Forum: GA3

Question of: Addressing the current political situation in the US concerning immigration

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I. Description of the Issue

Immigration has long been an important issue in the United States, but in recent years it has become one of the country's most significant political topics. The United States receives millions of legal immigrants each year while also experiencing large numbers of irregular border crossings, particularly along its southern border with Mexico. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey, approximately 47.8 million foreign-born residents live in the United States, representing about 14.3% of the population, the highest number in the country's history. Consequently, immigration is closely linked to debates over border security, asylum procedures, labour shortages, national security, humanitarian protection, and the responsibilities of the federal government.

The current political situation is largely shaped by the immigration policies introduced after President Donald Trump returned to office in January 2025. The administration declared illegal immigration a national emergency and introduced measures to reduce irregular migration and strengthen enforcement. These include increasing federal law enforcement at the southern border, expanding detention facilities, accelerating deportations, restricting access to certain asylum procedures, and suspending or significantly reducing several humanitarian immigration programmes.

Immigration authorities have also increased workplace inspections and interior enforcement operations to identify individuals without legal status. Many of these operations are conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which enforces immigration laws through arrests, detention, and deportations. The federal government has expanded cooperation with state and local law enforcement agencies, while individuals found in violation of immigration law may be detained pending immigration court decisions or removal. According to ICE, tens of thousands of migrants are held in detention facilities on any given day while their cases are processed. Some are returned directly to their countries of origin, while others are first transferred to detention facilities before deportation. The administration has also launched the official website Aliens.gov, encouraging individuals without legal status to leave the United States voluntarily before enforcement action is taken and providing information on immigration procedures.

Figure 1: ICE officers conducting an immigration arrest in the U.S

At the same time, legal immigration continues through employment-based visas, family reunification programmes, student visas, refugee admissions, and other lawful pathways. However, access to some of these routes has become more restrictive through additional screening, policy changes, and reductions in available programmes. Asylum seekers retain the legal right to apply for protection under U.S. and international law, although changes to eligibility criteria and border procedures have made the process more difficult.

Immigration remains a major political issue because it affects both domestic policy and international relations. Changes to U.S. immigration and border policies directly affect neighbouring countries, particularly Mexico and several Central American states, which serve as countries of origin or transit for many migrants. These policies also influence migration patterns throughout the Americas and require international cooperation on border management, law enforcement, humanitarian assistance, and refugee protection. As a result, the current U.S. immigration situation has implications far beyond its national borders and remains an issue of international concern.

II. Definition of Key Terms

Irregular (Illegal) Immigration:
The movement of individuals across international borders without complying with the immigration laws of the destination country. This may include entering a country without authorization or remaining after a visa has expired. International organizations generally use the term "irregular migration" rather than "illegal immigration".

Asylum Seeker:
A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for protection in another country because they fear persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. Their application has not yet been decided.

Refugee:
A person who meets the definition established by the 1951 Refugee Convention and has been recognised as needing international protection due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group.

Deportation:
The formal process by which a government orders a non-citizen to leave the country because they no longer have, or never had, legal permission to remain there.

Detention Centre:
A government-operated facility where migrants or asylum seekers may be held while their immigration status is being determined or while awaiting deportation proceedings.

Border Security:
The policies, infrastructure, personnel, and technologies used by a government to regulate and monitor its national borders, prevent unauthorized entry, and facilitate lawful travel and trade.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):
The United Nations agency responsible for protecting refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other displaced populations. UNHCR also works with governments to promote durable solutions for displaced people.

International Organization for Migration (IOM):
The leading intergovernmental organization on migration. The IOM supports governments in managing migration, provides humanitarian assistance to migrants, and promotes safe, orderly, and regular migration worldwide.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP):
The federal agency responsible for securing the borders of the United States while facilitating lawful international travel and trade. CBP conducts border inspections and enforces immigration laws at ports of entry and along the country's borders.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):
A federal law enforcement agency responsible for enforcing U.S. immigration laws within the country's interior. ICE investigates immigration violations, conducts enforcement operations, manages immigration detention facilities, and carries out deportations.

