'Run-Ology': A Pilot Study of the Social, Economic and Political Environmental Factors that Promote the Industrialization of the Sino-US Undocumented Immigration Corridor

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Abstract. The paper commences with an introduction to the prominence of un-documented immigration issues amidst globalization and economic exchanges. With highlighting the emergence of terms like 'run-ology' in the Chinese internet sphere, which have become widespread after the 2020's outbreak of covid-19, due to the long-standing immigration corridors in the Americas. This paper discussed the two main driving factors behind the popularity of this term: policy and social environment, and economic factors. The paper then explores the policy and social environmental factors that have increased the prevalence of 'run-ology', such as China's strict isolation policies and tightened migration policies, juxtaposed with the Biden administration's relaxation of some immigration policies in the U.S. Economic factors are also examined, including the demand for labor in countries like the U.S., the profitability of labor export from China, and the impact of the pandemic on economic activities and youth unemployment. It also analyzes past Chinese and American immigration policies and their effects on undocumented immigration trends. The conclusion summarizes that the pursuit of higher economic and social status, along with the political tolerance of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., are key reasons for the increase in undocumented immigration and the industrialization of smuggling behavior. The paper suggests that addressing this issue requires more than policy changes; it involves improving conditions in both China and the U.S. to reduce the motivation for undocumented immigration. It also acknowledges the limitations of the research scope and suggests that future research should be based on more in-depth investigations of immigrant groups.

Keywords: Undocumented Immigrant, Covid-19 Pandemic, Migration Corridor, Wave of Immigration, Sino-U.S. Immigration.

1 Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization and frequent economic exchanges, the issue of undocumented immigrants between China and the United States has become increasingly prominent. Since the coronavirus outbreak in 2020, the topic of undocumented immigrants has once again become a focus on the Chinese Internet; The act of smuggling people to other countries such as the United States has sparked widespread discussion and formed online coined terms such as 'run-ology' (Original Chinese as '走线', literal translation as 'walking line'). The popularity of the word is related to the long-standing immigration corridors in the Americas, and with the improvement of visibility, and gradually become an industry [1]. Therefore, this paper takes the industrialization of the corridor of undocumented immigrants from China through the United States as the research object, and supplemented by the analysis of the economic and political environment of China and the United States, tries to analyze the political, social environment and other factors affecting the industrialization of the movement of 'run-ology'.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Basic Concept

The word 'run-ology', is a newly coined word that has appeared in the context of the Chinese Internet since the new coronavirus epidemic in 2020.The word was originally intended to refer to the act of Chinese residents who lack the legal ability to enter the country through visas and other legal means to leave the mainland and enter other countries (especially the United States) through unofficial routes to live and work. Most of these immigrants entered the country illegally without checks, without proper identification documents, without work permits, and without a legal path to citizenship. According to the definition of Cornell Law School, residents who enter other countries through this method are undocumented immigrants [2]. However, after the outbreak of the new coronavirus in 2020, with the increase in the number of undocumented immigrants - according to the data provided by the US Immigration Bureau, 37,439 illegal immigrants entering the United States in 2023 are from China, which is low in absolute value, but the highest proportion of increase in any country - it is gradually widely referred to as 'run-ology 'on the Chinese Internet community. And derived such as 'walking-line' network unique phrases; These words have also become specific topic keywords in Tiktok, NewYork Times and other online media.

The popularity of this lifetime coinage is mainly divided into two major driving factors: policy and social environment, and economy.

2.2 Policy & Social Environmental Factors

First, political changes have increased the popularity of the word 'run-ology' and the behavior. TANG and KONG concluded that the strict isolation policy adopted by the

Chinese government in order to combat the epidemic objectively caused a decline in the income of a large number of Chinese citizens, and the highly controlled isolation policy on social activities caused doubts and fears of Chinese citizens [3]. This change in psychological and social environment has prompted a large number of citizens to choose to smuggle into the United States. At the same time, as Li reported in 2023, China has tightened its policies on the outward migration of its citizens, especially for the overseas movement of highly skilled people; And, in August 2022, the counter-measures taken in response to Pelosi's outburst included suspending cooperation on the repatriation of illegal immigrants from China and the United States [1].

