FRIENDS ON OTHER CONTINENTS: REPRESENTATIONS OF BIDEN'S MIGRATION DIPLOMACY OUTSIDE THE AMERICAS*

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Introduction

A report released by the Institute for National Security Studies before Biden took over as president anticipated that "most of the focus and resources, at least early in the new administration's term and possibly throughout 2021, will be invested in the effort to 'heal America's soul'" (Shavit, 2020).

According to other authors such as the London School of Economics economist Van Reenen, this measure would include a boost in the size of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce, including an emphasis on talent attraction through immigration and an increase in education investment. This could benefit kids from low-income backgrounds, minorities and women, helping them to become innovators. Finally, Van Reenen wrote about the crisis as a learning opportunity for the new president and his administration:

> History teaches that crises can be moments of great political and social change. We are at such a historical conjuncture when reset button can be hit on the model of growth. After the Second World War, the West re-invented itself; we realized our deep interdependence and the necessity of investing substantially in what Vannevar Bush called (in 1945) the Endless Frontier of science (Van Reenen, 2020).

President Biden did indeed put an emphasis on raising levels for skilled migration, but that was not the main migration issue in the media in general, neither in the U.S. nor abroad. In turn, migration from Central America was one of Biden's hot potatoes during the first three months as a president,

along with vaccines and the COVID-19 pandemic. His actions to help migrants during COVID-19, accept more refugees, increase the levels of skilled immigration at levels equal to the ones that existed during the Obama administration, and allow work permits to skilled immigrants' spouses are all efforts with a direct economic impact on the recovery of the country from the pandemic. However, they also have a broader meaning of a complex migration diplomacy, based on philanthropy and the logic of R&D investment. Migration diplomacy is thereby understood as a set of actions meant to advance migration as a humanitarian issue, rather than a political crisis.

This chapter analyzes the media representations of Biden's executive actions on migration in his first three months in power, including his actions to promote the United States as a welcoming country and a leader in talent attraction. While media from countries directly involved in the Central American crisis (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States) have extensively published on the issue (a humanitarian crisis but not necessarily a migration one), this chapter explores media from regions that are not directly involved in the issue. In this way, our analysis is based on a combined pragmatic analysis of Biden's speeches compared to the political context and media representations in regions other than the Americas: Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Some of the first actions undertook by Joe Biden in his first three months as a president may be analyzed as an effort to reposition the United States as a multilateral partner and to deprovincialize the American perspective on immigration. In this way, Biden sought to promote his country as a moral, cultural and scientific power, but also to reestablish broken relations with Muslim countries, Central America and India that had been damaged by previous restrictions imposed by Donald Trump. As a Reuters title states, " 'America Is Back': Biden Touts Muscular Foreign Policy in First Diplomatic Speech" (Holland and Alper, 2021). Biden has positioned himself as a migration president and a president who repairs damage done by his predecessor.
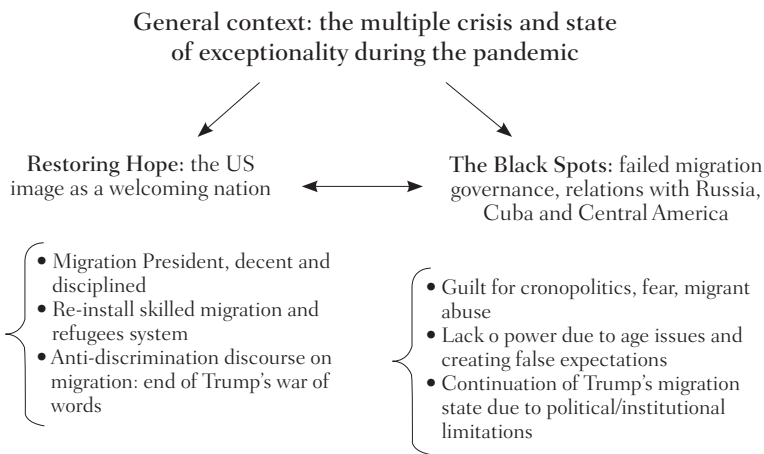
The hypothesis that sustains this study is that Biden's approach to migration may be considered in terms of a "country of origin" strategy to reposition the U.S. image, rather than a genuine attempt for a migration reform. His migration diplomacy was intentional and planned as a political strategy to promote the image of the United States, but also differentiate himself

from the previous Donald Trump administration. This chapter has a classi-
cal structure in three main parts: the first one proposes an interdisciplinary
theoretical background based on international communication, diplomacy
and migration studies; the second one explains the method for media analy-
sis; and the third one discusses results from newspapers monitored in Eu-
rope, Asia and the Middle East.

Theoretical Background: From Country Image to Sovereignty Defense

We propose an original model of analysis for the representation of Biden's
migration policy in non-American media, which may be interpreted in a
general context of the multiple crises and state of exceptionality during the
pandemic that overshadowed the first part of his presidency (see figure 1). In
line with this model, two general trends may be identified in media discourses
on Biden's migration policy: a) restoring hope: the U.S. as a welcoming nation
and b) "black spots": failed migration governance and failed relations with
Russia, Cuba, and Central America.

FIGURE 1
REPRESENTATIONS OF BIDEN'S MIGRATION DIPLOMACY
IN NON-AMERICAN MEDIA

**General context: the multiple crisis and state
of exceptionality during the pandemic**

Restoring Hope: the US
image as a welcoming nation

The Black Spots: failed migration
governance, relations with Russia,
Cuba and Central America

- Migration President, decent and disciplined
- Re-install skilled migration and refugees system
- Anti-discrimination discourse on migration: end of Trump's war of words

- Guilt for cronopolitics, fear, migrant abuse
- Lack o power due to age issues and creating false expectations
- Continuation of Trump's migration state due to political/institutional limitations

SOURCE: Developed by the author.

