

The Evolving Impact of U.S. Immigration Policies on the Socio-Economic Situation and Decisions of Kyrgyz Migrants to Stay or Return: Between Hope and Uncertainty

Keremetkan Kelsinbek Kyzy
University of Santo Tomas
Manila City, Philippines
Email: keremetkan.kelsinbekkyzy.gs@ust.edu.ph

Dr. Dennis Coronacion
University of Santo Tomas
Manila City, Philippines
Email: dccoronacion@ust.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

Migration has long been a defining feature of human history, shaping societies and cultures worldwide. However, contemporary migration discourse is marked by tensions regarding the impact of shifting immigration policies on migrants' lives. A key debate in migration literature centers on how restrictive versus open immigration policies influence migrants' decisions to stay, integrate, or return to their home countries. In the United States, these tensions have intensified with the return of Donald Trump

and his America-first policies, which reportedly create uncertainties for migrants. This study examines the case of Kyrgyz migrants, a group seldom explored in migration research, to analyze how U.S. immigration policies shape their experiences—from migration to integration. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study investigates how evolving immigration policies affect Kyrgyz migrants across Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, and New York. By comparing policy impacts under different administrations, it assesses their influence on socio-economic conditions, integration, and migration decisions. Grounded in the push-pull theory of migration and policy feedback theory, this research explores how U.S. immigration policies function as both deterrents and incentives for migrants. The findings contribute to migration literature by offering insights into the intersection of policy and migrant experience, emphasizing the need for adaptive immigration frameworks that promote long-term social and economic stability. Ultimately, this study addresses a critical gap in migration scholarship by highlighting the often-overlooked role of host-country policies in shaping migrant trajectories.

Keywords: International Migration, Kyrgyz Migrants, United States Immigration policies, Push-pull Migration theory, Policy feedback theory, Migration management

INTRODUCTION

Migration has long shaped human history, influencing how societies grow and evolve (Tsegay, 2023). Brown and Bean (2016) define migration as the movement of people across administrative boundaries, whether between villages, towns, or countries. While migration can be internal or external, this study focuses on the

external movement of people across national borders, which continues to define global trends today.

Today, international migration affects 272 million people worldwide, a number that has already exceeded earlier projections for 2050 (International Organization for Migration, 2020). This movement is driven by a combination of "push" factors—such as conflict, poverty, and climate change—and "pull" factors like economic opportunities and established social networks (Goldenberg & Fischer, 2023). Migration is therefore not only an act of survival but also a pursuit of improved living conditions and greater security. The United States remains one of the leading destinations for international migrants, reflecting its historical role as a beacon for those seeking better lives. Recently, immigration added 1.6 million people to the U.S. population, contributing to a total of 334.9 million residents (Schneider, 2015). As birth rates decline, immigration has become essential to sustaining population growth and maintaining the country's economic vitality.

Beyond demographic changes, immigrants contribute significantly to the American economy, creating what economists term the "immigration surplus." This surplus, estimated between \$36 and \$72 billion annually, arises from immigrants filling critical labor shortages and increasing overall productivity (Orrenius, 2016). With one in eight U.S. residents now foreign-born, migration continues to reshape both the workforce and society (Rose, 2023). Among these immigrant groups are citizens of Kyrgyzstan, who have increasingly migrated to the United States over the past two decades. Their movement is driven by factors such as unemployment, low wages, political instability, and recurring human rights violations in Kyrgyzstan (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Seeking better opportunities and safety, Kyrgyz migrants pursue entry through legal pathways like family reunification, the

Diversity Visa Lottery, or, in some cases, undocumented routes (Chekirova, 2019).

This study specifically examines Kyrgyz migration to the United States from 2019 to 2024, a period marked by significant policy shifts under the Trump and Biden administrations. By focusing on this group, the research analyzes how U.S. immigration policies have influenced their socio-economic stability, integration experiences, and decisions to stay, return, or migrate elsewhere. It proposes that immigration policies themselves can act as dynamic push or pull factors, even after migrants have settled in a host country.

Legal migrants are often overlooked in migration literature, which tends to focus more on undocumented migrants and refugees. Yet policies governing visas, work permits, and integration directly affect legal migrants' long-term outcomes, shaping whether they feel rooted in their new country. By centering the experiences of Kyrgyz migrants, this study fills an important gap and broadens the push-pull framework to include post-arrival policy impacts. The study will do this by asking three sub-questions:

- (1) How has the US immigration policy evolved from the term of former US President Trump to the term of US President Biden?
- (2) What are the differences in the socio-economic experience of Kyrgyz immigrants during the Trump and Biden administrations?
- (3) How the experiences of migrants under both the Trump and Biden administrations shape their perspectives and decisions regarding continuing migration to the United States?

