

# Why Has Migration Become A Contentious Political Issue In Key Elections Across The World? Case Study The USA.

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## **Abstract:**

*International migration has over the years become a contentious topic and has come centre stage in political discourse. One would have thought that in a more globalised economy, international migration would be the norm and hence, it's the scale of its complexity and the increasing divisiveness on the topic makes it an interesting research topic. This paper examines the probable causes of the growing disenchantment with international migration, which in the not-so-distant past was perceived as essential to fulfil key labour market gaps and consequent economic gains.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, politics, divisiveness, globalisation, nationalism, sovereignty and national security, populism, polarisation, unemployment*

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## **I. Introduction:**

Globally, approximately 184 million people, or 2.3% of the world population, live outside their country of citizenship. This highlights the growing complexity of human mobility, which will increasingly be driven by factors like climate change, conflict, divergent demographic trends, and income inequality [1]. As more and more people relocate for better opportunities, they also present growing unfamiliar challenges for the local community of the destination nations, that is causing an increasing uproar against it. The latest World Migration Report 2024 Reveals that migration went from 184-to 281 million international migrants globally with the number of those displaced hitting a record high in 2022, post the pandemic [2].

Migration is not something new. It has been an integral part of human history. As far as modern history is concerned, most migration is regular, monitored, safe, and regionally focused and is directly linked to opportunities and livelihoods, unless it come out of war and conflict and natural disasters. Even in the case of the latter, the proportion of unmonitored migration is substantially lesser and yet it has become a huge rallying point in the current political discourse.

It is in this context, that it is important to understand the difference between a migrant and a refugee as political discourse sometimes mixes the two. Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their home country due to violence, persecution, or war. They are unable to return home because of fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, that put their life at risk. Migrants on the other hand are people who move for economic reasons and for better livelihood and can choose to return at will [3,4].

While most empirical studies indicate a positive impact of migration labour markets and business performance in host countries, public opinion contrarily views immigration with apprehension and fear. The USA is often cited as an example of the positive co relation between migration and economic growth. Immigration fuels the economy. The Government authorities have gone on record to indicate that immigrants contribute to the U.S. economy in many ways, and they increase the productive capacity of the economy and help raise the GDP. Their incomes rise, but so do those of natives. It's a phenomenon dubbed the "immigration surplus". Their geographic mobility helps local economies respond to worker shortages, smoothing out bumps that could otherwise weaken the economy. Immigrant workers help support the aging native-born population, increasing the number of workers as compared to retirees and bolstering the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. And children born to immigrant families are upwardly mobile, promising future benefits not only to their families, but to the U.S. economy overall [5]. Immigrants hold jobs that are important to our economy and communities. Immigrant workers without a college degree that are often the target of the divisiveness that mars the current politics in the US are found in key sectors like farming, fishing, and forestry, building and construction, sanitation and cleaning, hotels and health care [6].

In a 2015 report, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel of experts determined that immigrants' economic contributions would be hard to replace There are still many jobs in the United States for low-skilled

workers [7]. Among the important reasons cited for this high demand have been the substantial shrinkage since 1990 of the U.S.-born, younger, less-skilled working-age population (those who are native born, ages 25-44, and with educational attainment of a high school diploma or less), owing to the aging of Baby Boomers; higher educational attainment among the U.S.-born; and a fertility rate below the replacement rate for the U.S. In fact, the report seemed to imply that immigrants were taking low-skilled jobs because the natives are either not available or unwilling to take them [8,9].

Empirical evidence has also shown that immigrants are more mobile and quicker to relocate for a job as compared to them in response to shortages that appear in local labour markets. This helps native-born workers by filling gaps that could otherwise make their jobs impossible or reduce their productivity and lower their wages [10]. Immigration also drives growth in key industries like housing and consumer durables with a Census Bureau data showing that , immigrant-headed households made up 39.5 percent of household growth [11]. These sectors are the key drivers of the local economies.

