

Theme Overview: Consequences of New Immigration Policies for the U.S. Agricultural Sector

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Introduction

Immigration policy has been at the forefront of public policy, particularly during national elections. Donald Trump, in his 2024 election campaign, promised to carry out the largest deportation of illegal migrants in US history. To uphold his promise and achieve this goal, President Trump has signed many executive orders aimed at reducing the number of illegal immigrants in the United States (Bustillo, 2025; Gutiérrez-Li, 2025), and the Trump administration budgeted \$170 billion for immigration enforcement in the One Big Beautiful Bill (American Immigration Council, 2025).

In implementing Trump's policy, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), charged with domestic enforcement, expedited the arrests of undocumented migrants by employing more than 5,000 personnel, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) asked for 21,000 National Guard troops to help ICE operations (Ainsley et al., 2025). Initially, ICE embarked on deporting illegal immigrants with criminal records in big cities. However, large-scale raids on a meat-packing plant in Omaha, Nebraska (Ashford, 2025) and California farm fields (Arcand, 2025), which received nationwide coverage by news media, triggered significant work disruptions. Furthermore, many undocumented workers are terrified and do not show up to work because of the fear of being apprehended (Meyersohn and Yurkevich, 2025), which economists call the "chilling" effect (East et al, 2023).

Under the background of these deportation policies, the purposes of this theme are to assess (i) the current farm labor market with a focus on labor scarcity, (ii) the importance of the H-2A program to US agriculture and the need to strengthen it by making it easier for farmers to procure more guest workers, (iii) the effect of mass deportation on the US farm sector and the economy, and (iv) the role of programs such as Secure Communities,

Articles in this Theme:

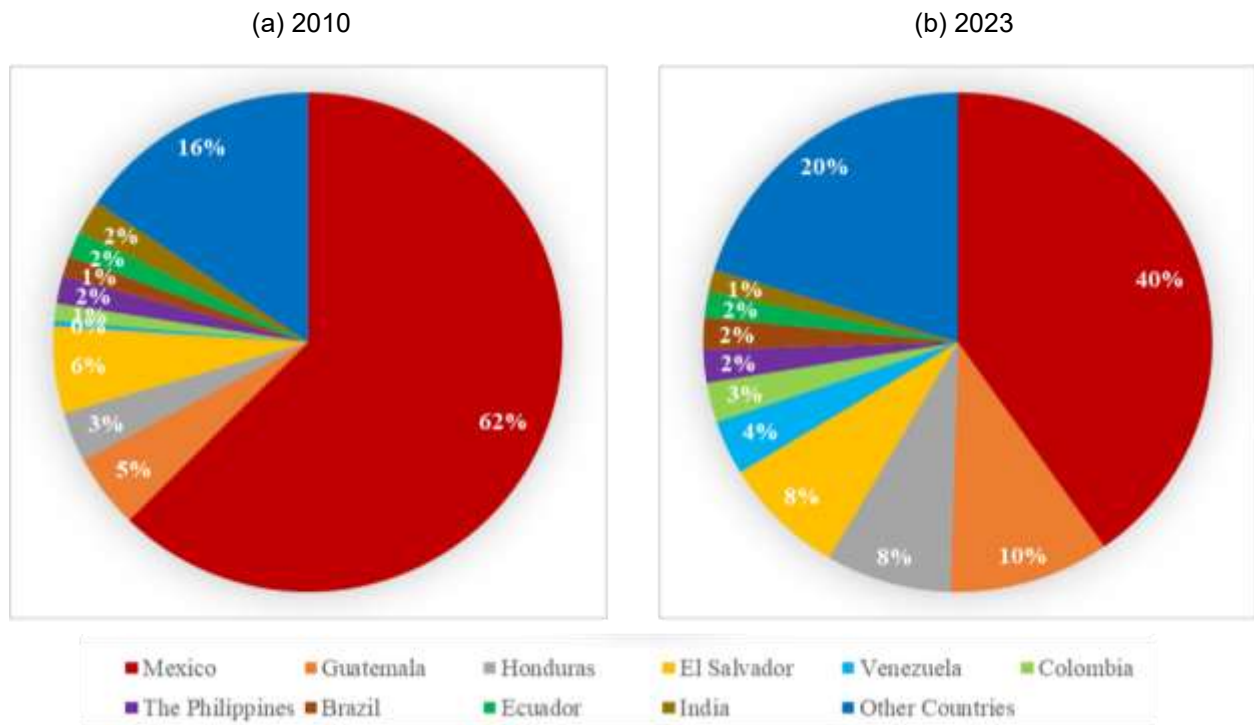
- [**Trump, Migration, and Agriculture**](#)
Philip Martin and Zachariah Rutledge
- [**Growth in H-2A Workers' Employment in US Agriculture**](#)
Stephen Devadoss and Jeff Luckstead
- [**Breaking Down the Deportation Strategy: A Look at Policies, Costs, and Potential Consequences**](#)
Alejandro Gutiérrez-Li
- [**Economic Effects of Mass Deportations**](#)
Angel Aguiar and Stephen Devadoss

287(g) agreements, E-Verify, and state-specific policies and their impact on labor supply, particularly in the agricultural sector. The four articles in this theme address these issues.

Origins of Migrant Workers

Until a decade ago, most undocumented workers came from Mexico. Charlton and Taylor (2016) observe that the farm labor supply from rural Mexico to the United States has been dwindling because of improvements in rural education, lower birthrates, and better employment opportunities in Mexico, adding to labor shortage woes in the US farm sector (see also Luckstead and Devadoss, 2019). Now, the composition of undocumented workers from various countries has changed. Mexico supplied 62% of these workers in 2010, but its share has shrunk to 40% because of the increase in undocumented workers coming from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Colombia (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Top Ten Origins of Unauthorized Immigrants in 2010 and 2023



Source: Van Hook (2025).