The first framing, of restoring hope, is more evident soon after Biden won the election and in his first month in power following his inauguration on January 20, 2021. This first general framing pictures Biden as an "immigration president," decent and disciplined, who tries to restore the image of the United States as a welcoming country, reinstall a refugee system and the attraction of skilled immigration. In this way, his anti-discrimination discourse on immigration is reproduced as a way to put an end to Trump's war of words. This framing is generally more present in European media and some Asian journals, but is soon criticized through a second opposed trend: the one that outlines "the black spots," or foreign policy challenges regarding his tense relations with Russia, adding Cuba on the terrorist list, and failed migration governance towards Central America. To illustrate this second, more pessimistic approach, certain general threads are recurrent in media monitored in the Middle East and Asia, such as Biden's guilt for immigrant abuse, fear, and planned cronopolitics of keeping people waiting at the border. He is also implicitly or explicitly accused of lack of power, due to age issues and creating false expectations toward immigrants. Finally, he is pictured as someone who may simply continue Trump's migration state due to political/institutional limitations. In what follows, the two main framings—hope regarding the improvement of immigrant situations and its opposite: pessimism regarding its unfeasibility—are described using general concepts of international communication theory and immigration scholarship.

Reasons for Hope: The Migration President

In the first place, the framing of hope may be better approached through the concept of country image and knowledge diplomacy. From this perspective, the United States is pictured as a historical nation of immigration, where immigrants have significantly contributed to welfare and consolidation of the United States as a world power.

In order to understand this positioning, we may recall the literature on country of origin as a basis for carrying out migration diplomacy. From a certain point of view used by tourism literature, countries are products that need to sell their destination image (Wang, 2020). This may be extended to investment and other economic exchanges, in which the foreign public opinion tends to

position itself through positive or negative attitudes toward a country. Through extrapolation of the aggressive discourse carried by the previous president, Donald Trump, many authors have shown a negative impact on the U.S. image abroad, from a leading country in democratic and liberal ideas, partly built by foreign talents, to one that was downgraded to a place of retrograde politics and conservative economic measures.

According to the theoretical model of country of origin by Motsi and Park (2020), such stereotypes have an impact on the micro and macro image of the United States. In general, stereotypes tend to be dichotomous: good or bad, and are based on the perceived warmth (i.e., caring) and competence (i.e., hardworking characteristics, skillfulness) of its people. These types of caricatural thinking lead to a macro image of a country—that is, the generic image that consumers/public have about a country. By comparison, the micro image refers to certain products from that country (Motsi and Park, 2020: 115).

By extension, the United States as a great power may be considered the macro image, while migration or immigration can be studied at a micro-level or by-product directed to foreign workers and would-be migrants. The two levels—macro and micro—are related. However, damage on one level, such as the abuse of human rights of immigrant workers or discrimination against foreigners of certain racial origin in the United States, may actually affect the overall image of the U.S. as a welcoming nation and further impact the country's wealth. This simple argument is actually behind the present administration's strategy to rehumanize immigrants, as a way to reposition the entire country as a friendlier partner in international society, a moral power that used to be a model for democracy.

At this point, it is important to outline how the image of the United States as a moral, democratic, and scientific power was created based on the contributions of certain elite diasporas. Recent literature that was published during the years of Donald Trump's administration, such as Burke (2017), Kando (2018), Gros (2018) and Van der Linden et al., (2020) has pointed to the role of skilled immigrants for U.S. scientific culture and its exceptional economic outcome. In his book *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000*, Burke (2017: 138) describes how knowledge immigrants have helped to deprovincialize and introduce other cultures to the United States, particularly since the great exodus from Hitler's Reich in the twentieth century.

One year later, Kando published a demographic history of the Nobel prizes in which he analyzed what he calls the massive "brain transfer" from Europe to America, after World War II. The migration of Jewish and other refugees fleeing Nazism, plus the migration of other intellectuals was welcomed by an open-door policy of the United States. In this way, the United States has benefitted from a "gigantic brain drain" (Kando, 2018: 69) and doubled its Nobel prize laureates. The political reason for Kando's study, as the author himself shows, was to pinpoint to Trump's "short-sighted move" to stop immigration, as it "has been the country's greatest source of strength, vitality, scientific progress and future wealth. Without immigrants, America would not have Google and Apple. Few things have benefitted this country more than the free flow of immigration" (Kando, 2018: 76).

In the same vein, Gros (2018) carries an empirical study of the per capita yield of science Nobel prizes and sees a decline in some Nobel prizes such as the ones awarded to natural scientists in the United States. Gros concludes with a question on whether the U.S. era is coming to an end. In contemporary times, Nobel prizes may indeed serve as an indicator of a country's scientific productivity (Van der Linden et al., 2020) and they also speak about the attraction of human capital from abroad.

In this way, the intention of Biden to keep strengthening R&D investment, attract skilled migrants, and repair relations with China could be interpreted as a return to science diplomacy that has historically characterized U.S. policy and even helped the country to win the Cold War (Krasnyak, 2018). In particular, knowledge diplomacy (Knight, 2020) focuses on academic exchange, and it may serve to attract international students to the U.S., along with human and economic capital.

Enrollment of foreign students in the U.S. slowed during Trump's administration, due to certain measures to suspend H1B visas, and further decreased as a consequence of the pandemic. Chinese students are the main population among foreign graduates, accounting for a third of all international students in the United States with a population of 372,000 before the pandemic (Allen and Ye, 2021) and an annual contribution US$15 billion to the U.S. economy (Malden and Stephens, 2020). Racist discourse and suspicions around espionage, which led to the suspension of some professors and students of Chinese origin enrolled at U.S. universities have however, deteriorated this exchange relation. According to Allen and Ye (2021), the

United States is now perceived as dangerous and unstable, and future Chinese students may fear study in the U.S. due to the mismanagement of COVID-19, which includes the exemption from wearing masks.