Successive studies on high skilled labour have also shown that immigrants contribute significantly to the culture of entrepreneurship and innovation that underlines the US success story. These studies also show that they make U.S.-born individuals more inventive [12]. “We find immigrants represent 16% of all U.S. inventors, but produced 23% of total innovation output, as measured by number of patents, patent citations, and the economic value of these patents,” according to a National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) study by economists Shai Bernstein (Harvard Business School), Rebecca Diamond (Stanford), Abhisit Jiranaphawiboon (Stanford), Timothy McQuade (U.C.-Berkeley), and Beatriz Pousada (Stanford). Moreover, immigrant workers bring new ideas and enrich both, the academic and business environment with unique diverse perspectives and significant strengths and facilitate diffusion of global knowledge [13]. Immigrants are an integral part of the American entrepreneurial ecosystem. Analysis of immigrant occupational tendencies indicate that in many developed countries, including the United States, immigrants have higher rates of business ownership compared to native-born citizens [14,15,16]. The role of the high-skilled immigrant entrepreneurs and workers, especially in high-growth sectors such as the tech sectors that play a pivotal role in broader economic conditions through job creation and tax revenue, has also been crucial. Saxenian (2002) pioneered a research study to examine the economic contributions of skilled immigrants, especially those of Chinese and Indian origin, to the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as California overall. The study showed that the transformation of the U.S. immigration system, via the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 and the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1990, coincided with the growth of emerging high-technology industries in Silicon Valley. By favouring the entry highly educated immigrants, including engineers and scientists, it fuelled the growth of the Silicon Valley [17]. The immigrants have played a crucial role in innovation and fuelled the startup/unicorn culture. According to a report from the National Foundation of American Policy, as of October 2018, 50 of the 91 unicorn startups (or 55 percent) had at least one immigrant founder. These immigrant-founded startups employ an average of more than 1,200 workers each and have a collective value of \$248 billion [18]. This number has only increased since then. According to the 2024 New American Fortune 500 report, the percentage of New American companies has reached a new high: 46 percent of Fortune 500 companies in 2024 were founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants. Of those companies, 108 had immigrant founders and 123 had founders being children of immigrants. In fiscal year 2023, they collectively generated \$8.6 trillion in revenue—an amount that exceeds the GDP of many developed countries, including Japan, Germany, India, and the United Kingdom. In fact, a country with a GDP equal to the revenues of the New American Fortune 500 firms would be the third largest economy in the world, behind only the United States and China [19]. Interesting they are a huge employment creators too. Together, they employ over 15.5 million people worldwide—a population that would rank as the fifth largest state in the United States, just after New York but easily beating Pennsylvania [20].

Besides entrepreneurship, high-skilled immigrants have contributed significantly to the overall innovation of American firms. Several studies have measured the innovation impact of immigrants using patent data. According to Bernstein, Diamond, McQuade, & Pousada (2018), immigrants produce more patents, patent citations and patent-derived economic value than native citizens. Despite being just 16 percent of inventors in 2018, they were responsible for 23 percent of patent production during that period. Bernstein et al. (2018) found that immigrants have generated 25 percent of the aggregated economic value created by patents produced by publicly traded firms [21].

Interestingly a lot of this success is attributed to the American higher education sector that has always welcomed international students and encouraged diversity on campus. About 22% (20 of 91) of the billion-dollar startup companies had a founder who first came to America as an international student [22]. In the 2018-2019 academic year, there were more than 1 million international students studying in the United States, with over 50 percent pursuing STEM fields—the primary driver of innovation and invention [23]. In 2021, the proportion of foreign-born workers in STEM occupations (26%) was greater than the proportion of US-born workers (24%) [24]. The number only increased post the pandemic. In their complaint related to ICE’s rule to exclude F-1 visa holders whose educational residency programs move online due to the pandemic, Harvard and MIT noted:

“The value of the education offered by Plaintiffs hinges on the diversity of perspective offered by these international students. Rendering their participation impossible or insignificant will impair the educational experience for all Harvard and MIT students. Moreover, Harvard and MIT also depend on some F-1 graduate students for teaching support in their undergraduate programs.... Many of Harvard’s curricular programs depend on the presence and diversity of international students” [25].

Studies have also revealed that Immigration will slow the future aging of America’s population and for the declining birth rate among the local population which can have long term impact on the economy and cause acute labour shortages. The results of the 2020 census showed a 2010-20 decade-long decline in the nation’s under-18 (youth) population, and a baby-boomer-fuelled gain in its 65-and-older (senior) population, which called attention to the aging of the U.S. population [26].