In the United States, although the Trump administration has implemented a series of tough immigration policies during its administration, including strengthening border law enforcement, limiting refugee applications, and introducing 'public charge' rules, Thomas mentioned the differences the Biden administration has terminated the Title 42 ban on entry order and no longer repatriates illegal immigrants on a large scale [4].

This comparative push and pull change in policy has become an objective sphere of undocumented immigration activities in China and the United States. Under the influence of this general social environment change, the Internet began to appear professional strategy pages, blogs, and intermediary counseling websites. On social informational sites such as Tiktok, LittleRedBook, Zhihu, and news sites such as BBC NEWS Chinese, there are also a large number of people producing content such as instructive videos and articles, including start from entering Ecuador to find traffickers, eventually cross the border, and to surrender to the detention center and claim political persecution or religious oppression to obtain political asylum. The difficulty of obtaining a professional undocumented immigration guideline has been greatly reduced. This makes a lot of immigration behavior happened without a very strong political or life motive - a December 2023 article on the voachinese website quotes Yanhai Wan, who founded Chinese Informational Community in Flushing, New York, as saying that undocumented immigrants often follow suit blindly, many undocumented immigrants choose to enter the United States simply because of the social environment around them [5].

2.3   Economic Factors

Second, there are economic factors. In fact, moving to other countries for better pay has always been the main reason for cross-border migration. Minghuan conducted a study on the immigrants in Fujian Province and concluded that the immigrants in Fujian province chose Israel as the destination because Israel is widely considered to be a hostile country that is endlessly associated with wars. They chose Israel to make money, not to settle permanently [6]. The article points out that in some countries, such as Israel, its labor needs, such as the need for manual labor, provide an operating environment for labor immigration. And profitable. Although illegal activities are frowned upon, they continue to exist as providers of measures that lead to cross-border migration and undocumented migration. China is a country with abundant human resources. Since the 1980s, China's economic reform movement has unexpectedly led to a growing trend of cross-border migration, especially in southern regions such as Fujian Province [6]. In

addition, some state-owned and private companies have begun to recruit workers to work abroad. The export of labor became a very profitable business.

At the same time, the contraction of economic activities and the rise of youth unemployment caused by the epidemic have negatively affected the income of a large number of Chinese residents. This further increases the frequency of undocumented immigration in 2023. Undocumented immigrants seek higher wages and employment opportunities in the United States, often working in the gray zone in exchange for survival and savings. At the same time, according to Yan Haiyan, undocumented immigrants can, to a certain extent, meet the demand for labor force in the economic development of the United States [5]. According to the Pew Research Center, there were 7.75 million undocumented immigrants in the labor market in 2017, accounting for 4.6% of the U.S. workforce13. Cho found that the unemployment rate of undocumented immigrants was 3% higher than that of legal immigrants and natives during the recession, while the gap narrowed to 1.5% during the recovery [7]. Of these, 44% of undocumented immigrants work in the service industry, mainly in construction, catering, domestic services, agriculture and other fields. Although the average income level of undocumented immigrants in the United States is lower than that of legal immigrants and native workers in the United States, different economic circumstances in China and the United States still indirectly contribute to the frequency of undocumented immigrant in both directions [7],[8]. Machado also pointed out that the United States also adopts an attitude of acceptance towards undocumented immigrants, and most of the behaviors of undocumented immigrants can be pardoned, because it is also in the interests of the society to accept illegal immigrants and give them legal work and social status. The impact on work benefits for the indigenous population was modest (a reduction of only 0.2%) [9]. Although the wages and incomes of pardoned immigrants, that is, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants differ. And illegal immigrants with higher education will lower the wages of local residents with lower education. But admitting immigrants, legalizing them, and adding them to the tax system increases the productivity of workers in the economy. Therefore, the United States is more inclined to adopt an admission/legalization policy toward immigrants.

Working abroad and then sending money back home is also an important reason why undocumented migrants choose to smuggle themselves across the border. Many choose to send a portion of their income back to their home countries to support their families or provide for their children's education. China is one of the largest recipients of remittances from the United States. In 2018, Mexican immigrants in the United States sent $33.5 billion in remittances to their home country, a significant portion of which came from undocumented immigrants [10].