Executive Order:
A directive issued by the President of the United States that manages operations of the federal government. Executive orders have the force of law unless they are overturned by Congress or ruled unconstitutional by the courts.

III. Background information

The current immigration situation in the United States is driven by a combination of push factors in migrants home countries and pull factors in the United States. Many people migrate because of armed conflict, political persecution, gang violence, poverty, corruption, environmental disasters, or limited economic opportunities. At the same time, the United States continues to attract migrants due to its comparatively strong economy, labour market, educational opportunities, and existing family connections. As illustrated in Figure 2, these migration flows predominantly move through Central America and Mexico towards the United States, highlighting the regional nature of migration patterns in the Americas.

One of the greatest challenges facing the U.S. immigration system is the growing backlog of immigration court cases. Millions of cases remain pending, meaning that asylum seekers and other migrants often wait several years before receiving a final decision. This places considerable pressure on immigration courts, detention facilities, and federal agencies while creating uncertainty for migrants awaiting the outcome of their cases.

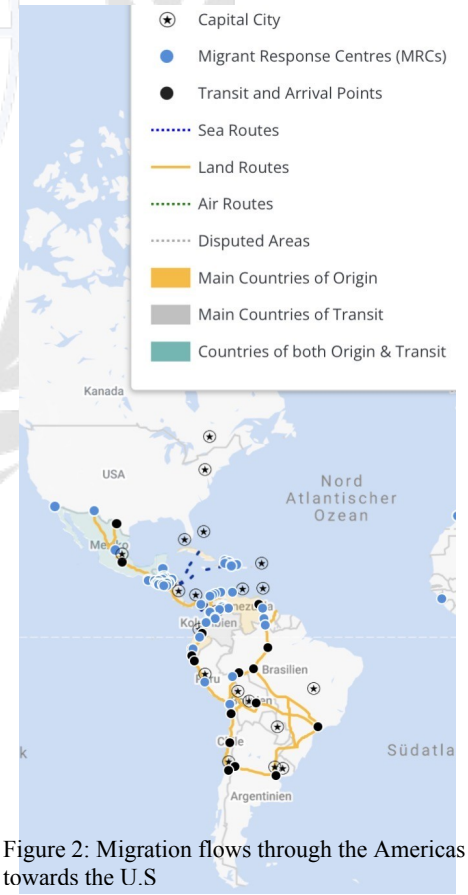

Figure 2: Migration flows through the Americas towards the U.S

Another major challenge is balancing border security with humanitarian obligations. While the U.S. government seeks to prevent irregular migration and combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, it must also uphold national and international legal obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers. This has led to ongoing discussions regarding the capacity of border authorities, detention facilities, and asylum processing systems.

The issue also has significant economic and social implications. Many sectors of the U.S. economy rely on immigrant workers, particularly agriculture, construction, healthcare, and hospitality. At the same time, rapidly changing migration patterns can place additional pressure on housing, education, healthcare systems, and local government resources, particularly in communities receiving large numbers of new arrivals. These competing humanitarian, economic, and security considerations make immigration one of the most complex policy challenges facing the United States today.

Historical background

Immigration has shaped the United States since its founding. Successive waves of migrants contributed to the country's development, while millions of Africans were forcibly brought through the transatlantic slave trade and Native American communities were displaced. These developments established immigration as a defining characteristic of the United States. As shown in Figure 3, the proportion of foreign-born residents has changed significantly over time, reflecting different waves of immigration policy throughout the country's history.

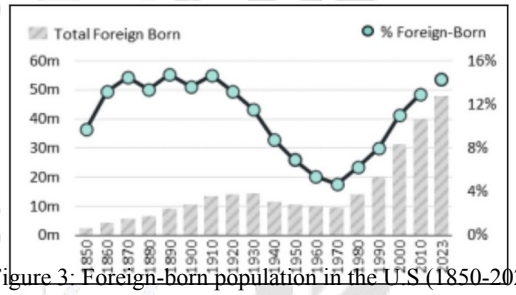

Figure 3: Foreign-born population in the U.S (1850-2023)

During the early twentieth century, immigration became more restrictive through literacy tests and national-origin quotas. This changed with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the quota system and introduced a new framework based on family reunification and employment, leading to greater immigration from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.