"The Black Spots": Lack of Power in the Migration State

In the second place, the more pessimistic view on Biden's faults and limitations (what I call "the black spots" of his administration) may be analyzed based on previous literature on the migration state by Adamson and Tsourapas (2020) and Hollifield (2004), as well as from the critical stands on the commodification of citizenship for economic, demographic, and, above all, racial purposes. Since 2004, Hollifield proposed the concept of migration state that can be applied to the cases of the United States and other major receiving countries to control their borders and trade. These states seem to be caught in a "liberal paradox," as they follow the laws of trade, but they are required to control their borders for human flow purposes and carefully decide who gets admitted as a migrant or citizen.

Adamson and Tsourapas (2020: 858) apply the concept to include states of out-migration from the Global South that try to manage migration as a strategy of economic development, alleviate unemployment, and secure foreign direct investment via remittances. In this way, weak and non-democratic states are suffering from what the author calls the "illiberal paradox," as they seek to restrict emigration for political and security reasons, but they also need to encourage emigration for the economic reasons mentioned above as well as to control overpopulation (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2020: 861). For instance, Mexico's Bracero and the following "Tres por uno" programs are examples of such a dilemma between using migration as an escape valve but also trying to get economic benefits from migrant workers in the United States.

According to this model, the U.S. may be considered a neoliberal migration state, carefully selecting immigrants based on economic background and race, rather than on humanitarian reasons. This tendency was further deepened by Trump's policy and discourse, while Biden seems to revert to a more friendly discourse based more on human rights than on sovereignty

interests. The representations of his stand on immigration will be discussed in the media analysis that follows.

Method

We offer a study of image of Biden's immigration policies and initiatives taken to deal with those at the border with Mexico and other immigrant populations who try to reach the U.S. or are already inside the country. When focusing on Biden, we accept that certain personalities such as presidents do have a relevant impact in affecting the image of their country abroad. A previous work by Balmas (2018) shows that a leader's messages may have positive characteristics (e.g., trustworthy and warm) or negative characteristics (e.g., untrustworthy and cold).

In this way, Balmas proves the psychological effects of the personal projection of leaders on how a certain country is perceived. Looking through the lens of immigration, we see a contrast between Donald Trump's aggressive messages toward migrants and a warmer one promoted by Joe Biden, which may further affect the representation of the United States as an un-welcoming vs. welcoming country.
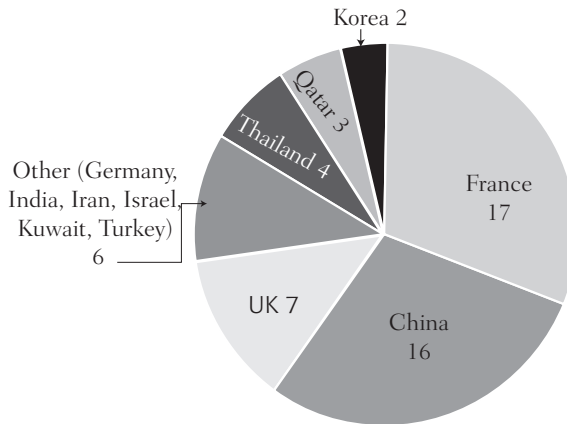
However, such interpretations and generalizations may have limitations depending on different contexts and political background. According to Agadjanian and Horiuchi (2020: 584), immigration policy content may have a larger effect on worsening/improving public opinion than the message cue given by presidential discourse. In this way, foreign opinion toward the U.S. does not unconditionally hinge on its political leader. By extension, Agadjanian and Horiuchi suggest that Trump has not irreparably damaged U.S. image abroad (Agadjanian and Horiuchi, 2020: 600).

Using data and media representations from the first hundred days of President Biden, we find that the damage may indeed not be irreversible; however, regions and countries with a historical background of tense relations with the U.S. and territories that had been more affected by restrictive policies such as Trump's ban, also tend to picture Biden in a less optimistic way. Media from the Middle East are more cautious about his policies, while European media believe more in the message of rehumanizing migrants promoted by Biden.

Monitoring was focused on non-American media, a geographically re-strictive approach that has been previously used by authors such as Endong (2019). In this way, most of the countries included in the study are not di-rectly involved in the current immigration issues of the U.S., with the ex-ception of China, where reports were released on the difficult conditions of Chinese foreign students in the United States during the Trump adminis-tration. In media studies, proximity is also considered as a way of appreciat-ing how a topic such as regional migration in the Americas may be exported and interpreted by newspapers in other regions of the world.

To tackle the wide variety of messages and formats, we use a classical framing methodology to distinguish between the main topics around Biden and his approach to immigration. Based on a similar methodology, Viladrich (2019: 2) has pointed to an active role of the media "in prompting their au-diences to align with a specific vision on a controversial topic, as when support-ing a humanitarian approach (i.e., immigrants deserve compassion) or when conveying the idea of a threat (i.e., immigrants are dangerous subjects)."

FIGURE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF ARTICLES ANALYZED BY COUNTRY

SOURCE: Developed by the author.

The qualitative data analysis for this chapter consisted of 55 journal ar-ticles from 12 countries (figure 2), published between January and May 2021 in their online editions, summing a total of 18,573 words. From the selected media, non–American newspapers that published most were *Le*

Soleil (16 features) and *China Daily* (Weekly, Global, and Hong Kong Edition, 13 features)—see table 1. Most of the articles (70 percent) were written in English and the other 30 percent in French.