Starting from the above economic factors, labor market demand, unemployment rate, secure income and other factors are the main factors contributing to the smuggling of undocumented immigrants to the United States, and have been further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus contributing to the further outbreak of smuggling behavior.

2.4   Research Gap

Although, both society and academia are aware of the behavior of undocumented immigrants, or Chinese residents smuggling to the United States - overland smuggling from South America to the United States is not a new phenomenon after the epidemic. Some article on New York Times also call the large-scale immigration behavior after the outbreak of the epidemic in 2020 China as 'fourth wave of immigration'15. However, only a small number of articles and scholars have focused on the fact that after 2020, the act of undocumented immigration has gradually been industrialized, with a set of self-consistent market rules. The emergence of social facts such as local villain, online intermediary agent sites, and online community discussion posts that provide detailed text or video guides - which point to the generalization and socialization of the word 'run-ology' [11]. This change not only indicates the popularity of this behavior and the improvement of the public's awareness of it, but also makes people metaphorically think that the behavior of the word 'run-ology' is gradually becoming an industrial phenomenon - as long as the price is clearly marked and the list is prepared as planned, the behavior of undocumented immigration and smuggling from China to the United States will be successful. It can be seen from Tiktok, LittleRedBook, and various online forums that those who provide help to undocumented immigrants have a very clear purpose of profit distribution.

So, which social background is the behavior of undocumented immigrants gradually industrialized? What makes 'run-ology 'an industrial and social phenomenon? This paper will try to explore the social and economic factors that promote the industrialization of 'run-ology 'behavior.

3   The Specific Reasons for the Industrialization of 'Run-Ology'

3.1   Changes in Social Environment

In current society, the undocumented immigration industry has begun to take shape, involving labor introduction, transportation, capital turnover and other fields, and has formed an underground industrial chain connecting China and the United States.

The industrialization of 'run-ology' is inseparable from the changes in the social environment, such as the adjustment of policies, and the gray space generated by the expansion of people's livelihood needs. As the world's economy, transportation technology, and even the Internet continue to develop, the increasing economic and cultural ties between China and the United States also reduce the cost of undocumented immigrants, and undocumented immigrants have more channels to enter and stay in other countries.

From several immigration waves, it can be found that the survival gap and gray space generated by the social environment is one of the main reasons for the industrialization of 'run-ology'. In the 1980s, China began to implement the policy of reform and opening up and gradually integrated into the process of globalization. At the same time, the US economy has entered a new period of growth, and the demand for labor is increasing. In this context, a large number of Chinese immigrants began to go to the United

States to make a living, a considerable number of them are undocumented immigrants. According to Skeldon, between 1980 and 1990, the stock of Chinese immigrants in the United States increased from about 300,000 to more than 1 million [12]. As the U.S. economy continues to grow, the demand for immigrant workers in the labor market is gradually increasing. In this context, the number of Chinese immigrants entering the United States through family reunification, tourism, study abroad and other means is increasing, and the phenomenon of undocumented immigration is widespread [13]. Over time, the political relationship between the two countries has also changed. Although the political relationship between the two countries is becoming strained, the two countries have carried out extensive cooperation in the areas of livelihood security (such as drug control), economy, and the open integration of the civilian environment has provided convenience for undocumented immigrants to a certain extent. The attitude of American society toward undocumented immigrants is also easing. For example, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program launched by the Obama administration in 2012 allows undocumented immigrants who enter the United States under the age of 16 and meet certain conditions to be exempted from deportation and obtain a two-year work permit; In 2015, 10 states, including California, allowed undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. Since 2017, as Machado illustrated, several states have also passed legislation allowing undocumented students to pay tuition and receive financial aid as in-state students; Survival and development of undocumented immigrants and their children Increased tolerance of environmental policies to some extent increased the likelihood of undocumented immigrants staying in the United States [9]. The US government has relatively weak controls on illegal immigration, and undocumented immigrants have gradually gained more breathing space in the US.