A low birth rate and an ageing population can lead to a decline in the labor force, reduced demand in certain industries such as housing (and reduced home prices due to weaker demand), and a slowing and less dynamic economy. Immigrants, however, can counteract these effects. By 2035, the Census Bureau projects, there will be only about 2.4 working-age adults in the U.S. for each person aged 65 or older, fewer than in any prior decade on record and down from 4.7 working-age adults in 2016. The ratio of working-age adults to children and elderly combined is expected to fall from 1.6 to 1.3 between 2016 and 2030 and remain there until at least 2060. Adding younger workers now can ease this demographic shift. These younger workers will have to be sourced from other countries as Without immigrants, there would be fewer working-age adults [27,28,29,30].

Given this context, it is worth examining why immigration has become one of the nation’s most contentious political issues. This paper examines the plausible reason for the growing disenchantment with the country’s immigration policy.

## **II. Plausible Reasons For The Growing Disenchantment With Immigration In The US: Increasing job insecurity as the labour market slows down:**

The global financial and economic crisis triggered a sharp decline in almost all industrialized economies in 2009, reminiscent of the post-Second World War era. Businesses were forced to cut down on production due to a sharp decline aggregate demand. This resulted in Businesses offloading workers to stay afloat sharply increasing unemployment. When President Obama took office, the American automobile industry was on the brink of collapse forcing him to take the difficult decision to provide support to General Motors (GM) and Chrysler on the condition that they, and all their stakeholders, make the sacrifices necessary to fundamentally restructure their businesses and commit to tough-minded plans to return to viability [31]. Despite the recovery, watching the big manufacturing giants crumble sowed the seeds of insecurity in the mind of the public.

Subsequently, the 2010s were a decade of phenomenal innovation, led largely by the transition to mobile and the rise of data, which accelerated the growth of AI, e-commerce, social media, and biotechnology and heralded the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As new technologies are introduced to the marketplace, they had a profound impact on the job market leading to a huge loss in routine jobs while the demand for high skilled jobs surged.

Just when people were beginning to figure out the change and make sincere efforts to adapt to the changing reality, COVID struck. The COVID-19 pandemic had wide ranging impacts on the labour market and with increased unemployment, changed work conditions, and increases in job stressors [31,32]. Within a month of the pandemic i.e. mid-April 2020, the U.S. unemployment rate increased to a level unprecedented since the Great Depression, reaching an unemployment rate of 14.7 % [33]. Such rapid and unprecedented layoffs due to macro-level crises resulted in a lot of insecurity across the country [34,35,36].

As people struggled to get back to normal, technology had used the pandemic lull to completely alter the job landscape. A new survey finds that responses to COVID-19 have speeded the adoption of digital technologies by several years—and that the rapid technological change has been destroying jobs faster than it is creating them, contributing to the stagnation of median income and the growth of inequality in the United States [37].

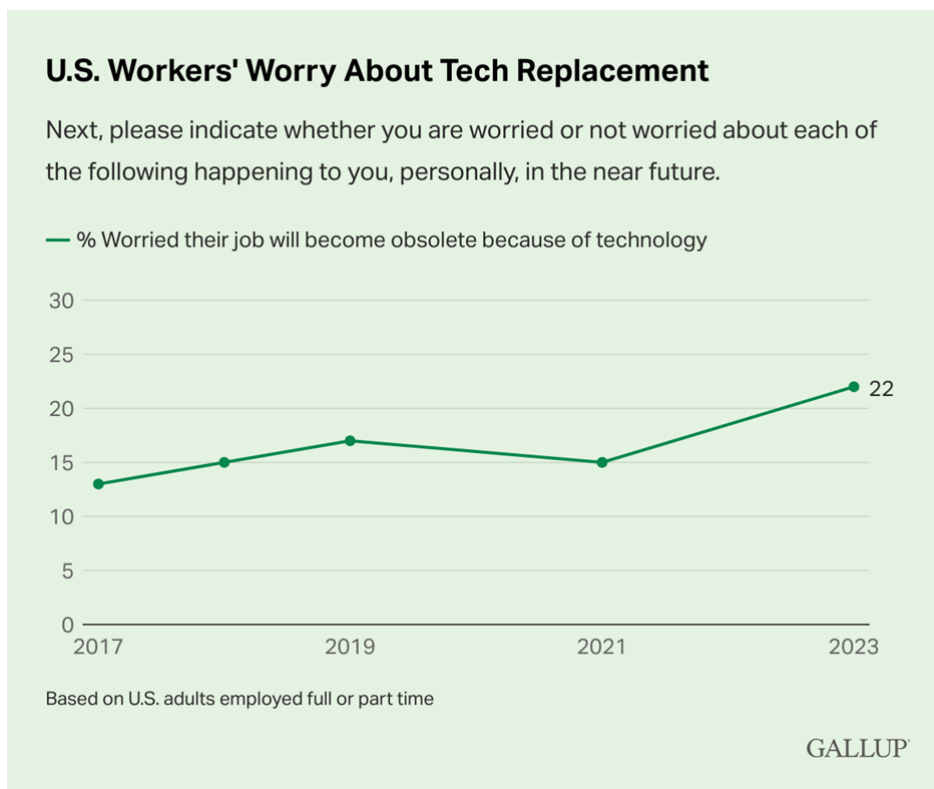
In a country replete with powerful people preaching the importance of working hard and staying busy, lack of jobs is much more threatening socially. President Theodore Roosevelt once remarked that he’d rather risk wearing out than rusting out. This thought process was a part of American culture. Yet millions of people today find themselves at odds with this once uncompromised ideal of a steady, nine-to-five job that, for the baby-boomer generation, was all but guaranteed [38, 39].

