BRAIN REJECTION UNDER THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY, EVIDENCE FROM INDIAN AND MEXICAN PROFESSIONALS IN THE U.S.

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Introduction

Why is populism contesting the recognition of valuable human capital? Professionals, as educational and often financial elites, have been a target of the discourse of populist politicians from both right- and left-wing parties. Professionals are perceived as a social class whose well-being has been built at the cost of hard-working manual laborers; therefore, in general, populist politicians tend to restrict their privileges, lower their wages, or limit public expenditure on research and innovation. This interpretation of intellectuals and professionals in contrast to the uneducated and poor is emphasized even more when it comes to professional diasporas, conceived as a menace to the symbolic jobs of highly educated natives who may be underpaid because employers hire foreign skilled workers.

President Trump is no exception to the rule: he has been blaming foreign skilled workers for stealing jobs from their U.S. counterparts, accepting lower wages, and contributing to the general damage to the country's economy. The focus of his discursive and political action has been the H-1B visas, from the start of his presidential campaign to the beginning of 2019, when a new phase of his immigration policy was being adopted. It is all based on the fall 2018 regulatory agenda, which proposed a significant change in the H-1B visas, targeting specialized foreign workers. Along with the H-1B visas came the battle against the H4 visas, primarily awarded to spouses of H-1B foreign guest workers. The initiative to limit these visas received mainly negative comments from the tech industry and a significant number of relevant media outlets.

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This move is part of a more general intention to change U.S. immigration policy from one based on family reunion to a more selective pattern, like the Canadian and Australian systems. This new tendency aims at accepting the "best and brightest" migrants only, hiring them temporarily and without their families and therefore forcing most of them to return to their countries of origin, rather than allowing them to integrate or become citizens.

We chose India and Mexico as two fundamental cases for skilled migration to the U.S. India is the foremost country of origin of skilled migrants to the U.S., with roughly three-quarters of the Indian migrants arriving with the skilled category and H-1B visas. Mexico, although not a major brain/skill supplier, is the top migrant-sending country to the U.S.

We center the discussion on the H-1B visas, which have been a topic of dissent since Trump's campaign and for which he is promoting the reform. Our findings try to answer the following research questions: How do populism and prejudiced discourse affect professional foreign workers in the U.S.? Are we facing a shift of paradigm in skilled migration policies? We hypothesize that Trump is using highly skilled migration as a discursive tool to generate consensus on broader restrictive immigration policies. The recently announced actions to strengthen control over foreign professionals entering the country follow a populist strategy of "brain control" by limiting the number of H-1B visas and toughening the procedures for getting them, assuming that immigrants in general, educated or not, are economically and culturally damaging for the U.S.

This article is based on mixed quantitative and qualitative research in which we surveyed online and print media contents related to H-1B visas in the U.S., Mexico, and India. We collected the information for the period from May 1, 2016 to January 31, 2019, covering topics of Donald Trump's campaign, but also issues that emerged during his presidency. We followed the content analysis with a more detailed discourse analysis of twenty-three media features in the three countries.

Very little media contents were found in Mexico, showing that the H-1B visas are not necessarily a great topic of concern for skilled Mexican migrants, at least not as much as for Indians. However, we found some stories broadcasted by Univision and BBC media agencies and quoted by major newspapers such as *La Jornada* and *Reforma*.

By contrast, the H-1B visas for Indians were often on the front pages of the media monitored. Much of the content found in the U.S. media was

based on Indian sources, such as the Press Trust of India and *Hindustan Times* quoted in *The Economist* and *Washington Times*.[1]

This article is structured as follows: *a*) Literature Review: Populism and Anti-migration and Anti-elitist Discourse/trends; *b*) Background: Immigration Rates of Indian and Mexican Professionals in the U.S. (2007-2018); *c*) The Public Debate around Skilled Migration in the U.S., India, and Mexico; and, *d*) Conclusions.

Literature Review: Populism and Anti-migration and Anti-elitist Discourses/Trends

Scholars describe populism as a "thin-centered ideology" that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus the self-serving "corrupt elite" (Canovan, 1999; Elchardus and Spruyt, 2016: 114; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2007: 23; Stanley, 2008). Populism reflects deep cynicism and resentment of existing authorities, including not only economic and governmental actors, but also intellectual elites and scientific experts. Ordinary people are regarded as homogeneous and inherently "good" or "decent," counterposed to dishonest elites (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 16). Populist notions consider the "general will" of common, ordinary people and ascribe a kind of virtue to it (Hawkins, 2009: 3). Since populism claims to represent "ordinary people" against the "elites," it has become the expression of politics and popular mandate. Populist leaders range from the far left (Nicolás Maduro) to the far right (Donald Trump, Teresa May). As Kaltwasser (2014) comments, "Populism cuts not just across geographical borders and historical eras, but also ideological cleavages. However, the populist goals or issues are not permanent and can keep changing with time."

