



# The Establishment of the United States – Mexico Border Wall as Hindrance to Poverty Reduction and Global Development

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**Abstract.** President Donald Trump since the presidential campaign has echoed the idea of building border wall. This wall aims at reducing the number of illegal migrants who arrive in the United States by crossing the US – Mexico border land. The idea of wall reaps to public criticism both in national and international. Trump's border wall is seen as ineffective. It rather creates the image of US of having exclusive development. Regarding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this policy hampers the implementation of SDGs related to migration, labor market security, women and children protection, decent and peaceful societies, and global partnership. This discussion paper explores Trump's policy in the framework of SDGs and analyze the case with two relevant theories: globalization and dual labor market.

**Keywords:** The US – Mexico Border Wall · Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) · Exclusive Development · Globalization · Migration

## 1 Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was designated to improve people's life as well as balance human's relation with the environment. However, its implementation often finds hindrances. One of them is a government policy which does not side with the people. This discussion paper will particularly discuss one of Trump's immigration policy namely the establishment of the US – Mexico border wall. The author's main thesis is that the policy inhibits the poverty reduction and global development.

In this globalization era, to get a decent life, people migrate from a region to another even from a country to another. Better opportunities are the most favorite pushing factor of migration. Decent jobs become a priority of the migrants earned in the destination countries. Basic facilities such as health, education, and housing in the developed countries become the pulling factors for the migrants. Developed countries are often seen as a new place, providing those basic services better than their origin countries.

Hispanic (people mainly from Mexico and Central America) are not exception of that mindset above. Hispanic have a lot of financial problems in their origin countries as

developing countries. They see a light and a better future in their neighbouring country – the US. Some of them arrived in the US by legal process, some did not. Nevertheless, it does not take a moment to arrive using legal process. It takes months up to a year to validly enter the US. Economic pressure becomes their main reason to cross the border land illegally. However, it is not an easy decision to leave their home countries with the hope of new life.

This phenomenon is seen as a threat to the US. Trump is a nativist who alleges illegal migrants causing US insecurity. Illegal immigrants are not an exception of the scapegoating target of crimes that occur in the US, including the entry of illegal drugs. It is just an excuse of the sentiment toward migrants. As the matter of fact, crimes are not always committed by the illegal migrant. In some cases, the white people are the culprit.

This has become a complex problem with no concrete solution provided. Since the presidential campaign in 2016, Trump has echoed the building of “big beautiful wall” in the amount of more than \$5 billion to reduce the flow of illegal migrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries. In this discussion paper, the author will explore how Trump’s border wall policy becomes hindrance in realizing SDGs Goals ‘2030 Agenda’.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

To provide empirical and theoretical explanations in relations to Trump policy, which impede the poverty reduction and global development, the author uses two relevant theories: globalization and dual labor market.

### **2.1 Globalization**

Globalization describes the condition of late twentieth century and unprecedented culture, people, dependency among countries at the cross borders at the global scale. Globalization accelerates the distribution of information. In relations to migration, globalization removes barriers for people to move. Interstate migration in the era of globalization is a necessity.

The most common pulling factor is more opportunities to increase the quality of life. Migrants are also exposed to a new kind of jobs that are not available in their origin countries. Arjun Appandurai in his writing entitles “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” states that there are five global cultural flows as a result of globalization [1]:

#### **1. Ethnoscapes**

Ethnoscapes refers to the migration of people from an area to other areas. This migration is not always an individual but also a group of people or communities. People leave their origin country with several reasons such as to get better job opportunities, to get protection (asylum seekers), to avoid natural disasters or political chaos or to severe conflicts in the origin countries that force them to migrate and find secure places (refugees), or tourists who visit other countries temporarily.

## 2. Technoscapes

Technoscapes emerged from the rapid development of technology in global scale. In globalization era, technological development spread rapidly in all parts of the world. The most common technology transfer is from the developed countries to the developing countries.

## 3. Finanscapes

Finanscapes allows people to create an inclusive economic system which involves people from all around the world, not limited to specific countries.

## 4. Mediascapes

Mediascapes refers to the ability of electronic devices to produce content that can be disseminated through newspaper, television, magazine, film, and other media.

## 5. Ideoscapes

Ideoscapes derived from the word “idea” or “ideology”. Globalization enables an idea of an individual or a group can be learned and followed by others.

From those five aspects, the most compatible points for analyzing this case are ethnoscapess, technoscapes, and ideoscapes. Ethnoscapess allows people to move freely from a region to other regions as Hispanic move to the US. They get information from their fellow who have become permanent residents of the US and find that life in the US is more prosperous. They can also get the technology and skill transfer from their job.

## 2.2 Dual Labor Market

According to Reich, Gordon and Edwards, the economic and political power in the US capitalism has created and maintained segmented labor market. Seemingly, those segmented market sources are exogenic toward the economic system [2]. Those segmented groups have different positions in the labor market, a variety of work condition, different opportunities, different wages, and various market institutions.