Grounded in the assumption that U.S. immigration and integration policies serve as ongoing push and pull forces, the questions position migrants not as passive recipients of policy, but as active decision-makers navigating these external pressures. By exploring how policies can either stabilize or destabilize migrants' lives even after arrival, this research redefines the traditional migration framework to account for the critical role of host country governance in shaping migrants' futures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Push-Pull Theory of Migration

The push-pull theory, as explained by Zanabazar et al. (2021), provides a foundational lens for understanding migration by focusing on the conditions that drive individuals to leave their countries (push factors) and those that attract them to a new destination (pull factors). Originally conceptualized by Ravenstein (1889) in his "Laws of Migration," the theory continues to influence contemporary migration studies. Push factors include poverty, unemployment, political unrest, and insecurity, all of which compel individuals to seek better conditions abroad (Urbanski, 2022). Conversely, pull factors encompass the promise of economic opportunity, stability, and family reunification, making host countries like the United States attractive destinations (Pranka, 2022). While useful, the theory often treats migration as a one-time decision, overlooking what happens after migrants arrive in the host country.

Policy Feedback Theory (PFT)

To address this gap, the study integrates Policy Feedback Theory (PFT), which originates from Public Administration and Political Science. PFT, as articulated by Moynihan and Soss (2014),

argues that policies are not just end products but also inputs that shape future political behavior and social realities. This theory underscores how existing policies—such as those governing immigration, work rights, or integration—affect how migrants perceive their place in society and make future decisions (Michener, 2023). For migrants, these policies can either enable stability and inclusion or generate uncertainty and marginalization. Unlike the static nature of the traditional push-pull model, PFT emphasizes the evolving, recursive relationship between policy structures and individual agency over time.

Integration of Theories

By integrating Policy Feedback theory, the study seeks to challenge and enrich the traditional push-pull model by highlighting the dynamic interaction between migration policies and migration flows. This approach recognizes that migration is not merely a movement between countries but a complex process shaped by ongoing interactions with administrative policies in the destination country.

Research Framework

The framework combines key tenets from the Push-Pull theory of Migration and the Policy Feedback theory. Firstly, the blue arrows depict the principles of the Push-Pull theory, highlighting that a combination of Push and Pull factors leads individuals to decide to migrate to a specific country. First, Push factors are a set of reasons why a certain country becomes undesirable for its citizens, in this case, the focus is Kyrgyzstan. Previous literature noted that the push factors can range from environmental, economic, and political concerns. Now, since Kyrgyzstan has factors which made it undesirable for its citizens, the citizens will look for another country that is more desirable, the factors that

they will consider when choosing are pull factors as this is defined as factors that make it a desirable place to migrate into. Similarly, pull factors range from social, economic, and political attributes that have benefits for the migrants. The combination of an undesirable country of origin (Kyrgyzstan) and desirable country (United States) is migration. This is where the Push and Pull theory of migration stops, as it only aims to explain the factors why migration occurs.

However, since migration does not stop the moment people from a country of origin arrive at the host country, there is a need to integrate this theory to a theory in public administration, especially since migration, particularly open and close policies, is a continuously growing debate. Withal, the orange boxes recognize that once migrants successfully migrate to a country, they face a set of policies that, according to the Policy Feedback theory, impact citizens' lives. Consequently, there are two potential outcomes based on the policies supported by the current administration: either restrictive policies (left orange box), which may hinder successful socio-economic integration of migrants into the host country, or permissive policies (right orange box), which can facilitate their further integration and encourage them to stay.

As per the Policy Feedback theory, policies profoundly shape society, influencing the green arrows' responses to the orange boxes. Restrictive policies (left orange box) would prompt the left green arrow, potentially driving migrants to consider returning home or seeking other host countries. Conversely, permissive policies (right orange box) would lead to the right green arrow, fostering greater integration and encouraging migrants to remain in the host country.

In essence, the framework posits that comprehending migration necessitates a dual focus: not just on the motivations prompting individuals to depart their home countries and select

particular destinations, but also on how governmental policies, particularly those concerning socio-economic integration, influence their choices to either remain in or leave a host country.

