moreover these illegal groups often engage in document fraud such as tempering passports and making fake travelling papers.

According to the expert's estimation, under one third of all migrants in the United State are living illegally, with around 80 percent of the illegal population of migrant in the country coming from South America as well as Mexico. Among these unauthorized migrants around 25-40 percent visited US on a legal visa but then overstayed, while the remaining entered the country illegally. Of the latter group 97 percent of migrants entered the US through the US- Mexico border and coastal apprehensions. Moreover they also analyze that factors such as geographic location, limited authorized pathways, and economic inequalities play a crucial role in shaping migration between Mexico, United States and South America.⁶⁴

Conclusion:

Conclusively, migration policies under President Trump significantly effected the US-Mexico relations at both domestic and International Level. These measures strengthened historical structural inequalities, allowing US to use its economic power to influence Mexico's migration policies, Although Trump viewed migration as national security issue but Mexico faced difficulties in balancing diplomatic cooperation with the protection of its nationals in US. Furthermore these policies highlighted the interconnectedness between the two countries and the impact of migrations polices under the President Trump as migration is not only an issue of border but a complex issue shaped by competing interests, powerful authority and economic dependence.

⁶⁴ "Smuggling of migrants: the harsh search for a better life," United Nations office On Drugs and Crime, accessed October 18, 2025, https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/factsheets/TOC12_fs_migrantsmuggling_EN_HIRES.pdf.

Chapter 3

Discussion and Way Forward

The thesis statement “Analyzing Trump’s Policies on Migration: A Case Study of Mexican Migrants in USA” explored and provided a detailed account of how migration policies have been reshaped with the Trump administration coming into power, especially targeting Mexican migrants. The study has highlighted the significance of the traditional Mexican migration to United States which the Trump administration has tried to deter by naming migrants as alien and as a threat to United States society, sovereignty and national security.

The research remained focused on the role of Trump administration’s actions, measures and the impact of these actions which led to the violation of human rights as well as the rise of illegal networks in facilitating migration but at the same time these measures were justified in terms of protection of national security and sovereignty which is true to an extent as many migrants agree to work on low pay scales which unintentionally affect the national citizens. Mainly migration of Mexicans to USA has always been influenced by who has been in power and how do they institutionalize the process of migration.

The policies of migration under Donald Trump was shaped by several institutional factors such as executive orders, presidential statements, and state institutions. Donald Trump’s frequent use of executive orders and emergency declaration represented a growing centralization of authority. This move reflected his broader approach of governing through unilateral action bypassing the slow pace of legislation to directly show his stance that he was delivering on his campaign promises. Moreover extending the rights of state institution such as Department of Homeland Security and United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, allowing them to implement strict measures such as detaining migrants that are undocumented furthermore made migration a complex process leading to several humanitarian concerns.

After extensive analysis, it is easily identifiable that instead of legally and logically restricting migrants from entering in USA, President Trump and his administration implemented exclusionary tactics. Such tactics acted as a catalyst for illegal networks to make profit through migration. Moreover, the study has also compared different administration’s actions and reactions such as of

Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden towards the process of migration. President Obama and President Biden shared similar ideology that also considered humanitarian conditions as well as the benefits of migrant workers to the United States society but President Trump completely differed from these two previous presidents and made migration a complex process and saw illegal migrants as a threat to United States preferring “America First” Priority.

The term “America First” is mainly an ideology that is meant to represent the identity, rights, wellbeing, and prosperity of the American citizens as a top priority. From decades American citizens have argued that migrants from around the world disturb the wage level of the country as due to their illegal status and exploitation they agree to work on low pay scales which unintentionally make national citizens to remain unemployed or work on low pay income. Moreover President Trump has built his political career on the ideology of protection of broader security and defending American people against what he calls as immigration’s danger. In his Michigan address he stated that “When you have millions of people coming in they’re going to take your jobs”. Because of this Donald Trump gained a mass support from US public in order to win the Presidential election.

But in reality migrants play a crucial role in US economy. In 2023, the US Bureau of Labor statistics analyzed that migrants including the undocumented, estimated for 18.6 percent of the labor force of US which was more than from the statistics of 2022 which was 18.1 percent. The participation of labor force of foreign born increased around 66.6 percent, practically five percent more than the national born population which was 61.8 percent.⁶⁵

According to the analysis of Center for Migration Studies of New York around 8.3 million undocumented migrants work in the economy of United States. Most of the unauthorized labor come from Mexico (30 percent) South America (20 percent) and Eastern and Central Asia (15 percent). Moreover in New York state most of the migrants come from six countries: Mexico, China, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Ecuador. Furthermore in order to develop, US economy will continue to need migrant labor in certain industries. Moreover Federal

⁶⁵ Kevin Appleby, “The Importance of Immigrant Labor to the US Economy,” September 2, 2024, <https://cmsny.org/importance-of-immigrant-labor-to-us-economy/>.