3.2   Changes in Political Environment

In addition, the increasingly tolerant living environment in the United States has created space for the development of industries such as transnational intermediaries and underground banks for undocumented immigrants; On the other hand, changes in the official political environment have also passively created sphere for change for the industrialization of the undocumented migrant corridor. The Trump administration has implemented a series of hard-line immigration policies during its administration; At the same time, the Chinese government is gradually tightening controls on citizens leaving the country, especially on the overseas movement of highly skilled people. Bing & Zhen inferred this two-way policy contraction has not been able to curb the continuous flow of migrants, and this continuous flow of demand has contributed to the industrialization of the undocumented immigration corridor [5]. However, when the Biden administration came to power, there was a degree of relaxation in US immigration policy, especially in repealing some of the restrictive measures of the Trump era. This has reopened some space for undocumented immigrants. In addition, the amendment to the Immigration Act of the United States not only significantly increased the number of legal immigrants, but also provided some undocumented immigrants with the opportunity to obtain legal status.

According to the existing immigration policies, both China and the United States have certain immigration control measures. In China, foreigners must hold an employment-type residence permit to legally work in China, on the premise that they must have a permit from the foreign employment center and a health permit issued by the entry-exit quarantine department. This shows that China has relatively strict verification requirements for foreign immigrants, aimed at ensuring national security and social order. At the same time, China has also introduced a series of policies to attract high-skilled immigrants, such as the 'Thousand Talents Plan', as well as supporting entry-exit facilitation policies. These measures will help attract foreign talents and promote scientific and technological innovation and economic development.

In the United States, safeguarding national sovereignty has always been the fundamental starting point of its immigration policy. Amuedo-Dorantes & Puttitanun stated, the immigration policy of the United States pays more attention to the prevention of security risks such as terrorism, implements strict background investigation and verification procedures for immigrants, and has strict restrictions on visa quotas, resulting in a large number of potential immigrants unable to enter the United States legally [10]. These factors may drive some people to migrate illegally, creating an undocumented immigration corridor between China and the United States. In addition, there are gaps in the enforcement efforts and efficiency of immigration authorities in China and the United States. The United States Immigration Services (USCIS) has a large bureaucracy, but the review process is lengthier; China's immigration authorities are more aggressive in enforcing the law.

In general, the differences in immigration policies between China and the United States reflect different national interest demands and value orientations. China puts more emphasis on attracting high-skilled immigrants, while the United States puts more emphasis on maintaining the development of the national labor market, and to some extent even condones the illegal entry of immigrants - this difference predictably affects the flow and scale of undocumented immigrants between China and the United States, and the difficulty of choosing to enter the United States is significantly lower than that of illegally entering China. This difference has shaped the status quo of the Sino-US undocumented immigration corridor to a certain extent, affecting the flow and scale of illegal immigrants.

From the above social and political differences between China and the United States, the political environment of China and the United States has a complex and changeable impact on the industrialization process of the undocumented immigration corridor. On the one hand, the governments of the two countries are highly vigilant against the activities of undocumented immigrants for the sake of national security and social stability. On the other hand, the two sides have also retained some flexibility in immigration policy, leaving a certain space for the industrial development of the undocumented immigration corridor. The conflicting policy orientations reflect the complex calculus between the United States and China in managing undocumented immigration. In the foreseeable future, the political environment will remain one of the important variables affecting the industrialization process of the undocumented immigration corridor.

3.3   Exploration and Enlightenment of the Industrialization of 'Run-Ology'

The industrialization of 'run-ology' in South America is a complex social phenomenon, but it also provides constructive insight into the differences in the political environment of the two countries.

Social Environment. Among the citizens who choose to enter the United States illegally from China, except for officials with rich political lives who are involved in nasty political crimes, such as corruption and abuse of power, most are for economic reasons. Or, as Chin & Zhang referred, citizens with low levels of education, lack of awareness of international forms and political awareness - this makes irrational migration among the 'run-ology' groups [14]. In addition to the effects of restrictive visa regimes that maintain the stability of national sovereignty, the main motivation of immigrant groups remains limited to achieving higher socio-economic status in their careers. Although China's rapid economic growth in recent years has provided Chinese citizens with more economic opportunities and choices, the main contradiction in Chinese society is the contradiction between the people's ever-growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate distribution and development of social and economic resources [14]. This makes the group target of Chinese undocumented immigrants' rich diversity.