Such populist notions also claim to represent the native-born people or the nation and hence also give rise to nativist sentiment and attitudes. Mudde (2004, 2007) argues that right-wing populists are nativists who claim to represent the true people who make up the true nation and whose purity is

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[1] All quotes that originated with the Press Trust of India are redirected to the URLs for *The Economic Times* and *Livemint*, which republished their articles.

being muddied by new entrants. This gives right-wing populism its particular ethnic, cultural, and racial color, which also perceives migrants as outsiders.

A revision of recent literature on populism and migration has shed light on at least three topics of interest: a) the rise of radical-right parties in central receiving countries, due to economic and cultural factors; b) the impact on immigration policies in those countries; and c) the relevance of communication studies in the analysis of public opinion on immigration, in what is called a "post-truth" era of information (D'Ancona, 2017). In the case of skilled immigration, both anti-elitist and nativist sentiments are at play.

The Rise of Populism

Recent waves of far-right populist leaders have been rising in Europe (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, Poland), the U.S., and other parts of the world. In all these countries, these groups tend to be supported by the older generation, men, the less educated, ethnic majority populations, and the religious, as Inglehart and Norris's study shows (2016: 26).

The populist discourse in the Western countries today normally emphasizes nativism or xenophobic nationalism and favors mono-culturalism over multiculturalism and closed borders over the free flow of peoples, ideas, labor, and capital, and traditionalism over progressive and liberal social values. It is pitted against the ideals of cosmopolitanism and opposed to the philosophy embraced by theories of brain and knowledge circulation. This general feeling of xenophobia undoubtedly has its precedents, since several countries have witnessed the involvement of immigrants in terrorist activities.

But the roots of nativism and xenophobic nationalism goes far beyond security issues, since it blames immigrants for all the nation's woes. The rise in such loaded populism has also led to a significant change in the paradigm in which Western countries, for more than half a century accused of draining the sending countries of their talents, are now partly questioning their own previous strategy of attracting talent. This is very much in line with the argument that the developed countries dictate the terms according to what suits them.

As a populist leader, Trump explores this. According to Inglehart and Norris (2016: 6-7), President Trump is a potent mix of racial resentment

and nostalgia. What is more, he mixes left and right arguments under the same common denominator of populism and certainly positions himself against cosmopolitan views. "Donald Trump's speeches trampling on conservative orthodoxies, by advocating protectionist trade barriers, renegotiating NAFTA, and raising import tariffs against Chinese goods, are arguably located on the Populist Left, far away from the economic philosophy of neoconservatives, although his argument favoring business tax cuts is more right-wing (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 8).

Populism is not new to the U.S. and can be traced far back in history. However, the one variety that is of direct interest to migration policies is the late-twentieth-century populism occurring in several Western democracies. In particular, the 2011 World Values Survey (quoted by Inglehart and Norris, 2016) already showed a strong tendency in U.S. populism for supporting "a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with Congress or elections." This need in a certain part of the U.S. population certainly explains Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 election, along with deeper economic and cultural arguments.

One of the most relevant analyses of the causes of populism is Inglehart and Norris's (2016), mentioned above. Recent populism in the U.S. is partly attributable to economic insecurity and partly to a cultural backlash. Following up on the economic thesis, the supporters of populism are the workforce and society in post-industrial economies that have been hit by the economic crisis and have not benefitted from the knowledge economy and technological automation. These are people suffering from deep economic insecurity and social deprivation, generally "low-waged unskilled workers, the long-term unemployed, households dependent on shrinking social benefits, residents of public housing, single-parent families, and poorer white populations living in inner-city areas with concentrations of immigrants" (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 4).

The second hypothesis that explains populism, certainly linked to the first, is the cultural backlash that makes these people reject a postmaterialist society that goes against their religious and traditional family values. In particular, immigrants from Muslim countries have been rejected because of their religion and supposed potential for terrorism. When speaking of migration issues, far-right populist parties directly link immigration with crime and job losses. As related to this study, "the politicians on the populist right reject what they see as 'political correctness' and openly disparage expert opinions

and appeals to abstract concepts, such as inclusion or human rights" (Papa-demetriou, Hooper, and Benton, 2018: 8). This is important when studying the role of discourse in sustaining and implementing restrictive immigration programs that appeal to many supporters of the populist discourse.