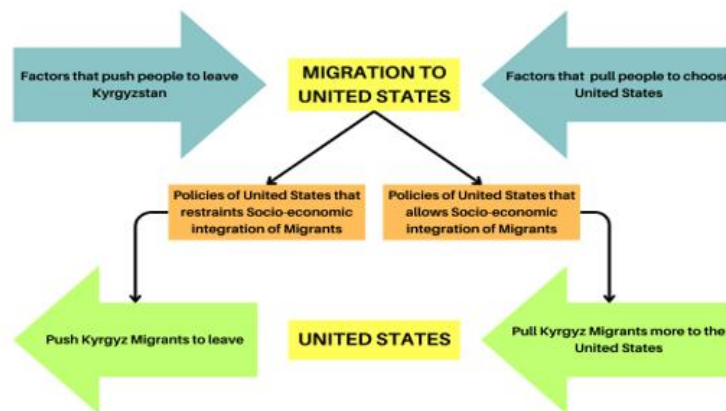


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Through this framework in Figure 1, another perspective will support an adapted version of the Push-Pull theory of Migration, drawing on Lee's (1966) assertion that positive factors encourage individuals to remain in countries while negative factors tend to repel them. This study examines how these policies, once migrants have settled in the host country, either create positive incentives that encourage them to stay or negative pressures that prompt them to reconsider their residence. This holistic perspective is crucial for policymakers as it provides insights into the complex dynamics of migration. By understanding these factors, policymakers can tailor policies that are attuned to their objectives of either attracting and integrating migrants into society or implementing measures that discourage migration, thereby shaping more effective and responsive immigration strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to explore the effects of U.S. immigration and integration policies on Kyrgyz legal migrants under the Trump and Biden administrations. Two primary sources of data were used: documents and individuals. Embassy documents were accessed via formal requests, while purposive sampling was employed for interviews with embassy officials who were directly involved with or knowledgeable about migration and integration policies from 2019 to 2024. A list of Kyrgyz migrants was also requested from the Kyrgyz Embassy in the U.S., and categorized by entry during either administration. From this list, 38 migrants residing in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Florida, or New York were randomly selected using Cochran's formula. Criteria included legal age, willingness to participate in surveys, and potential participation in follow-up interviews. Nine respondents were ultimately selected for in-depth interviews based on their consent and relevance to the third research question on perceptions of U.S. migration.

Research activities were distributed across Kyrgyzstan, the United States, and the Philippines. In Kyrgyzstan, data collection focused on gathering government perspectives and statistics. In the U.S., surveys and interviews were conducted with migrants and embassy officials to gain insight into policy impact and integration outcomes. The Philippines served as the academic hub for research documentation and oral defense. Instruments used included two sets of semi-structured interview guides—one for officials and one for migrants—and a Likert-scale survey developed from literature on migrant experiences. These tools allowed for detailed exploration of how policies affected integration experiences, including access to language training, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Data gathering involved primary data collection through interviews and surveys. Participants gave informed consent, and interviews were conducted with sensitivity and confidentiality. For qualitative analysis, thematic analysis was employed, with interview transcripts coded and organized into major themes aligned with the theoretical frameworks. Quotes were used to support findings, and triangulation was applied across data sources for validity. Survey data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to compute average mean scores, allowing a quantitative comparison of migrant experiences under each administration. This dual analysis provided both depth and breadth in understanding the policy impacts on Kyrgyz migrants in the U.S.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Socio-Economic Journey of Kyrgyz Immigrants in the U.S.

The survey, conducted with 38 respondents, reveals key demographic trends in age, gender, and geographic distribution. The majority of respondents (36.8%) are aged 18 to 29, while the smallest group (10.5%) is 60 and above, likely due to the online format of the survey. Gender distribution is nearly even, with 55.3% male and 44.7% female, ensuring balanced insights into integration experiences. Geographically, most respondents come from New York (34.2%) and Illinois (28.9%), with Florida and Pennsylvania representing 18.4% each. The survey captures varying experiences across states with different immigration policies and services, as well as a balanced representation of migrants who arrived under both Trump and Biden administrations (34.2% and 36.8%, respectively).

The survey employed a 5-point Likert Scale, with a 0 option, to assess the quality of migrants' experiences with integration policies, where 0 indicated no experience and 5 represented

excellent experience. It was divided into two sections: the first focused on social integration, evaluating aspects such as language training, social support, protection from discrimination, citizenship pathways, and healthcare, with responses analyzed separately for the Trump and Biden administrations (see Table 1 and Figure 2). The second section examined economic integration, covering employment services, educational opportunities, housing assistance, financial support, and job training, also comparing experiences under both administrations.

