

BOOK REVIEWS

The Border Within. The Economics of Immigration in an Age of Fear

By Tara Watson and Kalee Thompson. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2021. 304 pp., \$27.50 cloth.

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The authors of this book, an academic and a journalist, provide a synthesis of research on the costs and benefits of interior immigration enforcement in the United States. The picture is damning. The costs of enforcement are high, the costs to individual immigrants, their families, and their communities are devastating, and the deterrence goals of the government remain unmet. But this is not a one-sided story. In their analysis, the picture of immigration and immigration policy in the United States is balanced and as accurate as the research permits. By bringing together research on the economic effects of immigration with interior enforcement and the impact on the undocumented and broader community, the authors provide a much-needed holistic picture of the U.S. dilemma of undocumented migration. Given the current estimated 10.5 million undocumented migrants, this is a book worthy to be widely read.

The book is divided into three sections. The first provides a broad overview of the economic implications of immigration in the United States; the second outlines the interior enforcement policies of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the third examines the impact of enforcement on the immigrants themselves, their families, and their broader communities. Interlaced with the academic research are the stories of six families affected by interior enforcement.

The nuance in presentation is visible when describing the economic impact of immigration in the United States. Many economists blithely describe the net benefits of immigration to the economy, citing overall economic growth and the fact that many immigrants' labor force participation complements rather than competes with American workers. Watson and Thompson marshal research to unpack "net benefits," providing evidence that poorly educated U.S. residents are those who feel the brunt of any adverse consequences. "In particular, American-born workers without a high school degree, disadvantaged minorities, and previous waves of immigrants most directly compete with new migrants, and these same groups of

people may lose jobs or face lower wages due to immigration” (p. 7). Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that through this direct competition, income inequality in the United States is exacerbated. Sorting out the role of undocumented migrants on the economy is a bit trickier, as this population is more difficult to track in the data. The limited research available provides contradictory findings but suggests that undocumented immigrants have similar effects on U.S. labor markets as the immigrant population as a whole. Although this, from my perspective, is the most important takeaway, Part I goes on to survey various dimensions of immigration on the U.S. economy, the society, and the immigrants themselves, noting the dynamic effects of immigration on all dimensions, providing a more detailed picture of immigrants in our society. However, given the inability, for the most part, to disaggregate the undocumented population from the overall immigrant population, Part I opens the door to further research on the segment of the immigrant population that remains undocumented.

Part II focuses on enforcement. ICE now has an annual budget of approximately \$18 billion, which is employed to deter, detect, detain, and deport undocumented immigrants, alongside criminal enforcement activities. Watson and Thompson provide an overview of ICE activities, including cooperation with local and state governments through such programs as Section 287(g) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, the Secure Communities Program of 2008, and the Priority Enforcement Program of 2014. They make the important point that, in the absence of legislatively based immigration reform, enforcement priorities are subject to executive discretion and can swing wildly from one presidential administration to another. They are even-handed in their presentation of the evidence on the deterrent effects of interior immigration enforcement. In light of mixed evidence, they conclude that “recent border control efforts have deterred substantial numbers of illicit crossings” (p. 148). But they also point out that “potential migrants with the strongest impetus to enter the United States are the least likely to be deterred by harsh policies” (p. 148).

Part III covers the impact on immigrants of interior enforcement policies. Enforcement forces undocumented migrants from the formal labor market to the informal labor market with lower wages and poorer working conditions. Enforcement tends to discourage members of the immigrant community from reporting crimes. Enforcement deters immigrants from accessing benefits for which they are eligible, including U.S. citizen children with undocumented parent(s). As a result, undocumented individuals and families are poorer and tend to have poorer health. Deportation itself engenders yet more damaging consequences. Children suffer psychological trauma, and families’ incomes decline precipitously as the deported family member is often the head of household.

Watson and Thompson conclude that interior immigration enforcement will continue because of current political and economic realities. Nonetheless, they foresee the possibility of reform that would reduce some of the harmful effects of a “capricious and cruel” (p. 226) approach to interior enforcement and suggest seven strategies to promote a “humane and effective enforcement strategy” (p. 226). Some of their policy recommendations include promoting a legislative path of reform that increases the consistency and transparency of enforcement policy, as well as developing a narrow enforcement focus that will reduce the sense of fear

and vulnerability in the undocumented community. They also recommend acknowledging the humanitarian costs of deporting long-term residents and promoting intact families, as well as rewarding undocumented residents who are “good citizens” in the sense of working, paying taxes, and supporting their families and communities. These are no-nonsense strategies that should be welcomed in Congress and by the President.

This volume—the summary of broader research on immigration and their own contributions to the research agenda—is an important mechanism to inform the interested public and legislators at the federal, state, and local levels about the impact of our current interior enforcement system. Rather than calling for the abolition of ICE, they provide a more practical and realistic set of recommendations that would improve the lives and livelihoods of millions of undocumented immigrants, their families, and their communities. I hope it will be widely read and acted upon.

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Merchants of the Right: Gun Sellers and the Crisis of American Democracy

By Jennifer D. Carlson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023, cloth, \$29.95

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Carlson’s *Merchants of the Right* can be thought of as the third part of a trilogy that tackles distinct but interrelated loci in which ideas about gun ownership and its role in American society and politics are molded. Recent gun studies scholarship by political scientists have looked at the role of macro-historical forces (Filindra 2023), or institutional actors, such as the Supreme Court (Spitzer 2022) and the NRA (Lacombe 2021), in shaping gun culture. However, Carlson, a sociologist, has kept her gaze at a microlevel with immersive, ethnographic studies of concealed carriers (Carlson 2015), local police leaders (Carlson 2020), and now gun shop owners. As with her previous studies, the key motivating question is how people make sense of the world around them through their relationship with guns.

Merchants of the Right is situated in a unique time in recent American history: the COVID-19 pandemic which has had a profound impact on American life. Between March 2020 and May 2023, 1.13 million people died from the disease making COVID-19 the third leading cause of death for the period behind heart disease and cancer (Centers for Disease Control 2023). Yet, the pandemic is not simply