The third type of explanation may be derived from the cultural backlash account and speculates that the Donald Trump's success reflects a racist reaction to the election (and reelection) of the first African-American president to the White House (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 9). The white majority feels discriminated against; it appears to them that minorities are benefitting at great cost to them.

A fourth type of argument found in other studies is the crisis of confidence in governmental institutions, "where increasing number of voters are skeptical about whether mainstream parties and politicians really represent their interests on a range of issues, including immigration, creating an opening for self-proclaimed political outsiders who promise to shake things up" (Papademetriou, Hooper, and Benton, 2018). This explains measures such as the deep cuts in immigration and the rejection of the integration of immigrants, as promoted by many populist leaders.

Finally, unfiltered social media platforms have also enabled "those concerned to air their grievances with like-minded individuals, creating an 'echo chamber' effect and allowing fears to snowball" (Papademetriou, Banulescu-Bogdan, and Hooper, 2018). This means small fears regarding the harm that might be caused by migrants can become bigger and extend through social networks. Due to the lack of control and the absence of a central node that could filter communication in such virtual networks, hate speech and inaccurate data can also circulate along with verified information.

The Impact of Populism on Immigration Policies

Several studies have shown the impact of radical right populist parties (RRPP) and right-wing populism to be stronger in structuring the public debate on immigration and on the agenda of other political parties than on determining the actual number of migrants who enter a certain country. Among others, Lutz (2018) proves this tendency of the radical right's limited influence on government policies.

His model shows that radical right populism achieves migration policy success through its capacity to enact policy restrictions (preferable change) or its capacity to prevent policy liberalizations (undesirable change) when compared to the direction the policy would have taken in its absence (Lutz, 2018: 3).

Compared to mainstream-right cabinets, those with RRPP participation are more liberal about the admission of high- and low-skilled labor immigrants, whereas they are more restrictive toward family migrants and asylum seekers. Lutz also confirms that right-wing populism is a threat to minority rights in liberal democracies and the freedoms of those who are not considered part of the desired people (2018: 20).

A second report by Papademetriou, Banulescu-Bogdan, and Hooper (2018) also proves the limited success of populism, which has flourished equally in all the Western countries.

> Spain and Portugal, for example, lack a significant radical-right populist movement, despite possessing many of the characteristics typically associated with support for nativist populism, such as a deep economic recession and high levels of political corruption. . . . In other countries, the populist share of the vote has declined, or populist parties have disintegrated altogether (for example, in Romania and Bulgaria). In still others, populists have had an underwhelming record once in office and have either been torn apart by internal divisions (as in Finland) or alienated part of their base by failing to deliver on promises — often laced with extremist rhetoric— made while out of office. (Papademetriou, Banulescu-Bogdan, and Hooper, 2018: 3)

In part, right-wing limited effects are due to the difference between electoral promises and the governance process. Papademetriou, Banulescu-Bogdan, and Hooper (2018) analyze recent trends in Europe and the U.S. and suggest three critical forms of indirect influence of populist parties: 1) on the public debate and language on immigration; 2) on the policy agenda; and, 3) on the political landscape.

A different study co-authored by Papademetriou, Hooper, and Benton (2018) analyzes how populist leaders link immigration and crime and outlines the supposed "incompatibility" of immigrants' religious or cultural norms with host-country national values. To put it briefly, populists shape the agenda of other parties and displace them from the center ("the erosion of the center"). Hence, populism has become a political tool for almost every party and must be taken into account even by more progressive ones.

How Populism Alters Public Opinion on Migration

Public opinion and communication lie at the core of populist practices. Ban-ulescu-Bogdan (2018: I) shows that the politicians have taken advantage of this, when convenient, to disseminate information that at times is of dubious quality, and in other cases long since debunked:

> The wave of support for politicians touting populist positions seen in Europe and North America in recent years is inextricably linked to anti-elitism, includ-ing a disdain for academic institutions and a skepticism of the experts they produce. In this environment, messages conveyed by politicians through emotional ap-peals may be seen as more authentic than those backed up by research.

Why do people believe what their favorite politicians have to say? To answer this question, we must look at the psychological mechanisms through which information is molded to fit into people's existing views. Public opinion on immigration has also become seemingly impervious to facts. Evidence-based arguments dispassionately weighing immigration's costs and benefits often seem to fall on deaf ears, while emotional appeals (for either greater openness or restriction) seem to resonate with ever-broader audiences. Misin-formation is at times accidental and at times more deliberate, such as when information is distorted to achieve a specific political objective.