TABLE 1
ELECTRONIC JOURNALS AND ARTICLES ANALYZED BY COUNTRY

	Journal	*Country*	*No. of articles*
1	*Le Soleil*	France	16
2	*China Daily* (weekly, global, and Hong Kong edition)	China	13
3	*Bangkok Post*	Thailand	4
4	*The Guardian*	UK	3
5	*The Korean Times*	Korea	2
6	*Qatar Tribune*	Qatar	2
7	*The Daily Telegraph*	UK	2
8	*Global Times* (China)	China	1
9	*Shanghai Daily*	China	1
10	*Yuman Sun*	China	1
11	*Ouest France* (Rennes)	France	1
12	*Deutsche Welle* (English edition)	Germany	1
13	*Quartz India*	India	1
14	*Iran Daily*	Iran	1
15	*The Jerusalem Post*	Israel	1
16	*Kuwait News*	Kuwait	1
18	*Gulf Times*	Qatar	1
19	*Daily Sabah*	Turkey	1
20	*The Independent*	UK	1
21	*Yorkshire Post*	UK	1
		Total	55

SOURCE: Developed by the author.

Even though there is an implicit bias when selecting features in these languages, it is important to note that their audience may be a regional public with cosmopolitan cultural capital that may actually be interested in news issues that do not address their immediate proximity. In what follows, we describe the results of the media analysis, which ranges from a discourse

of hope to pinpointing certain more pessimistic clues about Biden's migration policy, based on evidence from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

European Media

Biden's image and his corresponding action on immigration were generally favorable in his first three months in power, according to the selection of European newspapers researched for this chapter. He was perceived as a president who tries to do justice to immigrants, in terms of discourse and actions. One of the journals with the most publications on Biden's image is *Le Soleil* in France. Following the methodological objectives described above, 16 articles were chosen for qualitative analysis, most of them news features with some opinion considerations. Some of the pieces are not original research done by *Le Soleil*, as they are authored by Agence France-Presse (AFP).

According to *Le Soleil*, Biden's campaign on immigration seems be based on symbolic clues: he assigns the role of family migrant reunification to his wife, Jill Biden, as a sign of a president who appreciates family, understands it, and relies on its values. An article from January 29 in *Le Soleil* (AFP, 2021a), describes Jill Biden as a university professor with a PhD in educational science—a stark contrast to Melania Trump—and quotes from her speech after the visit at a migrant camp in Mexico: "We are a welcoming nation, but this is not necessarily the message that we send." By comparison Melania Trump had visited a facility of child migrants in 2018, wearing a t-shirt that read: "I really don't care, do u?"

In this way, Biden's first actions were analyzed as part of a broader view on the necessity to restore the asylum system and renew aid provided to Palestinians. However, he did not reach the extreme of proposing open borders; on the contrary, all the ideas about protecting asylum seekers were occasionally suspended under conditions of exceptionality imposed by the pandemic, with the argument that it "takes time" to repair all the damage. Among other practical measures, this meant that Biden did not suspend a public health order issued by Mr. Trump at the start of the coronavirus pandemic that allows the United States Customs and Border Protection to immediately deport almost everyone trying to enter the country, including asylum seekers (Spagat, 2021 in *Le Soleil*).

However, the president does show intentions of reestablishing national honor and "delet[ing] the shame" of family separation (Plantive, 2021 in *Le Soleil*), which can be interpreted under the frame of discursive justice. By February 2021, Biden promised to reopen legal recourses for Central American migrants and asylum seekers. Almost paraphrasing from Global Compact for Migration, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that "international cooperation is essential to guarantee a secure, orderly and humane migration process."

The exceptionality during the pandemic made it harder to implement plans on immigration. Several pieces of news by Cartillier (2021a, b and c) show that energy cuts, high unemployment figures, fear of inflation and the general unstable international situation give a tough context for Biden's first hundred days. Says Cartillier (2021): "After the first hundred days at a good pace, with a discipline contrasting with the chaos of the Trump years, the Democratic president has entered a more delicate phase of his mandate." The situation will complicate even further due to conflicts with Russia and further classification of the U.S. and the Czech Republic as "unfriendly states" by President Putin (AFP, 2021b).

By May 2021, Biden announced an increase in refugee figures up to 62,500 in 2021, which would double in 2022, in what appears to be a decision to break with the Trump perspective, but also a reaction to several critiques from migration supporters who signaled he was not doing enough to help Central American migrants. This program would take refugees established in UN camps, who have previously applied to be resettled in the United States.

In general, Biden's first programs and initiatives allowed for high approval rates: 63 percent of the Americans thought he was doing a good job at the beginning of May, and even more so (71 percent) regarding the pandemic (Pace and Fingerhut, 2021). Almost half of the Republicans (47 percent) also approved his ways out of the pandemic and his approach to vaccine diplomacy (Cartillier, 2021b).

The most recurrent framing in French media (*Le Soleil* in particular) is the pandemic and relations with Russia. The thread of relations with Russia is recurrent in *Le Soleil*, with planned summits and official meetings reminiscent of the Cold War (Fontemaggi, 2021). Immigration is a secondary topic to evaluate Biden, less important than in Asian and Middle East media. Other issues, such as the liberation of some Guantanamo prisoners, tie

several aspects together, as some of the prisoners are previous immigrants from Middle East countries (AFP, 2021c).

President Biden also launched a discursive strategy against discrimination and racism of Asian migrants in a pandemic context, which is surprisingly not an important issue in Asian media considered in this study, but it was targeted by European outlets. Biden denounced the "horrible poison" of racism and lamented that so many members of this community have been "attacked, vilified, and made scapegoats" in recent months (AFP, 2021d). In particular, people of Chinese origin were accused of causing the pandemic, which led to the murder of some Asian female workers.