Most economists agree that one of the leading propagators of this loss of U.S. jobs is the exponential growth of the use of technology in industry to increase efficiency and output. The entire job market is seeing an unprecedented churn due to technology intervention. The trend was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdowns, forcing companies to adopt technology to reduce physical contact and excessive dependence on manpower. According to a survey during the pandemic, 43% of organizations reported that they would reduce their workforce because of technology integration [40,41,42,43].

According to a survey conducted by Gartner, Inc. as far back as in 2019, the number of organizations adopting AI has grown by 270% in four years, with more than 90% of businesses having ongoing investments in AI. While it is increasingly acknowledged that technological advancements have increased convenience and safety, it has left workers worried about their future roles and plagued with role ambiguity and issues of role conflict making them increasingly insecure [44, 45] of their own capability to adjust to the changing dynamics of the job market [46]. According to another study of the same year approximately 47% of jobs in the U.S. labor market (e.g., transportation and logistics, administrative support, and production occupations) are at high risk of being replaced by technology over the next 10 to 20 years [47]. The situation is a lot different now and automation has only increased in the last few years.

While earlier many researchers dismissed this problem claiming that only routine jobs would get impacted and that new avenues would open over time, the situation on the ground became extremely worrisome. According to a study conducted by UC Berkeley, some of the most vulnerable jobs are those in office administration, production, transportation, and food preparation. Such jobs are deemed to face “high risk” with over 70 percent of their tasks potentially automatable. All of these either involve routine, physical labor or information collection and processing activities. It went on to summarise that the “High risk” jobs represent only one-quarter of all jobs, but that doesn’t mean the problem is insignificant. A quarter of the U.S. workforce consists of some 36 million people who will be highly exposed to automation and could suffer displacement as a result [48].

While till now the impact was felt more in the blue collar and the lower skilled jobs, the latest results from Gallup’s Work and Education poll of 2023, has set off an alarm specially as it has come at a time when top tech companies were downsizing and laying off highly skilled workers. Twenty-two percent now say they worry that technology will make their job obsolete, up seven percentage points from the prior reading in 2021. The recent rise in people’s concern about their job becoming obsolete is owing almost entirely to college-educated workers, among whom the percentage worried has jumped from 8% to 20%. At the same time, worry among workers without a college degree is virtually unchanged at 24%. As a result, whereas non-college-educated workers were previously much more concerned about technological replacement than college-educated workers, these groups now express similar levels of concern [49, 50].



According to the CNBC- SurveyMonkey Workforce Survey of 2023, while 72% felt that the use of AI was positive, and made them more productive, more than 4 in 10 (42%) workers express some degree of concern about the technology’s impact on their jobs. It found that workers who use AI at work are nearly twice as likely to be concerned about its impact on their job, compared with those who do not use AI at work (60% very or somewhat concerned vs. 35%) [51].

