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The Migration Reader: Exploring Politics and Policies

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chapter 1

Introduction

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The phenomenon of migration is rooted in human prehistory, when people routinely traveled over great distances to hunt, fish, establish a livelihood, and secure a home. However, it only became politicized, and hence legally and politically circumscribed, beginning in the nineteenth century, when the modern nation-state arose and erected political-territorial borders around ethnocultural communities. From this point forward the nation was the political community that conferred the state's legitimacy over its territory and transformed the latter into an entity comprising formal citizens. Following from this historical development, the concept of nationality emerged to link all citizens formally to the state. The phenomenon of international migration came to be defined as the movement of persons, that is, nonnationals or foreigners, across national borders for purposes other than travel or short-term residence.

With approximately 175 million people currently residing outside their country of origin, international migration is at its historical zenith. Within this group are more than 17 million asylum seekers, refugees, and other persons of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Although Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, and the United States are typically considered the classic immigration-receiving countries, these five have been joined by others during the past two decades, including many in Europe, that traditionally have been classified as countries of emigration. On the other side of the immigration divide, Latin America, most prominently Mexico, contributes the largest percentage of foreign-born persons to the major countries of immigrant settlement. Of a current population of 108 million Mexican-born persons, approximately 8 million now reside in the United States.

Although the study of international migration necessarily focuses on individuals or groups of people, it is the role of states, laws, and politics that makes migration an especially complex and controversial phenomenon. In this context, international migration inherently raises a tension between the right of individuals to circulate freely (a right rooted in international human rights law) and the right of states to control their borders (based on the principles of sovereignty and institutionalized in international

and domestic constitutional law). Furthermore, although the right to leave one's country of origin is generally recognized as a fundamental human right (United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: Article 13), a corresponding right of persons to enter countries other than their own has never evolved, in part because no modern state wishes to permit unregulated trespassing. Indeed, the tensions between national and international law pertaining to migration have been reconcilable historically only as long as liberal democracies sought to maintain free markets and open borders. In the current global era, haunted by the specter of unique security concerns and daunting economic challenges, contradictions between the two domains of law have increasingly come to the fore, posing dilemmas for policymakers on every side of the migration equation.

The previously published works and original essays that are collected in this volume represent the many and oftentimes controversial and conflicting voices that reverberate within the contemporary scholarship on migration. In crafting this reader, we have been guided by three central objectives. First, we aim to introduce students to the wide range of issues, trends, and topics that spring from the phenomenon of international migration. Second, we wish to familiarize students with the diverse literatures and disciplinary perspectives on the subject. Finally, we seek to inspire students to consider critically the key questions and practical dilemmas that migration poses for contemporary politics, public policy, society, and international relations. Informing these objectives is our fervent belief that the study of international migration provides an intellectual window through which students can better comprehend the nature and direction of the historic macroeconomic and political changes currently occurring within the international environment and state-society relations within both affluent and less-developed countries. Because the restrictions imposed by states on the movement of persons across their territorial boundaries affect the welfare of both prospective immigrants and citizens, the study of international migration, in our view, necessarily intersects critical questions pertaining to contemporary citizenship, democratic practice, equality, freedom, globalization, and liberalism.

This reader also seeks to fill a pedagogical void. Having analyzed numerous course syllabi from Europe and the United States, we detect two trends in the teaching of international migration and refugee movements. First, given the unavailability of a comprehensive reader on migration, many instructors have compensated by assembling unwieldy course packets comprising seminal articles. Second, the themes and questions that are typically covered in these syllabi and course packets often overlap, thus leading to unhelpful and distracting repetition. In our view, both trends signal a need for an accessible general reader that can facilitate teaching the subject of migration from an international and comparative perspective.

Although *international migration* explicitly refers to the movement (both emigration and immigration) of people across international borders, the formal categories of who is and who is not an “immigrant” have varied over time and place. As we shall see in Chapter 2, some countries consider anyone settled longer than one year an immigrant; others designate a three-year term. Some governments consider people born in their own country migrants, while others automatically recognize them as citizens. These numerous and often fluid practices make comparative analysis difficult, and they account for the imperfect classifications that are created by international organizations and official statistical agencies that collect and aggregate such data.

To complicate matters further, a single country may admit several types of migrants at the same time, which means that some countries that seem especially “generous” to highly skilled workers may have very different and less generous policies toward unskilled laborers. In addition, the traditional classification of the world’s countries into “labor-importing countries,” “permanent immigration countries,” or “migrant-exporting countries” has increasingly become less valid because of the complex and convoluted nature of migration. Countries such as the Philippines that have historically contributed a large percentage of the foreign-born persons to the major countries of immigrant settlement (especially as domestic workers and nurses) have also recently become significant countries of destination, thus making them both immigration-receiving and -sending countries.