Different approaches from *Ouest France* (January 18) also mention the conflict ("war of words") between the U.S. and China that could affect educational exchange and skilled immigration. News from *Ouest France* continuously picture forced migration from Central America, with plenty of details that implicitly point to a general crisis that cannot wait for good or bad moments of U.S. Immigration policy. Indirectly, this is a critique of Biden's declaration that "it was not the moment to come for Central American Migrants."

The UK media pictures Biden as a decent president, with a more humane approach to immigration than his predecessor, but having a difficult time undoing previous actions. Marcus (2021) for *The Independent* as well as Holpuch (2021) for *The Guardian Weekly* write features that describe Trump as a phantom difficult to leave behind with regard to U.S. migration policy. *The Guardian Weekly* writes "Trump's Influence Still Lingers over U.S. Immigration" to describe the difficulty of starting deportations and border violence under a pandemic situation.

However, two articles by *The Daily Telegraph* bring brighter news: Biden has instructed agencies to stop using the "illegal alien" phrase. " 'Alien' will become 'noncitizen or migrant,' 'illegal' will become 'undocumented,' and 'assimilation' will change to 'integration'" (Ensor, 2021). His friendlier approach give space to a critical interpretation that migration authorities were caught by surprise regarding the number of unaccompanied children, whom Biden decided not to return.

Even though in general, Biden seems to have high rates of approval in his first three months, his image regarding immigration actions is approved by less than half (47 percent) of voters, according to the UK media. In this

sense, an article by *The Daily Telegraph*, published in May by Lynch and Wallace (2021), also refers to disappointments regarding the number of jobs created: 700,000 less than what Biden had expected in a context of economic recovery from the pandemic.

Regarding immigration from Central America, it is worth recalling an in-depth feature from *Deutsche Welle* (English edition), released on April 5, 2021. Migration from Central America, Honduras in particular, is described as an exodus out of control for the U.S. and Mexican authorities. An episode with migrants drowning in the Rio Grande River describes the inaction of the Border Patrol, which doesn't intervene to save people, even when they see them dying. "According to the Border Patrol, officers encountered 100,441 people making unauthorized crossings into the United States in February, the most since June 2019, when the figure was 104,311. Nearly 20,000 of those people were from Honduras […] Pictures of drowning Hondurans and U.S. border officials doing nothing to intercede may scare people for a while, but won't likely serve as a preventative for long," writes *Deutsche Welle*.

The anonymous author explains Central American immigration to the U.S. based on economic and climate reasons: people are unemployed and their countries have been hardly hit by tropical storms, hurricanes, and draughts in the last year. The rise in Central American migration may also be due to Biden's friendlier discourse towards immigrants, a discourse which coyotes are using to attract people to cross the border illegally. However, *Deutsche Welle* implies that the policy at the border is the same tough approach that tries to stop people from crossing and it especially affects women, who are more subject to sexual abuse during their journey. Implicit to this view is the idea that Biden's and Trump's migration approaches are not so different, when managed by the immigration authorities and bureaucracy.

Asian Media

Different regions may present their own views on migration. Twenty-three news and opinion articles were analyzed from Asia, most of them from *China Daily* (13), followed by *Bangkok Post Thailand*, *Korean Times*, and other three media from China and India.

The Indian press primarily addressed Trump's actions to reduce the number of skilled workers and access to permanent residency in the United States; consequently, it focused on Biden's friendlier discourse to diasporas and how to undue the wrong (Bahar, Choudhury, and Glennon, 2021). Many of the pieces in favor of Biden's migration policy in the United States are based on features that were first released in Indian media. We therefore found a process of intermediate quoting based on local secondary sources, with Indian media functioning as a first-hand information source on Biden's policy on skilled migration.

One of the most recurring authors to write on the topic is Ananya Bhattacharya from *Quartz India*, who shows a very different position from the ones previously mentioned in this section: Biden is a president who kept his word and has "started to deliver on his campaign promises to immigrants on the coveted H-1B visa," for instance, by revoking the Trump rule that ended work permits for H-1B holders' spouses (Bhattacharya, 2021). In this way, the Biden- Harris administration is also seen as having a more gender-friendly policy. The idea is illustrated with an earlier quote from Vice President Kamala Harris in her previous role as a senator from California: "Preventing women from engaging in employment can lead to isolation, depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt, and a loss of self-worth." In general, the features related to skilled immigration tend to picture Biden in a much better light than the ones referring to asylum, Central American migrants, and his broad actions on immigration. They point to a clear change of policy, very distinct from the Trump administration.

However, many features released in the Asian media focus on Central American migration and toughly criticize Biden for his immigration policy and, in general, seem to be more in favor of a restrictive stand, with exception to skilled immigration. *China Daily* is a highly relevant source of information for English speakers in East Asia. Several in-depth features by *China Daily*, Hong Kong edition, released in December, 2020, state the academic urge for the U.S. to change visa restriction policies in order to maintain foreign students and talent attraction. "Biden should restore normal people-to-people exchanges" and irrational decisions taking during the Trump administration.[1]

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[1] "On Aug 26, the University of North Texas sent a letter to fifteen visiting researchers from China saying their visa program stands canceled, thus forcing them to leave the U.S. on short notice amid the travel restrictions imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Quoting from Lee C. Bollinger, president of Columbia University (*China Daily*, December 9, 2020), these measures have eroded talent attraction and growth for the country, due to paranoid restrictions taken in a context of fear about the virus. The topic of restrictions imposed on Chinese academics and students was also seen as a return to racial discrimination and an anti-talent policy that ignore patriotism and contributions of Chinese Americans (Zhu, 2021). This feature does not really say anything about Biden, but it describes the circumstances under which he must act.