Table 1. Social Integration Mean

SERVICE	TRUMP	BIDEN
Language Training Opportunities	3.290	2.737
Social Support Networks	2.790	2.895
Discrimination Protection	2.632	2.737
Pathways to Citizenship	2.711	2.868
Access to Healthcare Services	2.632	2.868

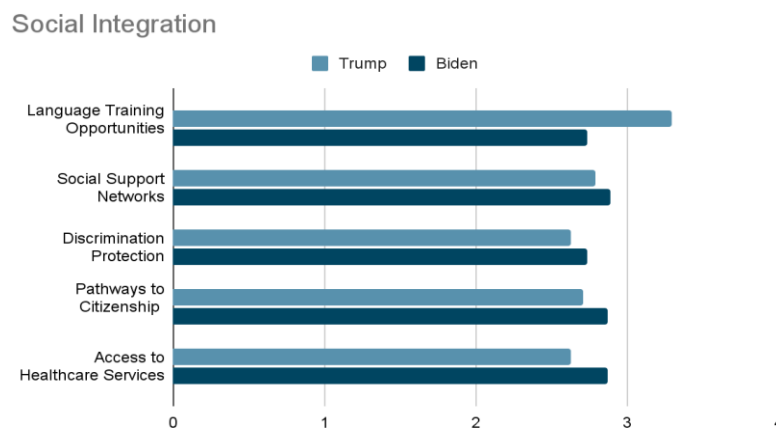


Figure 2. Social Integration Services Bar Graph.

The analysis compared social and economic integration experiences between the two administrations and highlighted the overall socio-economic differences in migrants' integration experiences. This approach ensured a thorough understanding of how policies impacted migrants' lives socially and economically.

Based on the experiences of 38 migrants, the Biden administration received slightly higher ratings than the Trump administration in four out of five key areas of social integration, with the most notable improvement in social support networks, scoring 2.89 compared to Trump's 2.79. Biden also outperformed Trump in protection from discrimination, scoring 2.74 versus 2.63, aligning with studies linking Trump's rhetoric and policies to increased racial tensions and reduced legal protections for migrants. Pathways to citizenship and access to healthcare both received identical scores of 2.87 under Biden, compared to Trump's 2.71 and 2.63, respectively, indicating that while Trump performed slightly better in citizenship pathways than in healthcare, Biden's administration was still rated higher overall. However, despite these marginal improvements, none of the categories received particularly high ratings, highlighting persistent challenges in migrant social integration under both administrations. The category where Trump received higher ratings was language training, which was also the highest-rated service overall, reflecting his administration's strong emphasis on English proficiency as a key aspect of integration. While Trump promoted English language acquisition through policies requiring immigrants to learn English and pass a civics exam, his administration faced criticism for cutting English programs for migrant children, though adult migrants, particularly those from Kyrgyzstan, rated his language programs more favorably than Biden's (see Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2. Economic Integration Mean

SERVICE	TRUMP	BIDEN
Access to Employment Services	1.895	2.132
Educational Opportunities	2.158	2.368
Housing Assistance	1.921	2.421
Access to Microloans and Financial Assistance	2.132	2.421
Job Training	2.316	2.500

Economic Integration

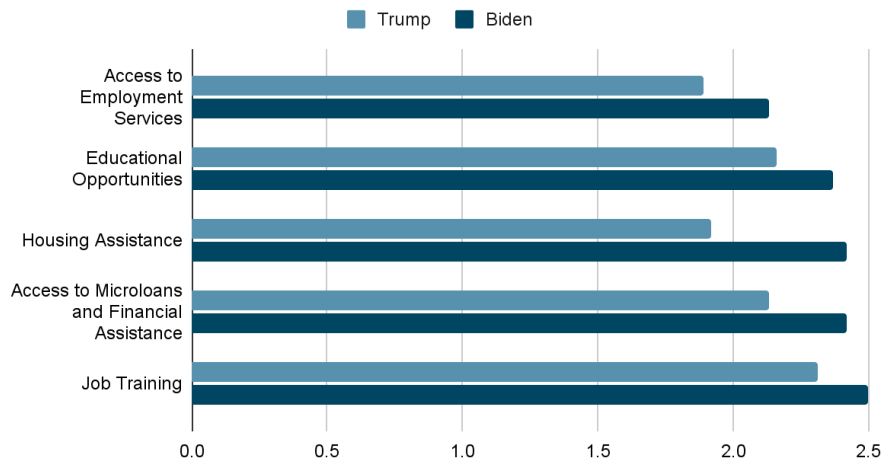


Figure 3. Economic Integration Services Bar Graph.