The final challenge that has accompanied the shift in the media land-scape is that information can gain credibility not because it has gone through a rigorous review process or has evidence to support it, but simply because it is widespread and because other people believe it, says Banulescu-Bogdan. Her study is of the utmost importance when doing media analysis, especially when we isolate the information from traditional media. Information circu-lates and forms waves of public opinion support for or against highly skilled migration, mainly based on people's personal experiences and beliefs, rath-er than starting from a serious economic diagnosis. In what follows, we will study the impact of populist discourse on the entry of skilled foreign work-ers into the U.S.

A Comparison of Indian and Mexican H-1B Requests (2007-2018)

India has always been the primary recipient of H-1B visas, which justified entirely centering the discussion almost exclusively on the impact of their modification on Indian nationals (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
TOTAL H-1B PETITIONS FILED (FY 2007-FY 2017)
TOP TEN BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES
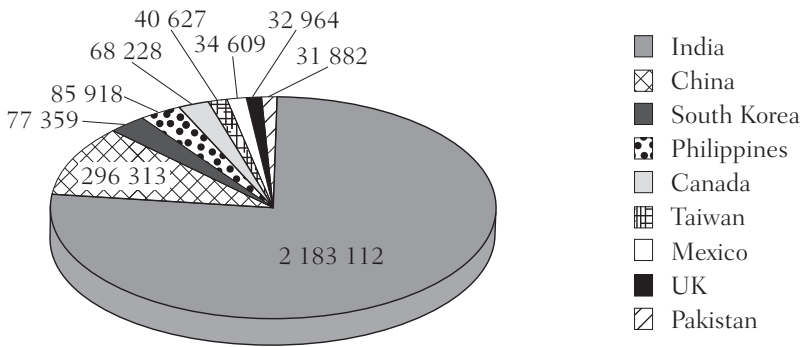
SOURCE: Based on data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018).

The tendency for H-1B visa applications from India and Mexico has been quite similar from 2007 to 2017, with India always surpassing Mexico's number of applications, even when, in general, the number of Mexicans entering the U.S. was larger. The number of H-1B petitions decreased during the same years (2008, 2009, and 2017) and increased in 2011 (see Graph 1).

According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018) data, the number of H-1B petitions tended to grow during 2007 and 2016, except for during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 fiscal years, a detail probably explained by the world recession at that time (see Table 1).

The number of rejections oscillated from 78 percent in 2007 to 74 percent in 2009. In subsequent years, they rose until 2016, when 87 percent of the 399 349 applications for H-1B visas were approved. However, in 2017, the approval rate dropped to 58 percent, meaning that only 197 129 newcomers and H-1B holders already in the U.S. had their requests approved. The number of applications received was in general lower that year, dropping from 2016's 399 349 to 336 107.

TABLE 1
OVERVIEW OF TREND OF H-1B APPLICATIONS RECEIVED (FY 2007-FY 2017)

Petitions Filed	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
India	166 575	157 608	122 475	135 931	155 791	197 940	201 114	227 172	269 677	300 902	247 927	2 183 112
China	26 370	24 434	22 411	21 119	23 227	22 528	23 924	27 733	32 485	35 720	36 362	296 313
Canada	8562	7111	7871	7342	6761	6688	5478	5267	5050	4547	3551	68 228
Mexico	4259	3680	399	3260	3439	3602	2985	2769	2462	2315	2239	34 609
UK	5105	4241	4270	3651	3241	3130	2330	1988	1697	1528	1783	32 964
Iran	2531	1930	1930	1897	1755	1676	1362	1331	1230	1152	1332	18 148

GRAPH 1
NUMBER OF H-1B APPLICATIONS RECEIVED ANNUALLY (2007-2017)
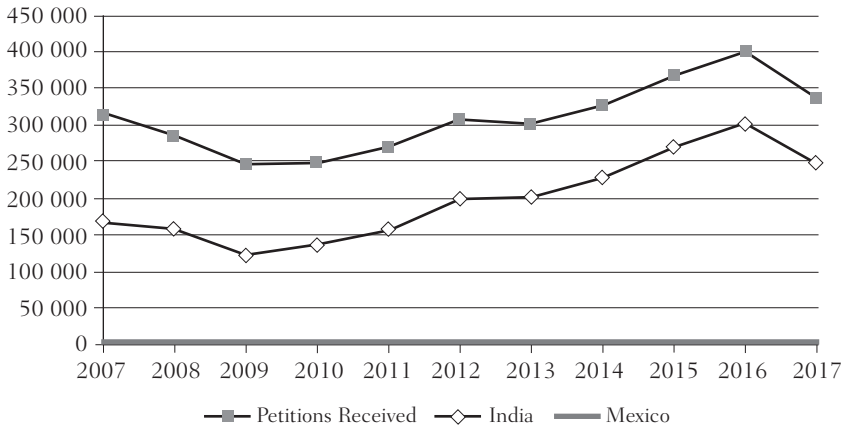
SOURCE: Based on data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018).