As irregular immigration increased, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 granted legal status to approximately three million undocumented immigrants while introducing sanctions for employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers. Although many migrants were legalized, irregular migration continued.

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, immigration became closely linked to national security. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created, bringing together agencies such as CBP and ICE to strengthen border security and immigration enforcement.

In 2012, President Barack Obama introduced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) through an executive order, granting eligible undocumented immigrants who arrived as children temporary protection from deportation and work authorization. DACA did not provide permanent legal status or a pathway to citizenship and required renewal every two years. In 2017, President Donald Trump sought to end the programme, but in 2020 the Supreme Court ruled that the administration had not followed the required legal procedure, allowing DACA to continue for existing recipients. In 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order directing federal agencies to preserve and strengthen the programme, although legal challenges remain.

Since President Donald Trump's return to office in 2025, immigration policy has shifted towards stricter border enforcement, expanded deportations, greater use of detention facilities, and reduced humanitarian immigration programmes, further intensifying political debate within the United States and across the Americas.

IV. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States of America (USA)

As the primary country concerned, the United States is responsible for establishing and enforcing its immigration policies. Federal agencies, including CBP, ICE, and USCIS, manage border security, process immigration and asylum applications, and enforce immigration law. Changes in U.S. policy directly influence migration patterns throughout the Americas.

Mexico

Mexico serves as both a country of origin and the main transit country for migrants travelling to the United States. It cooperates with the U.S. on border management and combating migrant smuggling while also providing humanitarian assistance to migrants waiting or remaining within its territory.

Northern Triangle Countries (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador)

These countries remain major countries of origin for migrants travelling to the United States. Migration is driven by poverty, organised crime, gang violence, political instability, corruption,

and limited economic opportunities. Their governments cooperate with regional and international partners to address the root causes of migration and support returning migrants.

Venezuela

Venezuela has become one of the largest countries of origin for migrants and asylum seekers due to its prolonged political, economic, and humanitarian crisis. Many Venezuelans travel through several Latin American countries before attempting to reach the United States, making Venezuela a key country in regional migration.

Canada

Canada is an important regional partner in managing migration and asylum through bilateral cooperation with the United States. The two countries coordinate on border security and asylum procedures, particularly under the Safe Third Country Agreement.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR protects refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons by supporting asylum systems, providing humanitarian assistance, and promoting compliance with international refugee law.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM supports governments in migration management through data collection, humanitarian assistance, capacity-building, and voluntary return and reintegration programmes while promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

OHCHR monitors the human rights implications of migration policies and works with governments to ensure that migrants rights are protected in accordance with international human rights law.

Organization of American States (OAS)

The OAS promotes regional cooperation on migration through policy dialogue, border management initiatives, and efforts to address the regional causes of displacement across the Americas.

V. Timeline of events

When:	What:
1965	The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) abolishes the national origins quota system, establishing a new immigration system based primarily on family reunification and skilled employment.
1986	The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) grants legal status to nearly three million undocumented immigrants while introducing penalties for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers.
11. Sep. 2001	Following the terrorist attacks, immigration becomes more closely linked to national security. Border controls and visa screening are significantly strengthened.
2003	The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is established, bringing together agencies responsible for border security and immigration enforcement, including CBP and ICE.
2012	The Obama administration introduces Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), providing temporary protection from deportation for certain undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children.
2017	President Donald Trump begins his first term and issues several executive orders strengthening immigration enforcement, expanding border wall construction, increasing detention, and introducing the "Remain in Mexico" policy for many asylum seekers.