Significantly, all this while the higher skilled segment was considered relatively secure. However, recently, in a stunning reversal, the tech industry—once the unstoppable engine of modern innovation—has laid off over 124,000 workers in 2024 alone adding to the angst regarding the future of work [52]. In August 2024, Intel sent shockwaves through the market by announcing a 15% reduction in its global workforce—roughly 15,000 jobs. Just days later, Cisco Systems announced plans to lay off 7% of its employees, marking its second round of job cuts this year as the company shifts focus to rapidly growing areas like artificial intelligence and cybersecurity [52]. It is evident that Artificial intelligence is profoundly reshaping the tech landscape. IBM's decision to cut 3,900 jobs in its marketing and communications division while freezing hires for roles that could be replaced by AI is a stark illustration of this trend. The shift toward AI-driven efficiency is forcing companies to rethink their workforce strategies [53,54].

Amid all this uncertainty, there is this growing feeling among Americans, that the influx of immigrants hurts their prospects significantly and that increase in migrants with similar skills, brings down their wages and salaries as the simple demand supply imbalance begins to payout. This growing air of insecurity and fear of far reaching changes is turning a certain section of the populations against immigrants. There is a general feeling that “When the supply of workers goes up, the price that firms have to pay to hire workers goes down. Wage trends over the past half-century suggest that a 10 percent increase in the number of workers with a particular set of skills probably lowers the wage of that group by at least 3 percent. Even after the economy has fully adjusted, those skill groups that received the most immigrants will still offer lower pay relative to those that received fewer immigrants” [55].

The low skilled natives without a college degree that form a huge vote bank were the ones who have been hit the hardest. A high school dropout was expected to earn about \$25,000 annually. According to census data, immigrants admitted in the past two decades lacking a high school diploma have increased the size of the low-skilled workforce by roughly 25 percent. As a result, the earnings of this particularly vulnerable group dropped by between \$800 and \$1,500 each year [55,56]. This insecurity when fuelled by political rhetoric, only adds to the growing weariness with migration among the Americans.

### **Fear of losing Cultural identity**

Scepticism about whether new arrivals can assimilate into American society was a key concern in the 2016 presidential election and remains an ongoing theme in the public debate on immigration policy [56]. There is a large proportion of the American population who believes that immigrants as a threat to the integrity of the nation's culture, fearing that foreigners somehow make America less American. Immigration strikes at the very heart of a central metathesiophobia, or fear of change. This anxiety can come from a fear of the unknown or an expectation of loss — loss of identity about religion, language, and culture and the power and privileges associated with that identity [57]. The discomfort for them arises out of being surrounded by people who don't dress, behave or follow the same religion as them and yet enjoy the perks that come from being in a developed economy.

Beyond the economic argument, many Americans also think that the presence of immigrants, especially large numbers of immigrants from 'third world' countries, are a threat to American values, culture, and institutions as they don't speak English and have varying cultural values and eating habits. These sentiments are further fuelled by the more vocal rise of an anti-immigrant lobby that includes political leaders, TV and radio talk-show pundits, social movement organisations, including public interest organisations that publish reports and policy briefs, as well as unauthorised militia groups that patrol the U.S. Mexican border, such as the 'Minutemen' [58,59,60].

Moreover, the fact that Immigrants tend to settle in ethnic enclaves, prefer to speak their mother tongue, and gravitate to places of worship and social events that provide cultural continuity with their origins), also fuels this growing disenchantment with them [61,62]. While, living in ethnic neighbourhoods can be beneficial for immigrants within the larger culture there is generally a negative perception of ethnic enclaves as “ghettos” [63]. The few psychological studies conducted on the phenomenon of immigrants living in ethnic enclaves or neighbourhoods with greater co-ethnic concentration suggest that this experience may be quite different depending on where they settle and that they are more likely to retain their native culture. Pressure to assimilate can be strong outside ethnic enclaves and may lead to greater incidences of discrimination and its consequences [64,65,66,67]. However, the same benefits trouble the natives who feel that they enjoy the economic benefits without cultural assimilation and identification with the American way of life. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) argued that negative views of immigrants emerge from fears of diminished economic resources, rapid demographic changes, and diminished political influence. The last being very significant as more and more leaders come from background different from theirs and that makes them feel even more powerless in their own country [68]. The COVID-19 pandemic also changed people's lives around the globe, generating a rise in xenophobia against people of Asian descent. Specifically, Chinese Americans were the most negatively influenced because China was erroneously accused of being the origin of the virus that is manipulated on purpose. Other studies have also shown that the rising xenophobia toward Chinese Americans also affected other ethnicities

within the Asian community, such as Korean Americans and Burmese Americans, due to the fact that many Asians share similarities in appearance [69,70,71,72].