The various academic disciplines naturally approach the study of migration in different and sometimes conflicting ways. As a result, a comprehensive understanding of the migration dynamic can seem elusive. As political scientists, our objective in this volume is to provide a comparative and international relations perspective on the broad-based scholarly literature on migration. Because politics is fundamentally about managing conflict, we privilege the numerous conflicts (demographic, economic, security, social, etc.) that migration generates for states through the lenses of comparative politics and international relations, subfields of political science. We are especially interested in the interrelationship between international migration and the nation-state, the latter of which is the central unit organizing the political world. Although we recognize that the demographic, economic, or sociological dimension of migration may top the political agenda at any given moment, our bias is to focus primarily on the controversies that require resolution in the first instance by politics. This is our value added to an anthology of immigration that explores politics and policy from the perspective of political science broadly defined. Adopting politics and policy as our primary reference points allows us to explore the immigration dynamic from the perspective of the multiple actors that are especially central to the immigration process (e.g., immigrants, society,

policymakers) as well as the international regimes that influence the transnational flow of immigration (e.g., the Bretton Woods order, the Geneva Refugee regime).

In considering international migration from multiple perspectives and contexts and connecting it to the contemporary world, this reader necessarily touches on issues and questions that should be of interest to more than political scientists. Historians, for example, might ask whether contemporary waves of immigration are unusually large. Anthropologists might ponder whether migration will transform the ethnic composition of a country. Other questions might be economically inspired. For example, are immigrants unusually enterprising? Does immigration depress wages or increase unemployment? Does immigration lead to a more unequal distribution of income? Do immigrants impose an undue welfare burden on domestic economies? Does their labor reduce or increase international competitiveness? In addition to these questions, issues of ethics, national security, and culture are represented within these pages.

Whatever their specific nature, conflicts about immigration almost inevitably generate considerable heat and much popular passion. Although empirical research can inform and perhaps even cool this passion, only rarely does it resolve most controversies. As the collected articles in this volume document, scholars frequently diverge in their thinking on even the most important questions. For example, some econometricians claim that the effects of immigration on the wages of native workers are few and relatively inconsequential, whereas others, informed by alternative and contrary empirical evidence, claim that immigration has especially negative effects. Similarly, some demographers see immigration as a solution to the problems of population decline and demographic aging, whereas others vehemently deny this claim.

One of the reasons that empirical research, however rigorous, does not necessarily resolve the disagreements regarding migration is that, at their root, many of the conflicts are as much about ethics and values as they are about objective facts. For example, what sort of country one wants and how one sees immigrants and their descendants fitting into it are highly subjective questions. If we ultimately conclude, as several of the authors in this volume do, that the heart of the contemporary immigration dilemma centers on values, then we must equally conclude that, whatever immigration's future trajectory or volume, domestic and international conflict over it is likely to endure. Given that politics, according to at least one prominent definition, is about "the authoritative allocation of values," immigration will long be the object of conflict management and politics.

In line with the aforementioned objectives and perspectives, we have organized the volume into four parts. Part 1 introduces the general concepts, issues, and trends associated with international migration and the

paradigms that inform, organize, and inspire the prevailing scholarly literature. This section also explores the various disciplinary accounts of the “pushes” and “pulls” that govern population movements, approaches that range from the demographic and economic to the social and political. Among the important questions raised in this section are: Who are the migrants? Why do people migrate?

Part 2 traces the historical origins of contemporary migration. Among the arguments this section introduces is the notion that contemporary patterns of migration are a product of the interrelationship between the forces of capitalism and the consolidation of nation-states as the latter play out within the international order. In focusing on its economic, demographic, and political dimensions, this section locates migration at the crossroads of the literatures of international political economy and international security.

Part 3 considers the many factors that constrain immigration and immigrant policymaking within the major immigration-receiving countries. Within this context, the section introduces the range of actors, including legislatures, courts, bureaucracies, mass publics, political parties, and pressure groups, as well as nonstate actors that influence the formulation and implementation of public policy. A key question raised in this section is: How does mass immigration contribute to the growth and proliferation of extreme-right political parties? This section concludes by assessing the challenges of transforming immigrants into citizens and incorporating the new ethnic minorities into the societies and politics of the immigration-receiving countries.

Part 4 raises three timely questions. First, can migration be effectively regulated? Second, can states realistically and successfully respond to the challenges posed by immigration by acting unilaterally? Third, to what degree do states have a moral obligation to maintain open borders and societies? The section concludes by exploring the changing dynamics of migration in an increasingly global environment and its implications for state sovereignty. Among the issues raised here are the practices of human smuggling and trafficking, fraudulent asylum seeking, the growth of female migration, east-west migration flows, and new multilateral responses to secure national borders.

As the chapters in this volume will attest, the enormous exodus of persons around the world springs from varied circumstances. Moreover, as many of the chapters show, immigration is driven and sustained by numerous and increasingly complicated causes. With little sign of abating any time soon, the annual flow of millions of persons across national borders will continue to pose daunting problems for virtually all contemporary societies and states.