2021	President Joe Biden takes office and reverses several Trump-era immigration policies, including ending the "Remain in Mexico" programme. The administration also expands humanitarian parole programmes and increases refugee admissions.
2022-2024	The United States records historically high numbers of migrant encounters at the southern border, increasing political debate over border security, asylum procedures, and immigration reform.
January 2025	President Donald Trump returns to office and declares illegal immigration a national emergency. The administration begins implementing a series of executive orders aimed at strengthening border security and increasing immigration enforcement.
2025	The administration expands deportation operations, increases immigration detention, restricts several humanitarian parole programmes, tightens asylum procedures, and launches Aliens.gov, encouraging undocumented immigrants to voluntarily leave the United States. Several executive actions are challenged in U.S. federal courts.
2025-Present	Immigration remains one of the most debated political issues in the United States. Ongoing legal challenges, executive actions, and discussions in Congress continue to shape U.S. immigration policy and its international implications.

VI. Previous attempts to solve the issue

Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986)

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) granted legal status to approximately three million undocumented migrants while introducing penalties for employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers. Although it legalized many migrants, irregular immigration continued due to ongoing economic and political factors.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Introduced in 2012, DACA provided temporary protection from deportation and work authorization for eligible undocumented migrants who arrived in the United States as children. However, it does not provide permanent legal status and has remained politically and legally contested.

Border Enforcement Policies and Physical Barriers

Successive administrations have expanded border enforcement through increased surveillance, additional personnel, and physical barriers along the U.S.–Mexico border. While these measures strengthened border security, they have not eliminated irregular migration.

Asylum Policy Adjustments ("Remain in Mexico" and Related Measures)

The United States has introduced several asylum reforms, including the "Remain in Mexico" programme, requiring certain asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their claims were processed. These policies have changed across administrations and faced legal challenges.

Cooperation with Mexico and Central American States

The United States has worked with Mexico and Central American countries on border security, anti-smuggling efforts, and development programmes addressing the root causes of migration. Despite these efforts, migration pressures have remained high.

Humanitarian Parole and Refugee Admission Programmes

Different administrations have used humanitarian parole and refugee admission programmes to provide legal pathways for people fleeing conflict or persecution. These programmes have been expanded or restricted depending on changing government priorities.

Attempts at Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Several immigration reform bills addressing border security, legal migration, and the status of undocumented migrants have been proposed in Congress. However, political divisions have repeatedly prevented comprehensive reform from being adopted.

VII. Possible solutions

Expansion of Safe and Legal Migration Pathways

One long-term solution is to expand legal migration channels, including employment-based visas, humanitarian admission programmes, and family reunification systems. Increasing

access to legal pathways could reduce the incentive for irregular migration while allowing states to better regulate migration flows.

Strengthening Asylum Processing Systems

Improving the capacity and efficiency of asylum systems is essential to reduce backlogs and ensure timely decisions. This includes increasing administrative resources, improving case management systems, and enhancing legal assistance for applicants to ensure fair and efficient processing in line with international obligations.

Regional Cooperation and Shared Responsibility

Greater cooperation between the United States, Mexico, and Central American countries could improve migration management. This includes coordinated border management, information sharing on migration flows, joint anti-smuggling operations, and regional frameworks to distribute responsibility for asylum seekers more evenly.

Addressing Root Causes of Migration

Long-term solutions require investment in countries of origin to reduce forced migration. Development aid, poverty reduction programmes, security cooperation, anti-corruption initiatives, and climate resilience projects can help reduce the economic and security factors that drive migration.

Combating Human Trafficking and Smuggling Networks

Strengthening international cooperation to dismantle human trafficking and smuggling networks is essential for protecting migrants. This includes improved intelligence sharing, law enforcement cooperation, and stronger legal frameworks to prosecute trafficking organisations operating across borders.

Strengthening International Frameworks for Migration Governance

Member States could further support and implement frameworks such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Enhanced cooperation through the United Nations, IOM, and regional organisations could improve consistency in migration management and ensure better protection for migrants' rights.

