

# Time For Truthful Narratives On Immigration



Sonali Kolhatkar

12.07-2024 ~ *The “migrant crisis” was manufactured and is the fault of both Trump and Biden. We need to understand that the U.S. needs immigrants more than immigrants need the U.S.*

A quiet panic has broken out within immigrant communities across the United States ahead of Donald Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2025. [Mixed-status families](#) are expecting to be separated, [DACA recipients](#) foresee their status being revoked, those with [Temporary Protected Status](#) are pessimistic about the program remaining valid, and [asylum seekers](#) fear the worst. Indeed, if Project 2025’s [anti-immigrant agenda](#) is fully enacted, the [horrors of family separation](#) that the nation witnessed in 2018 under Trump’s first term will pale in comparison to what’s coming.

And yet, Trump might claim that this time, he’s merely following the public’s desires. The prevailing story of the 2024 presidential election is that voters were so fed up with immigration upending their lives that they picked a leader who promised to do something about it. Headlines such as this New York Times piece on Election Day claimed, [“Voters Were Fed Up Over Immigration. They Voted for Trump.”](#) Indeed, [polls](#) showed likely voters ranking immigration as either the top issue, or [second only](#) to the economy.

What has gone unsaid about public discontent over immigration and Trump’s coming assault on immigrant rights is that the Biden administration paved the way for it, manufacturing a “migrant crisis” and volleying it right into Trump’s hands so he could lob it all the way to the White House. What’s needed are not

just better policies but a rewriting of the narratives about immigration and immigrants so that vulnerable human beings are no longer political scapegoats every four years.

[Gallup polls show](#) that national anxiety over immigration significantly increased over the four years that Joe Biden was president. The fraction of Americans wanting lower levels of immigration had been slightly decreasing for years, landing at around 30 percent. In 2020 that number began rising, and by 2024, it had jumped to 55 percent.

It's tempting to conclude that this trend is merely a matter of perception, the result of successful propaganda, of Trump's constant drumbeat that Biden opened the floodgates at the border, rolling out the welcome mat for millions of people with no papers. Indeed, far too many people hold [false views](#) of immigrants in the U.S., from assuming they are more prone to committing violent crimes—[not true](#)—to the idea that they are stealing jobs from native-born Americans and longtime residents—[also not true](#). The adoption of such falsehoods is clearly Trump's doing.

However, there are plenty of credible reports across the country, in [small-town America](#) and in [urban centers](#), that demonstrate a real struggle with absorbing tens of thousands of newly resettled people from foreign nations. Such dynamics reinforced the notion that immigration is out of control and gave credence to Trump's lies about immigrants.

What's going unsaid is that migrants from nonwhite nations in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia are being deliberately dumped into towns and cities with no plan for orderly absorption and assimilation—in direct contrast to how well the Biden administration welcomed Ukrainian refugees. A February 2024 [in-depth report](#) by Jerusalem Demsas in the Atlantic is one of the few analyses that explored what happened and why.

“Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine brought a separate influx of displaced people into U.S. cities that quietly assimilated most of them,” explained Demsas. The numbers of Ukrainian refugees and nonwhite immigrants in many towns and cities have been comparable, but the ways in which they were resettled have sometimes been starkly different. Based on interviews with mayors and municipal leaders, Demsas realized there were “two major differences in federal policy” that

explained the contrast.

One policy difference was that Ukrainian refugees were allowed to work as soon as they arrived in the U.S., while subsequent waves of migrants were prohibited from working and then demonized for using government aid.

The other difference was that the Biden administration carefully coordinated Ukrainian arrivals with local officials to ensure their proper assimilation. And it chose not to do so with groups arriving from across the Southern border. This meant that those local leaders who could politicize migrants did so by pointing to the chaos their presence seemed to provoke and by adopting policies that deliberately worsened the optics of immigration.

“To call this moment a ‘migrant crisis’ is to let elected federal officials off the hook,” concluded Demsas. If the federal government had treated nonwhite Latin American, Caribbean, African, and Asian migrants the same way it treated Ukrainian refugees, voters would likely not have been as swayed by Trump’s lies as they were.

A similar scenario played out with asylum seekers at the border. Rather than allowing those seeking asylum to make their case in an orderly way, the first Trump administration tried to [break the entire system](#), creating chaos in order to blame asylees. Joe Biden’s administration blithely allowed the restrictions to [remain in place](#), [breaking](#) his campaign promise.

The reality is that the undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. [increased by only 800,000 people](#) between 2019 and 2022 and remains below 2007 levels. In a nation of 335 million people, this is less than a quarter of a percent of the population. How can such a tiny fraction of people be the source of so many problems as Trump claims?

Americans are not anti-immigrant. In fact, they are pro-immigration. A new Pew Research [poll](#) released on November 22, 2024, finds that nearly two-thirds of Americans are happy to have undocumented immigrants remain in the nation with legal protections provided certain conditions are met, such as security checks and lawful employment.

The reason it appears as though Americans are anti-immigrant is because they’re being told that hordes of people are breaking the rules, sidestepping order, and

forcing their way in to cause chaos, commit crimes, and steal jobs. This is both Trump's fault, and Biden's.

Migration is a large-scale phenomenon of vulnerable populations fleeing war, poverty, persecution, climate change, and more. When given accessible procedures to enter another nation legally, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers will do everything possible to follow the rules. Because, why not? Why would they deliberately jeopardize their own long-term security when given the chance? It turns out, the system has been deliberately broken in order to manufacture a crisis and help gutless politicians claim they are being "tough on immigration."

The U.S. desperately needs immigrant workers. This is true not only in low-wage industries but in such highly skilled fields as medicine where immigrants are disproportionately represented.

For example, the [Migration Policy Institute](#) found that "[w]hile immigrants represent 14 percent of the Illinois population, they make up 37 percent of its physicians and 19 percent of its registered nurses." There is a nationwide shortage of medical workers—physicians, nurses, technicians, and home health aides—a gap that could be filled by skilled new immigrants.

As the U.S.'s elder population continues to live longer, [needing more care](#), and as the national [birth rate falls](#), immigrants have stepped in to [provide care](#) and pay [taxes to fund services](#) they aren't even allowed to access. Indeed, many nations in the Global South are struggling with the "[brain drain](#)" of their most talented workers leaving to work in the U.S. and other Western nations.

The stories we are telling about immigrants are fueling misplaced panic in the U.S. We cannot rely on Trump to fix what he sought to break. In the coming months and years, the devastation the incoming president will wreak on vulnerable populations will test our collective morality.

What's needed before the next election are truthful narratives about immigrants, including the fact that the migrant crisis has been manufactured and the legal immigration system deliberately broken for political gain, forcing most people into untenable situations.

Most importantly, we need to be clear that our nation needs immigrants just as, if

not more than, immigrants need the U.S.

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*Source:* Independent Media Institute

*Credit Line:* This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.