Economic integration services were rated higher under the Biden administration across all categories, with job training receiving the highest score at 2.5 compared to 2.32 under Trump. Housing assistance and access to financial aid were also rated more favorably under Biden, both scoring 2.42, whereas under Trump,

housing assistance was rated significantly lower at 1.92 and financial aid at 2.13. The lower rating for housing assistance under Trump may be linked to his restrictive policies, which not only limited aid but also revoked assistance from recipients, particularly through a rule banning "mixed-status" families from public housing, putting millions at risk. Housing assistance was the second-lowest-rated service in economic integration, with only access to employment services scoring lower, at 1.89 under Trump and 2.13 under Biden, highlighting persistent difficulties in job accessibility despite policy changes. Educational opportunities were also rated higher under Biden, scoring 2.37 compared to Trump's 2.16, reflecting the policy divide between the two administrations on education funding for immigrants, as seen in criticisms from Education and the Workforce Committee Chairwoman Virginia Foxx, who accused Biden of allowing undocumented immigrants to access funds intended for low-income Americans.

The socio-economic integration of Kyrgyz immigrants improved under the Biden administration compared to the Trump administration, with Biden scoring higher across social, economic, and overall integration categories. While Biden's overall integration score was 2.82 compared to Trump's 2.52, the most notable difference was in economic integration, where Biden received 2.38 versus Trump's 2.08. Social integration remained relatively close, with Biden at 2.82 and Trump at 2.81.

Table 3. Socio-economic Integration Mean

SERVICE	TRUMP	BIDEN
Social Integration	2.811	2.821
Economic Integration	2.084	2.368
Socio-Economic Integration	2.447	2.595

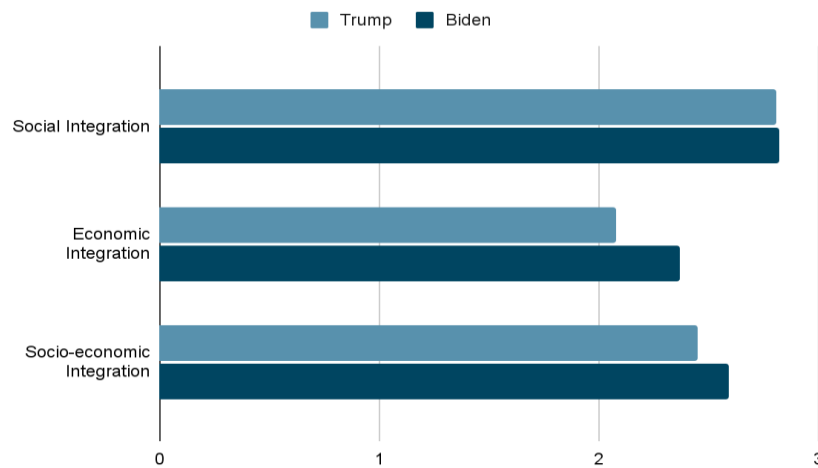


Figure 4. Socio-economic Integration Services Bar Graph.

However, none of the ratings in any category exceeded 3, indicating that respondents viewed their integration experiences as "Fair" rather than "Good" on the Likert scale. Despite Biden's higher scores, the results suggest that integration challenges persisted under both administrations, and neither provided a robust framework for Kyrgyz immigrants' socio-economic inclusion. Economic integration, which showed the largest gap between the two administrations, remained below the "Good" threshold, signaling only moderate improvements. Job training received the highest rating under Biden at 2.5, while access to employment services remained the lowest-rated category in both administrations (1.89 under Trump and 2.13 under Biden), reflecting ongoing difficulties in job accessibility. Housing assistance and financial aid were rated more favorably under Biden, while Trump's lower scores in these areas likely stemmed from restrictive policies that reduced aid for immigrant families.

Educational opportunities also saw a slight improvement under Biden, scoring 2.37 compared to Trump's 2.16, but both remained in the "Fair" category, indicating a lack of substantial progress. Socio-economic integration, calculated as the average of social and economic scores, was rated at 2.59 under Biden and 2.45 under Trump, reinforcing the conclusion that while Biden's policies may have been somewhat more favorable, systemic barriers to integration remained significant for Kyrgyz immigrants regardless of the administration in power (see Table 4 and Figure 3).

The Future of Kyrgyz Migrants in the U.S.