Between 2016 and 2017, the only countries among the top twenty that raised the number of applications filed were China (1.7 percent), the UK (16.6 percent), and Iran (15.6 percent). The other countries slowed down their number of applications by 17.6 percent (India), 21.9 percent (Canada), and 3.2 percent (Mexico). This may be attributed to the chilling effect of the presidential discourse on skilled migration to the United States according to the media interpretations below.

While India submits most applications for H-1B visas, Mexico receives the largest number of immigrant visas for immediate relatives (see Table 2). This means that Mexico is more likely to be affected by the virtual suspension of family-related visas to the U.S.

TABLE 2
IMMIGRANT VISAS ISSUED
(BY FOREIGN STATE OF CHARGEABILITY OR PLACE OF BIRTH) (FY 2018)

	Immediate Relatives	Special Immigrants	Family Preference	Employment Preference	Diversity Immigrants	Total
India	10 806	87	15 593	1 587	0	28 073
Mexico	46 334	36	28 120	411	0	74 901

SOURCE: Based on data from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2018).

The Public Debate around
Skilled Migration in the U.S., India, and Mexico

Much of the discussion around the restrictions of skilled migration in the U.S., as promoted by President Donald Trump, is centered around —and even reduced to— H-1B visas (visas for IT professionals and scientists) and the related H-4 visas, which allow direct relatives such as spouses of the H-1B holders, to work in the U.S. The articles we found in some of the U.S. media in 2018 are above all news, with little opinion or analysis. They seem to send clear messages about the efficiency of governmental actions, even when they are critical of them, as they emphasize the decline in applications for H-1B visas and the decision of many foreign professionals who cannot work in the U.S. to go to Canada. The Mexican media mainly reproduces this type of news and adds a further layer to this discourse of rejection, as they address the fear of green card holders, previously H-1B holders, wishing to become nationals, who are now investigated for fraud and some are even returned to their countries of origin.

The media analyzed contrast the official discourse and actions of the president and the government regarding the weaker position of migrants, companies, universities, and legal associations. Many times, the topic changes from the visas to the figure of the president, who seems to represent the whole country. Thus, even though the article is about Donald Trump's fall agenda, the title may start with "Uncle Sam doesn't want you!" (PTI, 2018d).

The U.S. media in 2018 focused on Indian professionals and Indian companies, actually reproducing pieces from the Press Trust of India. Much of this is republished by *The Economic Times*. In this way, a third indirect actor is involved, as we get a glimpse of the content the Indian media publish. The Indian media discourse becomes one with the U.S. media regarding the distribution of visas, and we imagine it generates similar public opinions around H-1B. In this way, the U.S. media may sometimes lack the originality of its critical analysis by utilizing the voice of Indian press associations.

The Main Issues in the U.S. Media

Fear

A December 2018 article published by *The Economic Times* (PTI, 2018a) covers the new "backdating" rule proposed by the president for H-1B holders and former foreign students in the U.S., who may "have a detrimental effect on America's higher education system. . . . Under longstanding immigration policies, when an individual is no longer authorized to remain in the U.S., such as when a visa expires, a period of 'unlawful presence' begins. After six months of unlawful presence, an individual can be forced to return to his/ her country of origin and subject to a three-year bar from the U.S." (PTI, 2018a). Apparently, this may affect U.S. universities in their process of hiring foreign graduate students, previously holders of F-, J-, and M-visas and who contribute US$39 billion to the U.S. economy per year, holding over 455 000 U.S. jobs.

In this way, U.S. leadership in attracting foreign students may be at stake. The same article quotes from a statement of 65 universities:

> As of today, international students continue to make this country the global leader in higher education, but the gap is closing. The United States' market share has dropped from 23 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2012, with China, Canada, Britain, and Russia all vying for the same pool of talent. (PTI, 2018a)

This type of interpretation was also explored in the academic literature regarding the so-called "global competition for talent" (Cerna, 2016; Griswold and Salmon, 2019). This competition includes not only the migration of professionals as more mature talents but also of students as talent with highly productive potential. Therefore, the discussion of visas for graduate students is relevant because many of them will qualify for the contested H-1B visas and may end up living permanently in the U.S.

Indian companies, pressured to hire locally (Phadnis, 2018), express a different type of fear:

> There is also another major problem regarding the redefining of the employer-employee relationship. While redefining the employer-employee relationship was designed to prevent outsourcing companies and body shops from utilizing exploitative tactics, there are plenty of other categories of workers that involve third-party sites that will also be affected. Doctors, for instance, are an

example of professionals who will almost certainly be affected by the proposed rule change. (Rao, 2018)

Governmental Efficiency

How populist is populism? Is it just a discourse against foreigners or are there actual actions? Trump's populism regarding skilled migration combines action and fear discourse and is shown to get results. He means what he says and he acts, in contrast to other political leaders who use fear tactics but never implement programs.