In an article released in January before Biden took office (Jishe, 2021) there is mention of the ongoing conflict ("war of words") that started in 2018 between the U.S. and China, due to the so-called "China Initiative" of Donald Trump, meant to investigate cases of economic espionage. Tensions produced by this action could affect education exchange and skilled migration from China to Mexico, poisoning bilateral relations, according to *China Daily*.

> The U.S. National Security Strategy Report 2017 said Washington "will consider restrictions on foreign STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) students from designated countries" and, according to some media reports, top White House aide Stephen Miller once tried to persuade Trump to cancel all student visas for Chinese nationals. Over the past almost four years, the U.S. administration has taken restrictive and punitive measures not only against Chinese scholars and students but also Chinese high-tech companies.

The author adopts a normative approach, suggesting that the United States should not target Chinese students in any way. Other opinion articles in the same journal mention the need to restore reputation and talent exchange/talent attraction policies, damaged by actions such as visa cancelling for Chinese students that are already in the United States. Nevertheless, the topic of talent attraction, particularly the Chinese-American exchange,

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The university did not cite any reason for canceling the program—except that the researchers were associated with the Chinese Scholars' Council—and probably made the decision under pressure from Texas politicians, some of whom are zealously pushing the U.S. administration's anti-China agenda devised by politicians such as Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz.

Actually, all the about 369,000 Chinese students studying in the U.S. can feel the change in the atmosphere following UNT's decision, simply because the fifteen visiting scholars are not fundamentally different from them and they could be the next to be 'deported.' Plus, it is hard to believe that the UNT and other U.S. universities will welcome Chinese students in the same way as before and, more importantly, Chinese students and scholars would be as enthusiastic to study or conduct research in the U.S." *China Daily* (Hong Kong), December 17, 2020.

was not followed after Biden took office. It was replaced by the crisis of migrants from Central America, an issue that was used to question Biden's administration in the first part of 2021.

China Daily started reporting on Biden's triumph with a generally positive stance and released features on his first executive actions to combat climate change, advance racial equity, and support other underserved communities (Huanxin, 2021). In the beginning of his term, his age and previous experience as a senator were seen as an opportunity for a good change in terms of diplomatic and political relations. Quoting from a piece in *China Daily* (Hong Kong): ". . . perhaps the finest characteristic one can ascribe to Biden is that he's a truly decent and empathetic person. At his inauguration, he confirmed it by giving a pretty impressive speech" (January 22, 2021). He was seen as a president with rational policies, whose by-the-book actions meant better relations with the world. By January 25, *China Daily* informed on Biden's intentions to restore aid for the Northern Triangle countries, previously suspended by Donald Trump, in an effort to reduce immigration. The same journal—*China Daily*—mentions that not all countries are benefitted by the Biden policy. A case in point is Cuba, as it was included on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, a piece of news that has not necessarily circulated much in world media.

By February 2021, Biden's actions regarding the Central American crisis were the main topic in most of the monitored foreign media. Very few of the articles tackle the issue as forced migration with its own causes and consequences; most of the reporters choose to frame it from a political point of view: what Biden can or cannot do in terms of political influence in Congress to improve immigrant living conditions. In general, the Asian media included in this study make no differentiation between migrants and refugees. The authors would rather emphasize the conditions of migrants, a perspective that implies Central American migrants have options back home and they crave economic opportunities, rather than trying to escape life-and-death situations in their homeland.

In this new context, President Biden as a political leader who created hope is downgraded to a president who might not have enough power to deal with immigration and, in general, with the responsibilities of the presidency. By February 2021, *China Daily* (Hong Kong edition) raised the age issue for Biden: he is described as the oldest U.S. president, one who may have less

energy to carry on. Migration becomes a way to put pressure on his administration and show he does not have enough power. Accordingly, the name of Kamala Harris is recurrent in the features on immigration, as she is supposed to be the right hand of the president, also responsible for the crisis.

In a piece of news from March 27 (*China Daily*, "Frontier Issues: U.S. President Joe Biden Defends Policy on Children Crossing border"), the unknown author talks about his/her experience at Biden's first solo press conference, where reporters asked him if he expected to run again for President in 2024. The age issue is a way to attack and deny his capacity to deal with Central American immigrants. Says *China Daily*: "In office for only two months, his 2024 plans have a direct effect on his political strength. If viewed as a one-term president, Biden would effectively be a lame duck with diminished sway at home and abroad as he pursues an aggressive agenda."

The lack of power issue is also developed by media in other parts of Asia. A piece of news called "Biden Scrambles to Shelter Migrant Kids. President's Vow Falls Short of the Mark," from *The Bangkok Post* in Thailand (March 12, 2021) exemplifies the issue through the inability to control the flow from Central America and give proper living conditions to migrants/asylum seekers who look for legal status. He is portrayed as having little power to convene other political sources, even though there is mention of a new diplomatic measure taken to allow "children in Central America to apply for protection in the region and avoid making the dangerous journey north to join parents already in the United States."

The Bangkok Post deals with the ambiguity of Biden's actions. He is taking good but inadequate measures. International media tend to picture migration as a high-stake issue for Biden's image and administration and also a way to compare Biden with Trump. For instance, *Bangkok Post* informs that by March 8, ". . . the number of children stuck in border detention facilities had tripled to more than 3,250, according to federal immigration agency documents obtained by *The New York Times*" (March 12, 2021).

The "immigration President" Joe Biden seems to be trapped in his own discourse and in an immovable national immigration system, caught up in a scramble to find shelter for so many migrant children. If the system is not in crisis, the president is caught in one, according to these reports. He is even accused of creating the crisis, since he is seen to promote immigration through a friendlier discourse. "Mr. Biden campaigned on a more humane approach

to immigration at the border, one that would prioritize investing in Central America to deter illegal immigration. But it has had the effect of drawing more people who see a better chance to enter the United States than they had under the Trump administration" (*Bangkok Post*, 2021).

