

Why Migrants Still Love America

A daily diet of negative stories about America's impending collapse feed today's headlines. Yet such alarmist tendencies conceal the complexity of the American experience.

Reality demonstrates that America still excels at attracting citizens from around the globe, partially due to its superb ability to mobilize resources and institutions to support individual achievement. Nothing illustrates the demand for America more than the wave of immigrants seeking to enter its shores.

Why do immigrants still find America appealing and want to cross its border in droves, even illegally? A few reasons come to mind.

Lower Corruption

[Corruption](#) is a widespread social norm in many countries and recalcitrant officials are rarely punished for misconduct. A case in point is Jamaica, where allegations of corruption are [likened](#) to a "nine-day wonder," where after ranting for a few days, people usually forget about the problem. But among immigrants there is still the perception that America is intolerant of corruption, and that even powerful people will be prosecuted for impropriety in the United States.

Greater Impartiality

Immigrants also believe that migrating to America will improve their life chances because America is a fairer society.

The forces of [nepotism](#) and clientelism block upward social mobility in some societies by rewarding family members and friends at the expense of competent individuals. Thirty-eight

percent of civil servants in Colombia “have a relative in public administration,” economist Juan Felipe Riaño [explains in a recent paper](#), while 18 percent “have a family connections to a top bureaucrat.” Eleven percent work with a family member based in the same agency. Connected people are likely to receive higher salaries and have their qualifications (or lack thereof) overlooked when connected to high-level officials.

Latin Americans [understand the toll such forces can have](#) on society. By failing to reward competence, these arrangements demotivate productive employees and increase the cost of doing business since the most capable people are not filling sensitive roles.

Better Work Environment

Immigrants also know that American businesses have a penchant for performance and excellence. If people were properly incentivized in their own countries, there would be much more hesitation to come to America; instead, people flock to the U.S. knowing it’s an environment where their efforts are appreciated.

The less toxic work environment America offers is also attractive to immigrants. In Jamaica, for instance, there is a widespread sentiment that promotion is linked to feeding the boss with gossip about colleagues or stroking his ego, author Kenneth Carter explained in his book, [Why Workers Won’t Work](#). He found that managers created this environment, one hostile to productivity. Since reward is not correlated with productivity, it is easier for employees to curtail productivity than to be exceptional workers.

Redistribution of Wealth

“The US stands out as the country that redistributes the greatest fraction of national income to the bottom 50%,” the [World Inequality Lab reported last year](#), showing yet another incentive immigrants have to come to America: handouts. Add in

the fact that corrupt bureaucrats from these migrant-generating countries often do a poor job of distributing public goods, and its little wonder that immigrants pour in.

Media outlets are replete with criticisms of America today, but the truth is that the U.S. is still an admirable country on many levels. For better or for worse, migrants recognize this.

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