Several media sources state the consistency between presidential statements and actions. "The Trump administration in the USA has been consistent in its efforts towards tightening immigration," according to *Immigration World* (2018). The authors of the same article continued by saying,

- H-1B visa applications denied to Indian professionals between the third and fourth quarter of FY 2017 rose by 42 percent;
- 72 percent of H-1B visa applications filed in the fourth quarter by Indians received requests for evidence;
- 48 percent of the L1B applications by Indians were denied in the fourth quarter of FY 2017; and
- 80 percent of O1 visa applications by Indians were issued requests for evidence in the fourth quarter of FY 2017.

Such efficiency is also interpreted as a danger for the U.S. economy, with another journalist saying, "One of America's most successful exports is in trouble" (Rampell, 2018).

Most relevant for our study of brain attraction with respect to populism, Trump is redefining the H-1B category, that is, reinterpreting what a foreign talent/professional is. Contrary to what we might expect, the Trump administration sets a higher bar on what a foreign professional should be: those with graduate studies, preferably earned in the U.S., are favored. "The proposed process would result in an estimated increase of up to 16 percent (or 5340 workers) in the number of selected H-1B beneficiaries with a master's degree or higher from a U.S. institution of higher education," said the DHS

in a statement quoted by Pramanik (2018) With this, analysts say, U.S. degree holders will get two bites at the apple, according to the same source (Pramanik, 2018).

This approach results in a redefinition of the category of skilled migrants, who previously required undergraduate studies only. Actually, this reconfirms previous studies on the insertion of skilled migrants that proved graduate studies to be an important condition for labor insertion abroad (Ramirez-Garcia and Tigau, 2018). Now being skilled is not enough: immigrants need to be highly skilled to be admitted to the U.S. in the first place. Indeed, Trump is shown to insist on bringing only the "best and brightest" workers into the country, that is, individuals with "extraordinary abilities" (Rao, 2018), a visa category that already existed as the o-1. Changing the definition of the specialty occupation covered by the h-1b "has great potential to reform the program," said Sarah Pierce, an expert with the Migration Policy Institute, the leading U.S. think tank, quoted by Yashwant Raj (2019) in *Hindustan Times*.

There is yet another implication of this change: the U.S. is inching closer to the Canadian and Australian models of skilled migration. Both are countries that carefully select their foreign workers and prioritize education and experience over family reunification. One of the corollaries of Trump's fall agenda is eliminating the h-4 visas, which means skilled migration will also be temporary and either families will be separated in the same way as unskilled migrants, or one family member will be ineligible for labor integration in the U.S. That means the U.S. is becoming less attractive for migrants with a family and may place at a disadvantage younger migrants, who may wish to form a family in the U.S., that is, integrate.

However, a certain rationality exists in all the measures, according to official statements by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (uscis). The changes are expected to reduce overall costs for petitioners and make the application process more efficient, besides avoiding the physical reception of documents. However, opponents such as Nasscom and the American Immigration Lawyers Association have raised concerns over the ability to implement these measures successfully from the first year. If enacted, the new registration system would be implemented in fiscal year 2020, although uscis could delay its rollout if it encounters "technical challenges," according to the *New York Post* (2018).

The online system also eliminates the application premium processing, yet another matter of concern for U.S. companies in need of foreign workers fast.

What we call the "efficiency" of the Trump administration is to be noted in the general slowdown in visas of all types, resulting in less interest in working, living, or visiting the U.S. Hesson (2018) shows a reduction in the overall number of legal entries to the U.S., with a 13-percent drop compared to fiscal year 2018. "That's been a bit of a nightmare," says Sarah Pitney, an immigration attorney quoted by Hesson (2018).

The uncertainty and difficulty of assessing the consequences of newly implemented and future measures is also attributed to the lack of transparency in governmental information. In the same column by Hesson (2018), he states,

> The State Department doesn't provide detailed information about how many visa applications it receives or denies, so it's impossible to determine how much the decline is attributable to tougher screening and how much to dwindling interest in traveling to the U.S. Either explanation would suggest that Trump's posture had a chilling effect on legal immigration flows. (2018)

The Economic Consequences

Due to increased government requirements, such as companies being required to fill in a form called a Labor Condition Application (LCA) to declare the wages they will pay to foreigners, employers themselves are expected to decrease their numbers of skilled temporary foreign workers. This is expected because they will have to pay higher wages and accept this increased government surveillance.