In addition to economic factors, demographic changes in China and the United States also influence the size of undocumented immigration. In the 1990s, China had a high proportion of labor force and a large number of surplus labor force in rural areas. After entering the 21st century, Pieke & Biao pointed the effect of China's one-child policy gradually appeared, and the proportion of the labor force declined [15]. According to the sixth census in 2010, China's working-age population aged 15-64 accounted for 74.5% of the total population, down 0.6% from 2000.

And the development of transportation has also reduced the cost of smuggling and promoted the industrialization of routing. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), a record 1.64 million illegal immigrants were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border in fiscal year 2021, an increase of about 314% from the previous fiscal year. Soudijin also reported some transnational human smuggling rings have also grown with the help of the industrial chain. They use the logistics network to organize smuggling activities and make huge profits from them [16]. Mexico's major drug cartels, for example, are involved in the smuggling business. Bing & Zhen reported, they charge high smuggling fees at the border and then arrange for undocumented migrants, many of them women and children, to cross through tunnels, box trucks and other means [5].

Economic Factors. In comparing the US-China corridor of undocumented immigrants in the 1990s and 2010s, the paper finds that economic factors that change over time also have a significant impact on the number and trends of undocumented immigrants. In the 1990s, China's economy was just getting started, while the United States was in the midst of an economic boom. During this period, the relatively high income of working in the United States was very attractive to many residents of rural areas in China.

Zhang & Chin estimated that between 1990 and 2000, the number of Chinese undocumented immigrants to the United States surged from 200,000 to 500,000[14],[17]. At the same time, after the 2008 financial crisis, the destination country of the United States, the industrialization side of the 'run-ology' reflects the increasing number of immigrants, and its indulgence of undocumented immigrants also implies its demand for labor. The continued demand for cheap labor in some industries in the United States has become a major 'pull' to attract undocumented immigrants. For example, as Zhang & Chin mentioned, the U.S. agricultural sector employs a large number of seasonal workers, a significant number of whom are undocumented immigrants [17]. About 50% of farm workers in the United States are undocumented migrant workers. In 2010, the average monthly wage of Chinese undocumented immigrants working in service industries such as catering and construction in the United States has reached about $2,500, an increase of nearly 50% from 20007. These workers tend to do jobs that require physical labor but are relatively unskilled, such as picking fruits and vegetables. Some businesses are happy to hire undocumented immigrants because of the flexibility and low wages [18]. This 'pull' factor can also be summed up from immigrants from other countries and regions. In Latin American countries such as Mexico, the domestic employment situation is severe, the labor surplus, and the national income level is much lower than that of the United States, which have become an important 'pull' to promote undocumented immigration. In Mexico, for example, unemployment remains high despite the government's ongoing efforts to create jobs. According to the World Bank, Mexico's unemployment rate in 2021 is 4.4%, and although this figure is lower than during the epidemic, the overall employment situation is still not optimistic. Meanwhile, Mexico's GDP per capita is only about one-sixth that of the United States. This huge income gap drives many Mexicans to take the risk of sneaking into the United States in search of work opportunities.

To sum up, it can be found that the industrialization of smuggling into the United States does not only point to China. The labor demand of the American society has created a window for the entry of illegal immigrants, and the demand brought by the gradually increasing number of smuggling personnel has naturally transformed into the market demand for 'smuggling' and formed an industrial chain. This complex cause-and-effect relationship makes it harder to curb illegal immigration. While cracking down on human smuggling, the governments of China and the United States should pay more attention to the social and economic environment of their own countries and alleviate the living pressure of their own people, so as to fundamentally reduce the motivation of illegal immigration activities.

4   Analysis of Past Chinese and American Immigration Policies

By comparing the undocumented immigration policies and data of different periods, it can be found that social factors and political environment have a very obvious impact on the Sino-US undocumented immigration corridor.