Reserve Bank of Dallas analyzed that in the post-pandemic economy, migrant laborers have played a crucial and positive role in stabilizing the economy, stimulating job growth while also keeping down inflation. As increased number of native born US labor retire and birth rates drop, many significant industries require migrant labor in the 21st century. A post-pandemic study found that the decline of two million migrants between 2019 and 2021 had a substantial negative impact on numerous industries, including hospitality and service, construction, healthcare as well as agriculture.⁶⁶

Analytically, President Trump political stance on migration was built on nationalism and gaining public support rather than on economic reality. Even though he called migrants as threat to US society and economy but from facts and figures we can see that migrants including undocumented migrants are a crucial part to the US society and economy contributing highly by filling gap in major services and industries such as construction ,health care, agriculture etc. These are the areas where American workers are less denoted. Furthermore it becomes clear that economy of Untied States heavily relies on labor force of migrants for its prosperity and development. This can be seen in the post pandemic era which shows that due to decline of migrant workers many industries were impacted which highlights that how interrelated migration and economic growth is.

Theoretically the research study has applied institutional theory of migration to analyze the thesis statement and address the problem statement as well as the research gap. Institutional Theory proposes that “migration flow is mediated by organizations both profit driven and nonprofit and focuses on how migration is not just shaped by state policies or personal choices but by intermediary organizations as well. Intermediary organizations may include both legal and illegal organizations. It also proposes that when strict policies are implemented, the capability of illegal organizations rises forcing and pursuing migrants to take more dangerous route thus making migration a deadly and complex process.

Furthermore the findings of this study reveals that Migration of Mexican to United States has always been influenced by who is in power and how do they shape policies of migration. President Trump approach to migration was completely different from the earlier administration approaches as migration was not just seen as political issue but also a matter of identity and national security.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Instead of viewing migrants as contributors to the US economy, he viewed and represented them as a threat to US society. The proposed border wall between US and Mexico became a major instrument of Trump's nationalistic ideology as it represented separation and rejection. The construction of border wall helped Trump to gain mass support from the US citizens who believed that migrants were taking jobs and threatening their culture and values. From this we can analyze that he used migration as political instrument to unify his followers.

Furthermore Donald Trump significantly relied on executive orders which highlighted how political ideology shaped the role of state institutions towards the process of migration. Rather than cooperating with Congress or following the legal procedures, President Trump often issued executive order to make quick decisions which included measures such as rise in deportation of unauthorized migrants, limitation of asylum cases and giving more power and authority to the institutions such as Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE). Moreover, local police were also included to halt the Mexicans from entering USA. These actions of Donald Trump created an atmosphere of fear where migrants became marginalized and unwanted. His administration focused on restrictive policies rather than identifying what's the real cause behind migration.

Meanwhile, very recently a huge turn came in US politics with the winning of Zohran Mamdani as the Mayor of New York city. He is a 33 year old Democratic Socialist and now the first Muslim mayor of New York City who won 50.4% of the vote and the support of over one million New Yorkers, beating both previous Governors Andrew Cuomo and Curtis Sliwa.⁶⁷

Mamdani's political campaigns were deeply related to the rights of working class and migrant families across the New York. His promises included universal child care, rent freeze for stabilized tenants, free services of bus rides and protection of migrants through legal defense funding and sanctuary style city policies. Moreover in one of his election speech in Brooklyn Paramount Theater he stated that "New York will remain the city of immigrants, powered by immigrants and,

⁶⁷ By Jeelani Law Firm, "New York's First Muslim Mayor Zohran Mamdani's Stance About ICE and Immigration," November 7, 2025, <https://www.jeelani-law.com/zohran-mamdani-stance-about-ice-and-immigration/>.

as of tonight led by an immigrant.”⁶⁸ This message deeply resonated with communities of migrants looking for representation and safety among rising fear of deportation and federal crackdowns.

Mamdani has always criticized US Immigration and Customs Enforcement due to their restrictive migration policies. During an interview in June with journalist Mehdi Hasan, he referred ICE as “a rouge agency” one that has no concern in rules and, no concern in order. Furthermore he stated that “It’s where the mayor will use their power to reject Donald Trump’s fascism. To stop ICE agents from deporting our neighbors. And to govern our city as a model for the Democratic Party one where we fight for working people with no apology.” This statement has sparked both criticism and admiration. Supporters argue that Mamdani is on point as he is representing the defenseless vulnerable population, while on the other side critics especially former ICE officials argue that federal agents can’t be prevented by any city leader when it comes to their official job. Retired ICE agent Scott Mechkowski, stated that “You’re not going to stop the federal government from doing what they’re charged with doing; it’s just not going to happen,”⁶⁹

Moreover these developments are explained and analyzed through the lens of Institutional theory of migration. Theory argues that when legal policies of migration are made complex by administrations, it unintentionally push migrants towards taking dangerous and illegal routes. This can be explained by analyzing President Trump’s strict implementation of policies such as “Remain in Mexico” and “Zero-Tolerance policies” which were aimed at limiting migration especially the illegal one but instead of limiting it, it forced migrants to depend on illegal organizations and networks.