> The new labor conditions could deter tech companies from hiring skilled graduates from abroad lest they fork out too much in annual wages, and could compel them to "hire American" in line with Trump's new order. Alternatively, if companies cannot source adequate [U.S.] American-born employees, the new conditions may result in selected foreign employees being appointed at much higher salaries. The true effects of this new LCA form have yet to be seen" according to an article by *Forbes*. (Semotiuk, 2019)

Others also criticize the decision to eliminate Level 1 or entry-level wages for H-1B occupations, many times used when hiring foreign graduates from U.S. universities (Rao, 2018).

Indians, the Group Most Affected

The general debate on skilled emigration in the last decade or so in India has been positive, especially in the context of IT professionals. There is a growing realization that brain drain from India corresponds with brain gain as more Indians try to acquire valued skills, and as return migrants bring back human capital, technological know-how, and connections, facilitating further technological dissemination (Kerr, 2008). It has enabled the Indian IT sector to grow rapidly, with new firms joining the race and older firms expanding, and over time, India has become a major software producer. Remittances sent by these temporary workers to their families back home were another gain for India.

As a result, U.S. immigration policies and H-1B visa changes have been paid more attention in the media. The curtailment is seen as a loss for Indian workers. However, there is also a counter view: in the words of Vivek Wadhwa (2009), "As the debate over H-1B workers and skilled immigrants intensifies, we are losing sight of one important fact: the U.S. is no longer the only land of opportunity." In countries like India and China, where the economies are booming, migrants are returning in large numbers. In addition, new destinations are emerging with new markets and economies, such as the Toronto tech hub, which is highly attractive due to Canada's friendlier migration policies.

All the media surveyed outline Indians as the group most affected (Rao, 2018). In fact, journalists even avoid mentioning other skilled foreign workers: the problem seems to be with Indians only, including men and women who benefit from the H-1B or H4 visas. According to *Livemint* (PTI, 2018d), "The move will have a major impact on Indian women as they are the major beneficiaries of the Obama-era rule."

"The move to end the rule could have an impact on more than 70 000 H-4 visas holders who have work permits. Such visas are issued by the USCIS to immediate family members (spouses and children under 21 years) of H-1B visa holders" (PTI, 2018d).

Even when most news and opinion columns have a rather pessimistic tone in India, there are also pieces on alternative political positions taken by Indian-American politicians, such as the attempt to pass the Immigration Innovation Act of 2018, proposed by representatives Mike Coffman, a Republican congressman from Colorado, and Raja Krishnamoorthi, a Democrat from Illinois. The legislation was rejected by Congress. The bill proposed to create new conditional green card categories to allow U.S. employers to sponsor university-educated foreign professionals and would have allowed H-1B workers to switch to new jobs and improved conditions for the H4 holders (Duttagupta, 2018).

Study International (2018) points at a one-fifth decrease in the number of Indian graduate students applying to U.S. universities in 2017, assumed to be caused by the "increasingly difficult requirements needed to secure the sought-after H-1B visa." The same study goes on to report that Indian students are now turning to Canada, and Indian workers are looking to return to India. By the end of March 2017, approximately 7000 U.S.-based Indians were seeking jobs back home, a significant increase from only around 600 in December 2016, according to the Deloitte consulting firm, as quoted by Study International (2018).

Compared to other countries that are closing borders to skilled workers, such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Singapore, and, of course, the U.S., Canada is pictured as favored by foreign talent "for its simpler and friendlier immigration policies" (Study International, 2018), with fast-track programs such as the Post-graduation Work Permit (PGWP). "Permanent residents can then apply to become Canadian citizens after residing and working in the country for six years. In contrast, the quest for a green card in the U.S. can take years and leaves many immigrants in limbo," says Study International (2018).[2] Canada also offers special conditions to foreign students from China, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines and seems like a perfect destination for young, skilled Indians who wish to work abroad.

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[2] According to Visa Guide World (2020), employment-based green cards may take up to six years to process, after the six years of staying on an H-1B visa. Processing family-preference green cards may take as long ten years.

The Mexican Media

The discourse of Mexican printed media around Donald Trump's policies toward foreign talent mainly summarize and reproduce the information from the U.S. They make no assessment of Mexican professionals in the U.S. or how changes in the H-1B visa will affect those who may wish to migrate.