Interviews with nine migrants revealed five key factors shaping their views on migration: Financial Gains and Growth Opportunities, Safety and Security, Cultural Differences, Relationships and Community, and Socio-Economic Integration Policies. While policies influence migration experiences, they are not the sole determining factor. Policies can support aspects like community connections, job access, and security, but other factors, such as cultural differences, are shaped more by personal experiences and societal dynamics. The following sections will examine each theme in detail. The following are example statements about Financial gains and growth opportunities.

- *“As everyone knows, American education is the highest in the world. All professional fields here, such as IT and medicine, are top-notch. My main goal is to receive quality education”*
- *“In Kyrgyzstan, making millions is extremely difficult. For example, recent statistics showed that the entire Kyrgyz IT Park generated \$20 million. While that is a good figure, it represents the entire IT industry of the country. Meanwhile, some restaurants in Florida are being sold with an annual*

gross revenue of \$40–44 million. That shows the immense business potential in America.”

- *“The U.S. has a strong economy and offers many opportunities. Most importantly, we moved here for our children’s future.”*

Financial gain and growth opportunities play a crucial role in shaping Kyrgyz migrants’ decisions to stay in or leave the United States. While traditional migration theories focus on pre-departure push and pull factors, this study highlights that these influences persist even after migrants arrive. Economic opportunities, particularly in business and education, serve as strong pull factors that encourage long-term settlement. Policies that support business development, investment, and financial accessibility make the U.S. an attractive destination, as illustrated by migrants who find it easier to start businesses there than in Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, access to high-quality education strengthens the pull factor, with migrants prioritizing professional development and their children’s future. These policy-driven opportunities create incentives for migrants to remain in the U.S. rather than return to their home country.

However, financial stability in the host country does not always lead to permanent settlement, as some migrants choose to return to Kyrgyzstan after securing economic success. Those with sufficient resources and business prospects back home may view their stay in the U.S. as temporary, while migrants whose financial security depends on staying in the U.S. are more likely to remain. This dynamic highlights the ongoing influence of both push and pull factors in shaping migration decisions. Although financial opportunities in the U.S. generally act as a strong pull factor, individual economic circumstances and prospects in Kyrgyzstan create counterbalancing forces that determine whether migrants

settle permanently or return home. The following are example statements about Cultural Differences.

- *“When I arrived, I had to take off my rose-colored glasses. I was in shock. It wasn’t what I had been told, nor was it what I had imagined. It was completely different. Everything here is different—nothing was as I expected. It broke me. Psychologically, it was very difficult, and it still is...I wanted that freedom, but not like this. Here, people are free to smoke weed, engage in prostitution, or walk around naked in public. And for me, that’s morally and psychologically difficult to accept—even as a man. You realize that this is the environment, and your children will grow up seeing this. That’s the hardest part.”*
- *“That’s why Trump was elected. In many schools, they promote the LGBT community and include these topics in education. I don’t like this being promoted in schools.”*

Cultural differences are known to influence even the simplest phenomenon. For instance, the study by Etrata et al. (2021) found that cultural factors—such as basic values, perceptions, and behaviors, among others—exert the greatest influence on consumer behavior. Similarly, it plays a significant role in shaping Kyrgyz migrants’ long-term decisions about staying in or leaving the United States. Unlike financial opportunities or safety concerns, which are common in migration theories, cultural adaptation is a post-arrival challenge that policies alone cannot fully address. In addition, certain cultural values from Central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan often contrast with American norms—particularly the shift from a traditionally patriarchal society to a more gender-balanced one, and the growing recognition of children's voices. This is especially evident as children tend to

adapt more quickly to the American culture of independence than their parents (Childress et al., 2024). This disconnect between personal values and the host country's culture can serve as a push factor, making long-term settlement difficult. The psychological impact of adjusting to a new cultural environment, particularly when it involves family and children, further influences the decision to stay or leave.

However, not all migrants perceive cultural differences negatively. Some view aspects of American society as more welcoming or aligned with their personal values. A migrant found respect and kindness in Florida that reinforced her decision to stay. The migrant appreciated the openness and freedom of speech in the U.S. but acknowledged challenges in family and social expectations. Others remained neutral but still preferred to return to Kyrgyzstan after completing their education. These varied perspectives suggest that cultural differences do not uniformly push or pull migrants—rather, individual experiences, values, and expectations determine how they interpret and adapt to cultural contrasts. For some, cultural barriers lead to a desire to return home, while for others, a welcoming environment strengthens their commitment to staying in the U.S.