The same article by *The Bangkok Post* clearly said "Republicans are framing the situation as a crisis of Mr. Biden's making, signaling an aim to use his immigration agenda as a political weapon against him in 2022." It goes as far as to affirm that "Mr. Biden [. . .] has continued to use a Trump-era rule to rapidly turn away most migrants at the border, with the exception of unaccompanied minors."

In a separate opinion piece republished by the same journal (originally released in *The New York Times*), with the suggestive title "Joe Biden Should Finish the Wall" (April 8, 2021), Bret Stephens indirectly accuses Biden of murder for not building the wall. He mentions an accident of a truck carrying migrants, in which thirteen people died on the spot in California. Says Stephens: ". . . those 13 people—along with others who have recently lost their lives in dangerous crossings—might not have met their grisly fate if the Biden administration's concept of compassion wasn't also an inducement to recklessness. And they wouldn't have been killed if a wall had been in their way." The wall, according to the author, "is a barrier against sudden future surges of mass migration," such as the one experienced during the first months in power of President Biden. According to his data, U.S. agents apprehended 170,000 migrants along the southwest border in March 2021, "a 70 percent jump over February's numbers and the highest level in 15 years. Despite the administration's claims to the contrary, there is a crisis, led by a massive surge in child migration spurred by President Joe Biden's promises of a more humane policy than his predecessor's." In conclusion, the U.S. "risks a version of the European migration crisis of 2015," which could further undermine Biden's plans for an immigration reform.

The same perspective of a failed immigration governance is present in *The Korean Times*, even though from a different critique based on arguments of environmental conservation and demographic growth. Migrants are accused of carrying about six to eight pounds of garbage when crossing the border, which would affect "America's beauty" (Guzzardi, 2021a). Biden is accused of supporting unreasonable growth in migration numbers that would more than double the U.S. population to 669 million in 2100, an

expansionist view hard to manage in demographic and economic terms, according to the journalist.

Guzzardi, also reporting for *Imperial Valley* (April 30, 2021b) refers to President Biden as an "expansionist" who failed to attend refugees in the way he promised and in general failed voters who expect the system to be controlled, but also care for the image of their country. The language used in this article is quite aggressive and informal: "Biden caved" as the "the annual refugee resettlement kerfuffle is underway"; "Biden's waffling about refugee quotas." Consequently, Biden is considered a president who cannot resist political pressure, especially regarding migration. In turn, the refugees he admitted are supposed to compete in the labor market, even when studies from academic institutions recognize the need for essential migrant workers in the American economy (Kerwin and Warren, 2020).

Four days later (on April 30, 2021), the same journal, *The Korean Times*, emphasizes the role of diplomacy in Biden's plan and the meeting with the Korean President Moon Jae-in, meant to "mark another diplomatic and national security 'milestone' in Biden's first hundred days in office." However, Biden is depicted in the middle of multiple crises caused by terrorism, nuclear proliferation, mass migration, cybersecurity, climate change, and the current pandemic. Biden is portrayed as a president who seeks support and allies abroad, using diplomatic channels.

Other media from Asia tend to criticize less and focus on economic rather than migration issues. *Shanghai Daily* (April 28, 2021) describes a wide range of economic aid offered by the Biden and Harris administration in a less ideologically-charged feature. However, the unknown author also mentions increased smuggler activity, as more migrants are persuaded to travel. Many of the researched media mention Kamala Harris's visit to Guatemala and a possible call for help from the Guatemalan President Giammattei, who asked for vaccines from the United States, but his proposal seemed to be ignored by the administration.

Middle East Media

Our findings on Biden's immigration policy in the Middle East media are based on the analysis of seven articles published in Iran, Israel, Kuwait,

Qatar and Turkey. Most of them were published electronically in February 2021. One of the very few positive pieces on Biden's migration policy to be found in the Middle East media comes from Turkey (*Daily Sabah*, March 23, 2021), and it describes the "no ban" actions, that is, the initiative of prohibiting future U.S. presidents from issuing racial, religious or geographical proxy bans that would impede certain groups from traveling to the United States. In this way, Biden is portrayed as a more just president who reopened embassies in countries previously excluded by the Muslim ban.

However, most of the articles in the Middle East media show a critical approach to Biden's migration diplomacy, based on evidence from the Central American crisis. A feature in *Iran Daily*, called "Freezing Weather Hits Migrant Camp Near U.S.-Mexico Border" by Cedar Attanasio (2021) mentions the human rights abuses in migrant camps, even after Biden took over as president. At the time, very low temperatures in facilities that were not properly prepared for winter caused the water filtration system to freeze. The article is framed by the same fear that migrants experience: fear of freezing temperatures, and fear for their health, in addition to uncertainty. Most of the migrants interviewed by *Iran Daily* had lived in the camp of Matamoros for two years. The uncertainty and vulnerability of their status is key to the way they are described by *Iran Daily*. The two themes of this article may therefore be *cronopolitics* (the politics of waiting) and fear.

Most of the articles from the Middle East tend to analyze Biden's and Trump's policy as part of the same restrictive and discriminatory system of U.S. immigration policy, which is not compatible with respect for human rights. Biden's policy is seen as a continuation of Trump's policy and there are more descriptive articles on the impact of his actions to protect migrants or in some cases, lack of programs, rather than a political analysis of his discourses. Gottesdiener, Daniel and Hesson (2021) write a piece for *Gulf Times Qatar*, in which they analyze the implications of promises about migration and blanket amnesty as well as the process of border externalization with Mexico. The article says:

> Under the Biden administration, the same general strategy is likely to continue, at least for the near term, according to six U.S. and Mexican sources with knowledge of diplomatic discussions.
>   They also said any rush to the U.S. border could hand Biden's political opponents ammunition to sink the rest of his immigration agenda, which includes

providing a pathway to citizenship for immigrants already in the United States and reducing asylum application backlogs.