### **Historical context:**

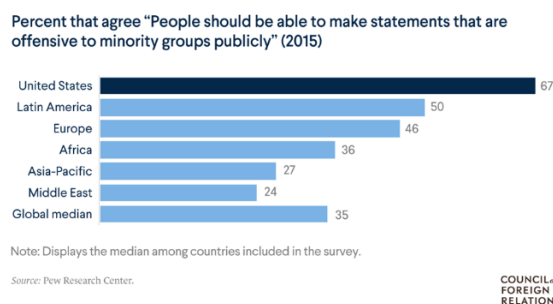
America's historic division over race remains at the heart of so many conflicts we see today. Research has shown that white Americans tend to define "American" as synonymous with "White" and subsequently perceive those who appear phenotypically not white (e.g., darker skin tones and phenotypes) as "less American". This phenomenon is reflected in immigration policy and lived experiences of minoritized immigrants. Further, this discourse erases the experiences of Native Americans and people of African descent who were colonized, enslaved, and oppressed, and are still marginalized to this day [73,74,75,76,77].

In its 2000 report, the United States stated that "overt discrimination" is "less pervasive than it was thirty years ago" but admitted it continued due to "subtle forms of discrimination" that "persist[ed] in American society". The forms of discrimination reported to the United Nations by the United States included "inadequate enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws"; "ineffective use and dissemination of data"; economic disadvantage experienced by minority groups; "persistent discrimination in employment and labour relations"; "segregation and discrimination in housing" leading to diminished educational opportunities for minorities; lack of equal access to capital, credit markets and technology; discrimination in the criminal legal system; lack of adequate access to health insurance and health care; and discrimination against immigrants, among other harmful effects [78].

Even today, for many White Americans, their ingroups do not include Black Americans. Part of the reason for this has to do with America's fraught history of racial segregation, which kept White and Black communities separated [79]. Since it has been found to be politically expedient, it is out in the open once again.

### **The impact of the social media:**

The growing racist calls and mounting number of attacks on immigrants and other minorities has raised new concerns about the connection between inflammatory speech online and violent acts, as well as the role of corporations and the state in policing speech. Analysts say trends in hate crimes around the world echo changes in the political climate, and that social media can magnify discord. At their most extreme, rumours and invective disseminated online have contributed to violence ranging from lynchings to ethnic cleansing. The response has been uneven, and the task of deciding what to censor, and how, has largely fallen to the handful of corporations that control the platforms on which much of the world now communicates. The social media also has the capacity to add fuel to the fire due to its reach. Incidents happening in one part of the globe can impact thinking at the other end. Much of the world now communicates on social media, with nearly a third of the world's population active on Facebook alone. As more and more people have moved online, experts say, individuals inclined toward racism, misogyny, or homophobia have found niches that can reinforce their views and goad them to violence. Social media platforms also offer violent actors the opportunity to publicize their acts with impunity in the name of freedom of speech; something that was not possible earlier. The following survey stands testimony to how people subscribe to social media posts, and other online speech that have the potential to inspire acts of violence [80,81]:



The same technology that allows social media to galvanize democracy activists can be used by hate groups seeking to organize and recruit.

It also allows fringe sites, including peddlers of conspiracies, to reach audiences far broader than their core readership. Online platforms' business models depend on maximizing reading or viewing times. Since Facebook and similar platforms make their money by enabling advertisers to target audiences with extreme precision, it is in their interests to let people find the communities where they will spend the most time.

Users' experiences online are mediated by algorithms designed to maximize their engagement, which often inadvertently promote extreme content. Some web watchdog groups say YouTube's autoplay function, in

which the player, at the end of one video, tees up a related one, can be especially pernicious. The algorithm drives people to videos that promote conspiracy theories or are otherwise “divisive, misleading or false,” according to a *Wall Street Journal* investigative report [82,83,84].