VIII. How to prepare as a delegate

Before the conference, delegates should thoroughly research both the topic and their assigned country's position on immigration. This includes understanding their country's immigration policies, previous voting records in the United Nations, relevant bilateral or regional agreements, and whether it is affected as a country of origin, transit, or destination for migrants. Delegates should also familiarize themselves with the positions of other countries represented in the committee in order to identify potential allies, shared interests, and opportunities for cooperation during debate. Delegates should also familiarize themselves with current U.S. immigration policies, relevant international frameworks such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, as well as the work of organizations including UNHCR and IOM.

When preparing for debate, delegates should develop practical and internationally applicable solutions that respect national sovereignty while promoting international cooperation. All delegates are required to submit a Position Papers covering the committee topics. These documents must be submitted to the Student Officers no later than 27 August 2026. Documents submitted after the deadline will not be corrected and may not be considered during the awards selection process. Delegates are encouraged to use reliable sources, including official UN documents, government publications, and reports from international organizations, to ensure well-informed and realistic contributions during committee sessions.

IX. UN resolutions

1. General Assembly Resolution 73/195 – *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*(2018)

Adopted on 19 December 2018, this resolution endorses the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the first comprehensive UN framework addressing international migration. Although the Compact is not legally binding, it encourages international cooperation, safe and regular migration pathways, stronger border management, and the protection of migrants human rights while recognising each state's sovereign right to determine its own national immigration policies.

Official UN Resolution:
A/RES/73/195 – Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

2. General Assembly Resolution 73/151 – *Global Compact on Refugees* (2018)

Adopted on 17 December 2018, this resolution affirms the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which aims to strengthen international responsibility-sharing for refugees and support countries hosting displaced populations. While the Compact primarily addresses refugees rather than all migrants, it is highly relevant to discussions on asylum procedures and international protection.

Official UN Resolution:

A/RES/73/151 – Global Compact on Refugees

X. Useful links

United Nations

- **UNHCR – Refugee and Asylum Information** https://www.unhcr.org/
- **UNHCR Refugee Data Finder** (Global statistics on refugees and asylum seekers) https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics
- **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** https://www.iom.int
- **World Migration Report (IOM)** – Comprehensive report on global migration trends and statistics. https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2026-chapter-2

United States Government

- **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)** – Official information on U.S. immigration laws, visas, asylum, and citizenship. https://www.uscis.gov
- **U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)** – Information on border security, migration statistics, and border operations. https://www.cbp.gov
- **U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – Immigration Statistics and Reports** https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics

Research and Background Information

- **Migration Policy Institute (MPI)** – Independent research and policy analysis on migration and refugee issues. https://www.migrationpolicy.org
- **Pew Research Center – Immigration and Migration** – Data, surveys, and analysis on immigration trends and public opinion. https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/immigration-migration/

XI. Sources

United Nations Sources

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Refugee Statistics and Data.* https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Global Compact on Refugees.* https://www.unhcr.org/global-compact-refugees

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U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). *Immigration and Citizenship Information.* https://www.uscis.gov

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U.S. Federal Register. *Immigration Rules and Executive Policy Updates.* https://www.federalregister.gov

The White House (Executive Orders & Immigration Policy). https://www.whitehouse.gov

Research Institutes

Migration Policy Institute (MPI). *Global and U.S. Immigration Research.* https://www.migrationpolicy.org

Pew Research Center. *Immigration & Migration Trends and Public Opinion.* https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/immigration-migration/

Brookings Institution. *U.S. Immigration Policy and Reform Analysis.* https://www.brookings.edu/topic/immigration/

Legal / Historical Frameworks Referenced

United States Congress. *Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).* (General legal framework reference)
https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation

United States Congress. *Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986).* https://www.congress.gov

UNHCR. *1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.* https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html

Pictures

Figure 1: ICE officers conducting an immigration arrest in the U.S

https://abcnews.com/Politics/ice-arrests-32000-migrants-us-illegally-1st-50/story?id=119719975

Figure 2: Migration flows through the Americas towards the U.S

https://dtm.iom.int/es/global-overview-of-migration-routes-portal/americas

Figure 3: Foreign-born population in the U.S (1850-2023)

https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11806