Similarly, the main theme in the Mexican media is the fear generated among migrants who have opted for U.S. citizenship in order to avoid losing their permanent residence. "Many people asked for citizenship in 2015 because they wanted to vote in the 2016 elections, but since then, they're doing it because they don't want to lose their permanent residence. Everyone is afraid and wants to have a more stable status. . . . We've seen people who ask for citizenship and their cases are reviewed to verify first whether, when they obtained the residence permit, they were really entitled to it; and they're sent to immigration courts, where they have to fight not to get citizenship but to defend their green card," said Ruby Powers, an immigration lawyer interviewed by BBC Mundo (Bermudez, 2018).

Apart from the very weak coverage of the topic, Mexican media mainly quote from Spanish-language international media, such as BBC Mundo or Univision, and pick up from U.S. opinion leaders such as Alex Nowrasteh at the Cato Institute in Washington.

Based on the content analysis of printed and online media feature stories published in Mexico in 2018 and 2019 and centered on the changes in the U.S. system, we found the main news is the slowdown in the applications and processing for all types of immigration to the U.S.: skilled and unskilled, temporary and permanent, refugees and asylum seekers. The U.S. is depicted as a place where fewer people want to go and they should not go because they may find themselves in many different unpleasant situations, including detention and forced return. The discussion is sometimes mixed in with the wall that Donald Trump intends to build on the border with Mexico and the vulnerable situation of DACA youth, many of whom come from Mexico.

Concerning the H-1B visa, Mexican media report on the decreasing number of applications contrasting with the increasing rate of rejection of those who do apply and on the White House's intention to cancel the work permits of immediate family members. They also inform about the suspension of the US$1225 fast-track fee for H-1B processing. This is explained by the

rejection of "chain migration," a term and idea perpetuated by President Donald Trump (Bermudez, 2018).

The Mexican media portrays the U.S. government as strong and tough on the measures to limit migration. They do not directly question its efforts to limit fraud, abuse, and the discrimination against U.S. workers by hiring foreign ones (Univision, 2018). Even when no strong words are used and there is no explicit disagreement, the reader is finally given the impression of the U.S. as the "Uncle Sam that doesn't want anybody" and that kicks out the ones who entered previously. In fact, the official sources quoted by Mexican media offer very few statistics to prove the economic damage done by professional migrants in the U.S., giving the overall impression of a policy of closed or difficult-to-cross borders, for Mexicans as well as for other nationals. No one seems to be privileged.

Conclusions

A comprehensive discussion of the research on growing populism in contemporary democracies and reassessment of the literature on it is timely and warranted. The concept has gained currency in social science research as an important political phenomenon. Although populist trends are different in different regions, they have gained momentum all over the world. Populism may lead to the gradual erosion of democratic institutions and usher in competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Loxton, 2012). Migration —especially skilled migration— is one of the issues that has become the latest target of the populist political trends.

The recent anti-migrant rhetoric by the developed countries also shows that they begin opposing global trends as soon as they realize that the developing countries have started gaining an advantage from them, whether trade or migration. For the U.S., the consequences of skilled immigration from India appeared very beneficial in the beginning as the influx of engineers and computer scientists helped the U.S. IT sector grow leaps and bounds. However, the process, especially the H-1B program, which was meant for short-term stays, spurred growth in the competing Indian IT sector and to some extent challenged U.S. market dominance. According to Khanna and Morales (2017),

Migration led U.S. native CS [computer science] workers to switch to non-CS occupations and is therefore associated with a fall in the U.S. native CS workforce by as much as 9 percent in 2010. However, the gains for the U.S. have been multiple. Immigrants from all countries constitute only 12 percent of the U.S. population, but have started 52 percent of Silicon Valley's technology companies and contributed more than 25 percent of our global patents. They make up 24 percent of the U.S. science and engineering workforce holding bachelor's degrees, and 47 percent of science and engineering workers who have PhDs. Immigrants have co-founded firms such as Google (GOOG), Intel (INTC), eBay (EBAY), and Yahoo! (YAHOO).

Nevertheless, popular beliefs and media coverage in the U.S. have taken the whole discourse related to immigration to a completely negative place, so much so that it impacts and shapes the socio-economic narratives in sending countries as well. In Mexico, for example, it has generated fear and anti-U.S. feeling among the general public and also among those who have already migrated but fear losing their permanent residency. As the studies point out, people in fear of their cases coming under review even avoid availing themselves of the residence benefits they are entitled to. In fact, the issue has become so entangled with several other migration-related problems that hardly any independent, rational debate exists that can assess the real situation and help Mexican professionals who wish to migrate.

There can hardly be any doubt that the restrictions on the circulation of brains, skill, or knowledge are a bad trend for the growth of economies, as well as the intellectual world. However, the restrictions in the U.S. could also result in gains for the home countries like India or the rise of new destinations like Singapore, or other countries in Asia.

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