In the 1980s, as Thomas recorded and summarized, the United States passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which not only granted amnesty to

nearly 3 million illegal immigrants, but also established an employer sanctions regime that prohibited the hiring of undocumented immigrants [4]. This policy contained the growth of illegal immigration in the short term. In the long period, however, due to the lack of effective enforcement means, employer sanctions were not really implemented, and the number of undocumented immigrants increased rapidly [8],[19]. However, after the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, as Thomas pointed the employment situation in the United States deteriorated sharply, and the unemployment rate was as high as 10% [4]. To protect its workers, the US government has tightened immigration policies and stepped up efforts to crack down on illegal immigration. The Obama administration introduced an executive order in 2014 that allowed some undocumented immigrants to stay legally, but the policy was subsequently rescinded by the Trump administration. Trump has stepped up immigration enforcement since taking office, making mass arrests and deportations of undocumented immigrants and trying to build a US-Mexico border wall to stop illegal entry. These measures have led to a decline in the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States and China. Between 2010 and 2019, the total number of illegal Chinese immigrants in the United States fell 18%, from 325,000 to 268,000, according to the Pew Research Center. By contrast, illegal Mexican immigration to the United States has also declined, but only by 8% [4].

In addition to the policy environment in the United States, economic and social changes within China are also affecting the flow of undocumented immigrants. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid rise of China's economy has provided a new impetus for undocumented immigration. A large number of rural surplus labor poured into the city, but the restrictions of the household registration system made it difficult for them to establish a foothold in the city, so they chose to smuggle abroad to make a living. At the same time, Liang & Zhou pointed the US economy continues to grow and the demand for cheap labor is rising, which also attracts a large number of illegal immigrants from China [19]. Also, according to Thomas, the number of illegal immigrants from China to the United States increased by nearly 500,000 from 2000 to 2010[4]. But since 2010, Xinbo mentioned the Chinese government has vigorously promoted urbanization and relaxed household registration restrictions, which has enabled a large number of migrant workers to become citizens [20]. At the same time, although China's economic growth has slowed, its per capita income level is still rising steadily.

All of the above data suggest that political factors have a significant influence on controlling the number of illegal immigrants, and that the number of Chinese illegal immigrants is more sensitive to changes in U.S. policy than the influence of Chinese policies. Therefore, it can be seen that if government want to reduce the motivation and number of illegal immigrants to enter the United States, reducing the tolerance of American society and laws for illegal immigrants will be a powerful measure.

5   Conclusion

This paper aims to analyze the social and political reasons for the industrialization of undocumented immigrants in China and the United States, and after comparing the current social environment and economic development changes of the two countries, it

believes that the pursuit of higher economic and social status and the political tolerance of undocumented immigrants in the American society are not only the reasons for the increasing number of undocumented immigrants, but also the reasons for the increasing number of undocumented immigrants. It is also the reason for the industrialization of smuggling behavior. Now that the impact of the novel coronavirus epidemic has gradually subsided, and in the context of deteriorating Sino-US relations, the scale of illegal immigration in China is likely to shrink further in the future.

The popularity of 'run-ology' is not only caused by several waves of Chinese immigrants and the social environment of continuous immigration behavior. Addressing the 'run-ology' of industrialization between China and the United States, as well as illegal immigration itself, will require more than just policy changes. The emergence of undocumented immigrant groups and the formation of immigration corridors are not easily fluctuated by policy changes. On the contrary, the increasingly strict social and policy environment may, in turn, prompt the people to have an increasingly deep-rooted sense of antagonism, and thus make this industry more disciplined, profitable, and industrialized. One of the reasons why the smuggling industry is difficult to curb is not only the expansion of geographical and political gray space, but in the long run, if both China and the United States can maintain their economic vitality, and actively eliminate the irrational and unscientific speculation of the people of the two countries about 'immigration can change the status quo' through publicity and science popularization, it will be the most favorable factor to prevent the continued development of the undocumented immigration industry.

However, the observations of undocumented immigrants in this paper do not necessarily apply to countries with more complex, extreme geopolitical and political environments, and less developed economies. At the same time, the research scope of this research report is limited to the social research of other scholars and the incomplete capture of network news, and it lacks further specific and in-depth academic research on immigrant groups, so it may lack further characterization of the motivation of immigrant groups. Illegal immigrants are difficult to eradicate because they are in the gray area of legal and geographical rationality. However, this paper believes that future research on the motivation of undocumented immigrants can be based on the investigation of immigrant groups from the front-line social surveys in China and the United States, so as to establish a correct understanding of the psychology of immigrant groups, and understand how countries can improve their own conditions. That would curb immigration itself. This will help us to understand more fully the complex dynamics of international migration.

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