In this theme issue of *Choices*, Martin and Rutledge observe that the major short-term effects of the implementation of Trump 2.0 immigration policies include disruptions from ICE enforcement actions, fear in immigrant communities, and more H-2A guest workers. They note that if ICE enforcement continues, mechanization and mechanical aids (M), the number of migrant H-2A workers (M), and fresh fruits and vegetables imports (I) are all likely to increase.

The article by Devadoss and Luckstead discusses the serious problem of chronic labor scarcity in labor-intensive agricultural sectors. Since the goal of the guest-worker program is to alleviate these labor shortages, the number of H-2A workers employed under this program has been steadily growing. Farm labor contracts are instrumental in this increase due to their effectiveness in recruiting productive workers. The authors conclude that the guest-worker program will become more important, at least in the short run, to farmers and businesses in need of low-skilled workers as a result of the Trump administration's policy of deporting undocumented workers. They also discuss the need for streamlining recruitment so that farmers can readily employ these workers and the higher cost of employing guest workers.

The article by Gutiérrez-Li summarizes the Trump administration's immigration policy, trends in deportations, and the role of programs such as Secure

Communities, 287(h) agreements, E-Verify, and state-specific policies, costs, and their impact on labor supply and the economy.

Economic Impacts of Deportation

A study by the American Enterprise Institute and The Brookings Institution predicts that total net migration to the United States could reach a negative 525,000 in 2025 because of a stark decrease in border crossings (Montoya-Galvez, 2025), deportation of unauthorized workers, and fewer issuances of green cards and H-1B and student visas (Edelberg, Veuger, and Watson, 2025). This report concludes that the United States has not experienced such a negative net flow of immigrants since before 1960. This decline in the workforce will have adverse effects on the US economy, leading to a 0.3%–0.4% decline in GDP. Rebecca Shi, the CEO of American Business Immigration Coalition, notes that ICE nationwide raids are creating harm to local economies and communities and industries that depend on migrant workers for their operations (Meyersohn and Yurkevich, 2025).

In view of the adverse economic effects, the article by Angel and Devadoss presents a general equilibrium analysis to assess aggregate impacts (production, domestic sales, imports, and exports) of a scenario with a 50% deportation of undocumented workers on labor-intensive sectors and the overall US economy. They find

that this policy causes substantial declines in output and productivity in agriculture, construction, and hospitality sectors, with secondary effects on other industries and the overall GDP. Their findings underscore the economic risks of aggressive deportation policies and the importance of balancing immigration enforcement with labor market realities.

Public View of Trump's Immigration Policies

Public support for President Trump's immigration policies toward deporting migrant workers has shifted in recent months, as evident from the nationwide protest in June 2025. The public backlash and nationwide protests led President Trump to reconsider his policies of removing these immigrants and call on DHS Secretary Kristi Noem to stop the immigration raids; ICE then halted its raids at farms, restaurants, and meat-packing plants (Nichols, 2025). Furthermore, the DHS introduced a policy of paying \$1,000 to unauthorized workers for self-deporting themselves, which seems to be cheaper than the deportation of one worker at a cost of \$17,121 (Department of Homeland Security, 2025).

A comprehensive CBS News poll reported that in March 2025, 54% of Americans approved of President Trump's handling of immigration policies, but in July 2025, 56% disapproved of his policies, and 52% of Americans think that the Trump administration is deporting more people than they expected. The Republican political base strongly supports Trump's immigration policies, but the rest of the American public does not as much: 91% of Republicans approve of the Trump administration's deportation of illegal migrants, and 86% of Democrats disapprove of his policy (Salvanto, De Pinto, and Khanna, 2025). The same poll also revealed that 56% of Americans believe that Trump's administration is deporting people who are not dangerous criminals.

Unintended Consequences

Undocumented workers generally complement other factors in many sectors of the economy; therefore, removing these workers will affect the jobs for US-born workers too (East, 2024). Undocumented migrants also contribute to local demand, and removing these workers

will adversely hurt local businesses in many rural areas. Furthermore, these workers do pay taxes, and the elimination of these workers will lower tax collections. For instance, the Bay Area Council Economic Institute (2025) reports that mass deportations in California could reduce the state's GDP by \$275 billion and lower tax collection by \$23 billion.

Another unintended consequence is that the fear and anxiety among the migrant population due to ICE raids has prompted many parents in the migrant communities not to send their children to school (Franco, 2025). A study by Thomas S. Dee of Stanford University found a 22% increase in student absenteeism in the California Central Valley due to ICE raids (Franco, 2025). The states of Washington and Illinois also experienced similar absenteeism.

Finally, some undocumented workers, who are unable to work, have curtailed their remittances back to their home country (Angel and Devadoss, 2025). From January 1 to July 1, 2025, Mexicans working in the United States have sent about \$2 billion (about 5.5%) less in remittances to their relatives in Mexico (Resendiz, 2025).

Conclusions

If large-scale deportation continues, it will exacerbate the chronic labor shortage in the labor-intensive farm sector. Mechanizing farm operations is needed to alleviate labor shortages; however, research and development for mechanization has been going on since the 1980s, with very limited success. Therefore, mechanizing farm operations is a long-term solution, and not an immediate solution. The other alternative is to streamline the guest worker program to make it easier for farmers to hire H-2A workers. However, farmers have been complaining that H-2A workers are costly and time-consuming to procure (Luckstead and Devadoss, 2019; Devadoss and Luckstead, 2025). Imports of farm products to meet US consumer needs are another avenue, particularly if domestic production is curtailed due to a lack of labor. However, Trump's tariffs will make the imports very expensive, increasing grocery prices that will add woes to US consumers who are already saddled with high food price inflation.

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