- *“In our community, all the residents are very friendly and kind. Everyone greets each other and shows respect, which I really appreciate...I’ve observed that people here are always polite—no one speaks to you harshly, and everyone greets you with a smile.”*
- *“I wouldn’t say that housing is very expensive in this state, primarily because there are many Kyrgyz people. As a result, we often live together, which reduces costs to about \$300–\$400 per month.”*

- *“When you move here, you can find a Kyrgyz community that helps with housing, jobs, schools, or even food. Sometimes, you don’t even miss Kyrgyz food because people cook the same dishes here.”*

Familial and community ties play a crucial role in shaping Kyrgyz migrants' decisions to stay in the United States. The traditional push and pull theory already acknowledges that having family in the host country encourages migration, and this remains a strong pull factor post-arrival. M3 emphasizes that support from family members eases the transition, noting that being alone without legal documents would have made settling in the U.S. much more difficult. Similarly, M1 stresses the importance of having someone to rely on during the initial adjustment period. However, this study expands on existing research by identifying that beyond family, the presence of a Kyrgyz community in the U.S. significantly reinforces migrants' decisions to stay. M2 highlights how communal support reduces financial burdens, particularly in housing, while M7 explains that the Kyrgyz community provides assistance with jobs, schooling, and even maintaining cultural traditions. These findings indicate that migrants are not just pulled to a country but to specific locations where cultural and social networks are strong, enhancing their likelihood of long-term settlement.

Beyond immediate family and national communities, broader social connections also serve as pull factors. An immigrant notes that Kyrgyz migrants often form bonds with individuals from other post-Soviet countries, creating a larger support system based on shared cultural backgrounds. Additionally, migrants benefit from the general friendliness of their local environments, as reflected in another immigrant’s observation that her community is welcoming and polite. These factors suggest that policies promoting

community-building and social integration could enhance migrant retention. However, while relationships and community support generally pull migrants toward staying, the absence of such ties can become a significant push factor. An immigrant who is separated from his entire family in Kyrgyzstan, expresses deep emotional distress and a desire to leave despite being unable to return due to political persecution. His experience highlights the complex interplay of migration factors—while external conditions may force individuals to remain, personal experiences of isolation can simultaneously push them toward wanting to leave. The following are example statements about Social-economic integration policies.

- *“The Trump administration provided financial support by ensuring that our regular income continued on time, which was a great help for us.”*
- *“Under his (Biden) administration, my program allowed working multiple jobs, for example, two or three jobs, which was permitted. Since I arrived here, more than a year and seven months have passed. Because I came through the Work and Travel program, there were many benefits, so to speak. As soon as I arrived, I was able to immediately apply for a social security number.”*
- *“A lot of people were surprised that we were returning to Kyrgyzstan instead of staying in the U.S. I used to think that most Kyrgyz people in America were highly educated, and while that is true, many of them ended up working in manual labor.”*
- *“Those are not free. It was very difficult to apply for and even harder to get. I applied before having legal documentation, so my application was rejected. For the first year, I didn’t have health insurance because the government denied me*

access to that service.”

The shifting U.S. immigration policies under the Trump and Biden administrations have significantly influenced Kyrgyz migrants' decisions, acting as both pull and push factors. Under the Biden administration, migrants such as M3 found financial security policies particularly appealing, noting that the ability to work multiple jobs helped improve their financial situation. In contrast, the Trump administration's provision of financial support also provided a stable income, which migrants appreciated. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends not only on the benefits they offer but also on their accessibility. For instance, M6 experienced delays in obtaining essential identity documents, such as a Social Security number, which hindered their ability to access employment opportunities, showcasing how administrative barriers can impede the positive effects of supportive policies. Additionally, while U.S. policies can create job opportunities, M4 highlighted the frustration of highly educated migrants being forced into manual labor, revealing that employment-related policies can simultaneously attract some migrants and push others away due to mismatched job opportunities.

Beyond financial and employment policies, migrants also highlighted the impact of other social policies, such as those related to healthcare, language support, and housing. M7 shared the challenge of not having health insurance for the first year due to policy restrictions, and M5 discussed struggles with language barriers in communication, both of which shaped their experiences and integration in the U.S. Kazakbaeva's (2022) study highlights the profound impact of English language proficiency on migrant integration, emphasizing that it plays a critical role in shaping individuals' adjustment—from everyday social interactions to achieving self-actualization in the host country. The study further

reveals that social environments and employment settings significantly influence the extent and quality of English language exposure and acquisition. These findings suggest that effective language instruction policies must go beyond formal education to also foster environments—through social networks and employment opportunities—where migrants can actively practice and develop their language skills.