**Political Expediency:**

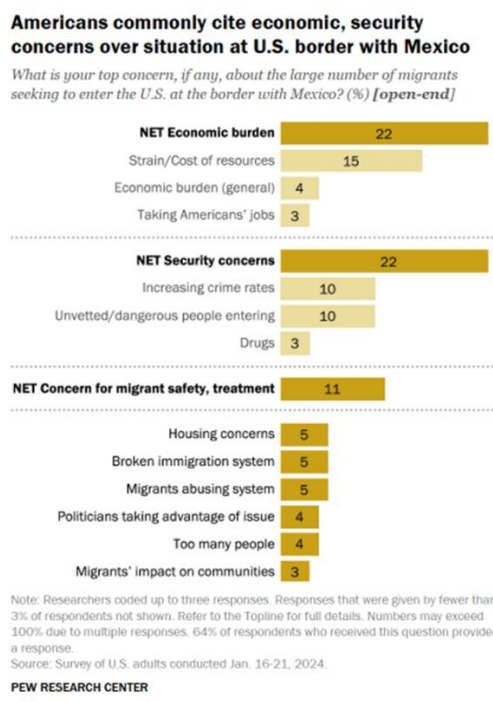
Dividing people based on race and religion is becoming a politically expedient experiment in most secular democracies across the world. The trend has only deepened fault lines in the US. In a polarized United States, what divides Democrats and Republicans the most isn’t gender or education or income or religion. It is the issue of race, whether regarding the backgrounds of the voters who make up the two parties’ coalitions, or the conflicting agendas and priorities each side advocates in the pursuit of power [85].

A report prepared by the American Political Science Association (APSA) in partnership with the organization Protect Democracy, the first such from APSA in 70 years, looks specifically at the demographic sources of division brings home the degree to which the political parties, as they have sorted themselves over recent decades, now have as the most fundamental cleavage race and ethnicity Lilliana Mason of Johns Hopkins University writes in another chapter of the report, “The process of social sorting allowed the Republican Party to represent the interests of ‘traditional’ white, Christian America while the Democratic Party was increasingly representing those who were still struggling to overturn centuries of social inequality. This type of divide is not easily corrected — Democrats and Republicans have opposing visions of who should hold power in American society and how much progress has already been made.” Since this division is reaping benefits, it’s not something that can be wished away [86]. Racial realignment between the major parties has been growing for decades, changing the way the parties see the political landscape and their incentives for action. In the 2016 presidential election, non-White voters comprised roughly 45% of the Democratic vote, compared with less than 15% of Republican voters [87].

**Security Concern:**

As per research conducted by the Pew Research Centre, when asked an open-ended question about their top concerns regarding the large number of migrants seeking to enter the U.S. at the border with Mexico, the most cited concerns relate either to the economic costs and burdens associated with the migration surge or concerns about security [88].

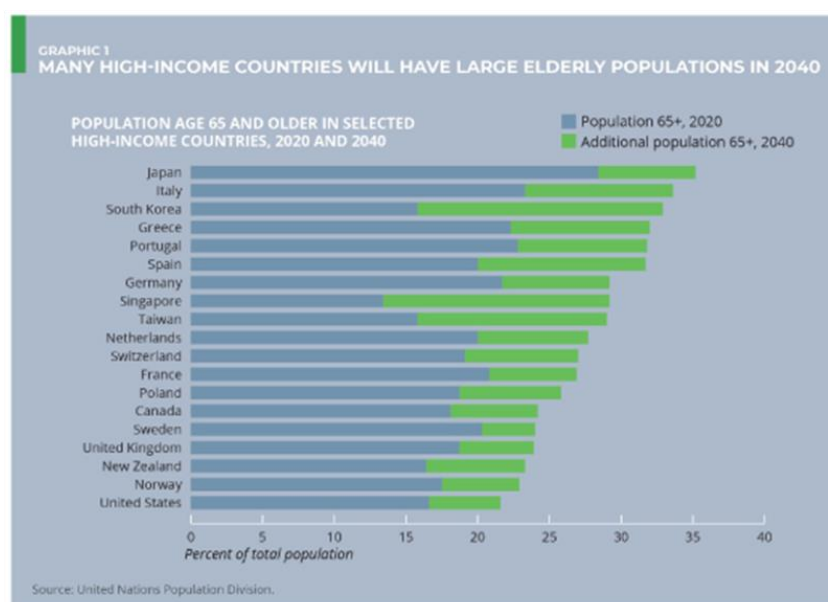
The September 11, 2001, terrorist attackers were foreigners who entered the country legally on a temporary visa, mostly tourist visas with entry permits for six months. That even triggered great insecurity among the American people. The pandemic changed the perceived threat to health. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign tourists, temporary visitors, and returning U.S. citizens were not required to undergo medical screening upon entering the country. These watershed events only fuel further insecurity and fear of foreigners entering the system and being detrimental for the security of the country [89].