The Mexican government has informed the new U.S. administration that it intends to keep current immigration enforcement measures in place because it is in Mexico's sovereign interest to secure its own borders, one senior Mexican official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Above all, this reporting on human rights abuses, which covers critiques of the military actions of the National Guard in Mexico, in charge of applying U.S. immigration policy, comes from journalists in countries that are not directly involved in Central American migration to the United States. Even when many of the countries in the Middle East did suffer from Trump's travel ban, they do not picture Biden as a political figure capable of navigating the diplomatic crisis. They criticize him for coming to a late start in applying certain promises made during the campaign; his slow actions are expected to cause uncertainty among migrants. The same article by Gottesdiener, Daniel and Hesson for *The Gulf Times Qatar* adds:

In the mid-January confrontation in Guatemala, the Reuters photographer and other witnesses saw a wall of security forces confront hundreds of migrants, beating some and deploying tear gas. Some migrants threw rocks. Guatemalan immigration authorities reported an unspecified number of injuries. Guatemala's human rights ombudsman Jordan Rodas said "it was outrageous to see the scenes of how the military brutally received our Honduran brothers and sisters."

A later article from March 2021 in *Qatar Tribune* (unknown author) looks at Biden's negotiations with Mexico from the viewpoint of vaccine diplomacy during the pandemic: indirectly Mexico is supposed to stop migrants in exchange for more vaccines.

The U.S. recently said it is shipping several million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to Mexico, where shortages are acute. At the same time, Mexico announced it was closing its southern border with Guatemala and Belize as a way to impede the northward travel of migrants. The White House denied the two moves were a quid pro quo arrangement.

Still, Mexico is accustomed to being strong-armed by Washington, under several administrations, to hold back immigrants. Roberto Velasco Alvarez, head of the North America section of the Mexican Foreign Ministry, said Monday the two countries will find ways to "cooperate on the development of Central America and southern Mexico" and agree to "joint efforts" to create "safe, orderly and regular" migration.

Biden's more "humane" discourse on migration is therefore questioned and his efforts to promote immigration reform are considered unsuccessful in a context of increased migration numbers. The same thread of migration crisis during the Biden administration, indirectly attributed to the inefficiency of his policy, follows in an article by the same journal (*Qatar Tribune* by Noah Smith, April 19, 2021).[2] This perspective responds to a particular ideology, as it implies migrants from Central America are a demographic issue rather than an issue of forced displacement.

> High birth rates encourage migration because if you have a lot of young people around, it pays to send some of them to a rich country where they can find work and send money back to the family [. . .] Biden wants to address this by making Central America richer, which is a great idea. If the GDP of these countries can be doubled, the perpetual border crises would likely vanish. The question is how to do it.

Smith acknowledges that future development in countries of origin may actually reduce the desire to migrate and even to have more children on the long term. However, he believes Biden's plan to reduce corruption in Central America has not been particularly efficient.

The Kuwait News (May 9, 2021) follows on the thread that migration at the southern border cannot be solved and focuses on Kamala Harris's action rather than on Biden's. She is depicted as a number two at the White House, who has "already failed by not visiting the border." The editorial line here is not clear, as the unknown author does not offer a solution to the crisis, but only says the crisis should be brought to an end, implying both Biden and especially Harris are not capable of doing it. This piece may even be interpreted from a feminist point of view: the women who is number two and cannot properly do the job, but perhaps this would be a topic to be addressed in another chapter on homonationalism in Middle East media discourse.

Results and Conclusions

Even though one hundred days may be a short time to assess the impact of migration diplomacy actions, the media representations of Biden's discourses

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[2] The piece was first published in *Bloomberg* and republished by *Qatar Tribune*.

and actions are relevant proof of a change in discursive terms. From a communication point of view, a friendlier discourse may indeed be translated into a better image of the United States as a country of destination for immigrants, with a cosmopolitan approach that better suits economic globalization.

The qualitative data analysis applied to media on three continents—Europe, Asia and Africa—allows two types of conclusions. The first one refers to a differentiated representation of policies for skilled and unskilled immigration. In this way, Biden's policies on increasing the levels of H1B skills at levels prior to Donald Trump and allow spouses on H4 work permits may be understood as a talent attraction policy, implemented along with more permissive immigration laws that may help the U.S. economy to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and heal bilateral relations with Central America, China, and Mexico. In contrast to this positive evaluation of actions on skilled immigration, Biden was criticized and questioned for his efficiency in dealing with the political crisis of Central American migration, which involves more humanitarian problems regarding undocumented and many times, low-skilled displaced people.

This finding leads us to a second conclusion on the use of intermediate quoting and circulation of media content between U.S. sources and non-American media. This study found a process of intermediate quoting based on local secondary sources: for instance, articles from Indian media tend to be reproduced by U.S. media, due to first-hand information related to Biden's diplomacy on skilled migration in Asia. In turn, certain content from foreign media in the Middle East and Asia is similar to more conservative newspapers in the U.S., from which they actually reproduce articles as a way to replace foreign correspondents; therefore, they also penalize undocumented immigrants and launch many reasons to doubt Biden's immigration actions. This intricate process of quoting and ideological similarities is a reason that further justifies studying the U.S. image on macro and micro levels in foreign media, based on the broad actions of President Biden in terms of foreign policy and migration challenges. In the future, a comparative study may follow for his last hundred days as president in order to look at the medium-term impact of his course of action on immigration policy and diplomacy.

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