Furthermore, policies extending beyond immigration laws, such as foreign and educational policies, also influenced migrant perspectives. For example, M6's concerns about Biden's foreign policy stance, including military involvement in conflicts, made them reconsider staying in the U.S. Similarly, M7's discontent with U.S. educational policies promoting LGBT rights underlined how cultural policies could push some migrants away. These broader political and social policies, often unrelated to immigration laws, shape migrants' views and experiences, illustrating that migration decisions are influenced by a complex array of factors. This demonstrates that U.S. policies—ranging from immigration and employment laws to broader cultural and political stances—play a critical role in determining whether migrants choose to stay in or leave the U.S.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The U.S. immigration and integration policies under different administrations have significantly impacted the socio-economic conditions of legal migrants, directly influencing their decisions on whether to remain in the United States or return to their home country. The evolving landscape of immigration policies, with contrasting approaches from the two administrations, demonstrates the complexity of how policy frameworks intersect with the broader migratory experience.

The dynamic nature of U.S. immigration policy under different administrations clearly demonstrates the relevance of policy feedback theory in understanding the relationship between immigration policies and migrant behavior. According to policy feedback theory, the design and implementation of policies have long-lasting effects on the behaviors of those they impact. For migrants, policies that ensure greater economic opportunities, protection, and security encourage long-term settlement in the U.S., while policies that limit opportunities and introduce uncertainty act as powerful push factors, leading to potential return migration. Therefore, U.S. immigration policies have played a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic outcomes of Kyrgyz and other migrants, influencing their decisions about whether to remain in the U.S. or consider repatriation.

Through adding the policy feedback theory to the traditional model of push-pull framework, it is realized that the push-pull theory of migration must be expanded, like what was shown in the framework of the study. Nonetheless, despite the improvement brought by the new model introduced, the findings also suggest the importance of further improving the framework. While immigration policies undoubtedly act as key push and pull factors, it became evident through the research that other socio-economic, cultural, and personal factors also significantly influence migrants' decisions. The study partially uncovered that factors such as family ties, personal aspirations, access to social networks, the desire for educational opportunities, and even the broader global socio-political context also play a crucial role in shaping whether Kyrgyz migrants decide to stay or return.

The findings of this study call for theoretical advancements in how migration decisions are conceptualized. While the updated push-pull framework integrated policy feedback theory to examine how U.S. immigration policies affect Kyrgyz legal migrants, future

research should expand this model to include non-policy factors such as personal aspirations, family ties, global economic conditions, and digital social networks. These influences increasingly shape migrant behavior alongside policy shifts. Additionally, the return of Donald Trump to the presidency presents a new opportunity to conduct longitudinal studies comparing migrant responses across successive administrations. This would help determine how alternating political ideologies influence long-term integration and stability. Comparative analyses with other major migrant-receiving countries like Canada, Germany, and Australia could also reveal alternative policy strategies that better support Kyrgyz migrants. Moreover, special attention should be given to illegal migrants and those who chose to return or move elsewhere, as their experiences offer critical insight into the gaps and failures of current systems and further validate push factors already identified in this study.

On a practical level, the U.S. government must reform its immigration system to ensure greater predictability and long-term stability for migrants. The study illustrates how abrupt policy reversals between administrations foster legal and emotional uncertainty. This is a long term investment because as proven by the study of Kumarasinghe and Karunarathne (2024) workers must meet their emotional demands to ensure a better service delivery, knowing that migrants are proven to have an impact in the workforce, it is necessary to improve their situation in order for them to be a more valuable part of companies in the United States. Legal protections alone are not enough; cultural acceptance and inclusive public messaging are equally vital in creating a supportive environment for migrant communities.

Lastly, economic integration must be improved through strategic labor market planning. One of the key tensions in immigration discourse is the fear that migrants may displace

American workers. To address this concern, the government should conduct national labor market assessments to identify sectors with genuine workforce gaps—such as agriculture, healthcare, construction, and technology—where migrant labor can be directed. These assessments should be followed by targeted training and certification programs to align migrants' skills with high-demand industries. Simultaneously, immigration policy formulation should adopt a feedback-based approach, where the voices of migrants are systematically collected and analyzed through regular consultations and impact evaluations. By making immigration governance more participatory and data-driven, the U.S. can craft sustainable, comprehensive, and economically sound immigration policies that support both migrant welfare and national interests.

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