### III. Conclusion

Immigration is going to be a huge issue as migrants will from heavily populated nations will continue to see greener pastures in developed economies. The United States and the other 36 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries—which currently host more than half the world’s international migrants—probably will remain preferred destinations because of their high quality of life, economic opportunities, and large foreign-born populations that can ease the social and financial costs of integration [88]. Between 2013 and 2017, average per-capita income was 54 times higher in high-income countries than in low-income countries, and the World Bank estimates that closing this income gap will take 135 years at current growth rates.

**Ageing population in the developed world is another worrisome demographic trend** that is likely to spur demand for more foreign workers as companies/businesses will struggle to meet their labour shortage. Moreover, Increasing life expectancies will cause the number of people worldwide who are age 65 and older to nearly double from about 728 million in 2020 to 1.3 billion in 2040, according to UN projections. This older cohort will account for about a quarter of the developed world’s population by 2040. While automation might provide a certain relief in manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs, it will not be able to replace service professionals and high-skill workers. Many developed countries will need more migrant workers to care for their growing elderly populations. During the next decade, OECD countries are expected to have a shortfall of 2.5 million nurses and 400,000 doctors alone [89,90,91]



*(Graphic 1: Many high-income countries will have large elderly populations in 2040 - Click image to enlarge)*

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) today launched the World Migration Report 2024, which reveals significant shifts in global migration patterns, including a record number of displaced people and a major increase in international remittances. It goes on record that the number of displaced individuals due to conflict, violence, disaster, and other reasons has surged to the highest levels in modern-day records, reaching 117 million, underscoring the urgency of addressing displacement crises [92]. It also underscores how climate change and environmental degradation are expected to contribute to economic and social stresses that encourage migration. The report projects that by 2050, 216 million people will be displaced due to climate change.

The only silver lining in the report is that international migration remains a driver of human development and economic growth, highlighted by a more than 650 per cent increase in international remittances from 2000 to 2022, rising from USD 128 billion to USD 831 billion. The growth continued despite predictions from many analysts that remittances would decrease substantially because of COVID-19.

The statistical data that reveals that of that 831 billion in remittances, 647 billion were sent by migrants to low- and middle-income countries, may add to the growing opposition to migrants who are seen as drainers of national wealth, making that revelation one of the main challenges that affect the perception of migrants in the mind of the citizens. These figures become the foundation to rouse public opposition to large influxes of migrants, even when the top corporates are defending it. Strong cultural preferences for maintaining ethnic homogeneity and national identity are likely to continue to foment some public opposition to large influxes of migrants, even



in countries in need of an infusion of working-age adults. The recent success and expansion of the populist-nativist parties in Europe and large /colour/race is also finding traction in the US. migration comes in handy and in the line of fire as most immigrants are predominantly non white and threaten the jobs of the black Americans who are feeling threatened in the unskilled sector.

There is no doubt that the biggest winners from immigration are owners of businesses that employ that use immigrants as cheap labour in both the low and high skills category. The other big winners are the immigrants themselves. Given the stress in the job market across the world including the US, this debate on migration and the strong public perception among the American citizens who are against it is here to stay as its potential benefits may have been overshadowed by sensationalized narratives. However, the reality is far more nuanced than what captures headlines. Even the authorities claim that most migration is regular, safe, and directly linked to opportunities and livelihoods, this issue will continue to hold centre stage for the times to come [93,94,95]. However, this issue needs a deeper analysis of the concerns of the locals so that the issue doesn't become a rallying point for the political class and a tool for propaganda to target immigrants. The world would be watching the United States very closely as it has always been seen as the most progressive global economic epicentre.

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