This has been proven in the above proposal by analyzing role of illegal organization in facilitating migration. Barrio 18 also known as 18th street Gang in Western Hemisphere, positions as one of the biggest youth gangs. Although Barrio 18 has cells functioning from Central America to Canada. The reason for Barrio 18 to spread south into Central America and Mexico was driven by a change in US immigration policies in the mid of 1990s, which surged the range of criminal charged for which foreign-born residents could be deported to their homeland.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid

From a critical point of view, when different migration policies of different Presidents were analyzed, we found that Donald Trump policies were evidently more rigid and retaliatory as President Obama and Biden attempted to balance implementation with humanitarian consequences, enforcing measures such as expelling criminals while also protecting innocent but Trump intentionally excluded this priority and treated each undocumented migrants as potential threat

The administration of Trump, Domestically depended on measures such as expedited removal, Migrant Protection Protocols etc. These policies intended at fast deportation of undocumented migrants and restricting asylum, by ignoring many proper protocols. The process of expedited removal helps Trump administration to quickly carry out deportations without any delays that come with the hearing of courts or appeals. In January 2025 administration of Trump extended the use of expedited removed to its full extent which now applies on undocumented persons: who are apprehended anywhere in the United States, cannot prove they have resided in the US for at least two years and lastly the one who entered the US between ports of entry.

The MPP ordered migrants to stay in Mexico until their court cases in United States were processed which led to the conditions that neglected their physical and psychological wellbeing. Due to MPP policy families for example in the camps of Rio Grande were pushed to live in poor conditions such as vulnerable to violence and extreme weather conditions. Numerous cases of separation of families, hindered reunification and deaths in camps and detention highlighted the humanitarian consequences of nationalistic driven migration policies.

On the other hand, Trump's policies on the international level capitalized diplomatic and economic tools to enforce his ideological driven migration policies. Tariff threats and agreements such as USMCA were used to force Mexico to align itself with the United States enforcement policies in limiting migration. Third country deportation was expanded at the similar time, forcing states such as Mexico, El Salvador and Costa Rica to receive migrants which were deported from US. Though there measures favored and strengthened US dominance on the border control, it raised serious concerns regarding the respect of international human rights principles and the safety of helpless populations. The implementation of Title 42 during the Covid-19 Pandemic which allowed fast removal of migrants and seekers of asylum under public health law, further limited authorized migration and highlighted that how domestic conditions can be interconnected with global crisis.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this study highlights that the migration policies of Trump administration was not merely influenced by economic concerns or labor demands but political ideology played a crucial role in shaping migration policies at both domestic and international level. By representing migrants as danger to culture, identity and national security, Donald Trump justified strict policies such as “Zero-Tolerance, Remain in Mexico and Family Separation” policy which had several consequences and posed a serious challenge to International Human Rights. Moreover, leader’s political stance and ideology play a crucial role in determining the process of migration as President Obama and Biden looked at various factors when dealing with the process of migration but President Trump from day one has had a negative stance when it comes to migration. Donald Trump by representing migrants as threat and supporting “America First” slogan furthermore transformed the paths of traditional migration and created a divide between who belongs to the United States and who don’t. The proposed border wall worked as crucial instrument in justifying these policies as it portrayed separation, not assistance.

Furthermore, Trump also used his legal power to his full extent which allowed him to determine and implement policies quickly and avoid working with the Congress with executive orders playing a major role in implementing these strict policies which also strengthened the powers of US agencies like ICE. But critics argue that Donald Trump played a politics of interest and made the system unfair as it was less about justice and peace and more about punishment. For example migrants with no criminal backgrounds were also treated as dangerous criminals. These policies didn’t halted the process of migration but instead changed the ways of migration which is explained by the institutional theory of migration which proposes that that “migration flow is mediated by organizations both profit driven and nonprofit and focuses on how migration is not just shaped by state policies or personal choices but by intermediary organizations as well. Simply when routes of legal migration are limited, it unintentionally force migrants to migrate from illegal routes through cartels and smugglers.

Moreover, Trump called migrants as threat but according to the findings, migrants including undocumented ones are a crucial part of economy of US as they heavily contribute to the major services such as agriculture, construction, health care etc., where the population of Native Americans are fewer.

Regardless of these preventive actions, encounters at the border increased, representing that implementation only did not effectively prevent migration but instead shifted migration routes and increased dependence on smuggling networks. From an economic lens President Trump measures reflected a protectionist approach but study from the Peterson institute of international economics and the congressional budget office analyze that limiting migration and deterring undocumented migrants unintentionally led to unintended consequences as migrants heavily contribute to US economy particularly in productive industries which require skillful workers. Policies that reduce migrant participation in the labor force can weaken economic growth, reduce innovation, and create labor shortages in critical fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). In this sense, the administration's nationalist migration agenda prioritized political symbolism over practical economic consideration.

Furthermore, the long term consequences of migration policies of President Trump continue to shape political and social dynamics of United States. The strong reliance on executive orders, America First ideology and Us vs. Them didn't address the real causes of migration such as economic inequality and violence. Instead these measures created a divide between communities of migrants and institutions of state. Lastly, these approaches of Trump administration damaged United States image as a country structured immigration and human rights. The consequences of harsh policies related to border strained diplomatic relations mainly with Mexico and placed US under international criticism for not respecting human rights related to migration.

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