Dual labor market divides labor segmentation becomes two main sectors:

### 1. Primary Sector

This sector is filled by occupations that required high skill or commonly mentioned as “white collar jobs”. Occupations in this sector provide a lot of benefits such as high wage, health insurance, job security, and a pension allowance. The example of jobs in this category are doctor, engineer, accountant, and others.

## 2. Secondary Sector

This sector is identical with low-skilled occupations or commonly mentioned as “blue collar jobs”. Occupations in this category does not give a lot of benefits. In opposite, it tends to have uncertain schedule and low wage with no pension allowance and health insurance.

Nevertheless, some scholars have derived job not only based on its sector, but based on the following criteria:

### 1. Segmentation by Race

Although minority group is included in the secondary sector, but they are not in the same segment in the sub-market. Certain jobs are determined by race, which definitely contributes to maintaining the segregation and prejudice owned by the labor market institution.

### 2. Segmentation by Sex

Some jobs are restricted to male, and some are only for female. Wage for female segment is generally lower than that for male segment. Female jobs often require and encourage “serving mentality” – an orientation toward providing services to other people and particularly to men [2]. This characteristic is driven by family and the school institution.

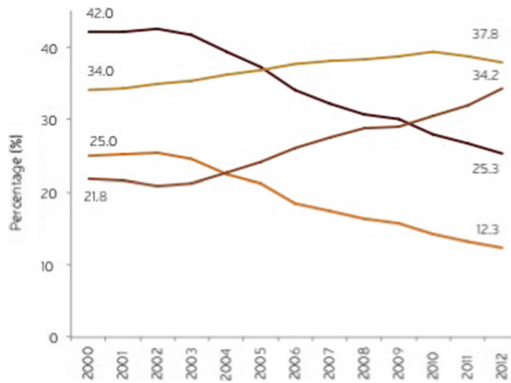
This theory is very relevant to analyze Hispanic migrants in the US. Since Hispanic migrants’ position in the US labor market is in the secondary sector. Hispanic take every necessary step that US residents would prefer not to. However, they are frequently abused by the white society or US resident holders.

## 3 Discussion

Globalization accelerates the dissemination of information which at a long-term accelerating people’s migration, technology transfer, and the share of ideas. It occurs with news about better life in the neighboring country, immediately heard by Hispanic. Although the economic growth of Latin Americas improved over time, as the data shows that the region’s gross domestic product per capita grew consistently at an average rate of 2.5 percent between 2000 and 2012 [3]. At the same period, the inequality also has declined proven by the decrease of Gini coefficient per capita. It decreased by an unprecedented five percentage points, from 0.57 in 2000 to 0.52 in 2012 [3].

The following figure shows the poverty reduction that decreases over time in Latin Americas and the Caribbean [3] (Fig. 1)

Thus, economic growth does not mean the decline of poverty number, particularly they who categorized as in chronic poverty. There are two kinds of poverty: 1) Transitory poverty refers to those who fall temporarily into poverty; 2) Chronic poverty refers to



**Fig. 1.** Poverty, vulnerability, and the middle class in LAC (2000–2012) [Source: World Bank (2014) using SEDLAC data (CEDLAS and the World Bank)]

those who are born into poverty and never escape their poverty status. To those who categorized into the chronic poverty, migrating to the US as a developed country is highly seductive option to have job opportunities, get a Green Card, and become permanent resident of the US. They dream a better life than in their origin country. Most Mexicans arrived in the US in the twentieth century, and especially during and after World War II [4].

Migration has long been a way to reduce poverty. The global target of the SDGs is to formally recognize migration in international development frameworks and processes [5]. This highlights the importance of migration as an issue. Migration also plays as a cement of factor which can contribute to poverty reduction and development. In SDGs targets 2030, the following table consists of Goals that mention migration [5]: (Table 1).

In addition, migration is a powerful strategy to reduce poverty, both for the migrants and the migrant's family in the origin country. It has a substantial positive impact on the increase of income and some other areas of development. The increasing number of migrants does not increase poverty in the destination countries. In fact, migrants add values to the domestic economy. Migration can help a migrant's family in the developing countries to increase their wellbeing with the increase of income that automatically increase the consumption. Further effects include higher investment, saving, and protection.

As Trump became the president of the US, and created several policies that prevented the migrants to come into US, it hampered the migrants to get the social protection as labor even prevented the migrants from the process of becoming the legal workers. Social protection includes facilities that gained by the labor by working in the US as a legal migrant such as health insurance, reasonable working hours, and a pension allowance. Those facilities will be obtained by the migrants if they are granted Green Card so that they can get similar jobs to which citizenship holders have. However, Trump that carries out nativism make the migrant's struggle even harder to get a decent work in the US. Nativism relates to racism that has long been lined in the history of the US since the colonialism period.

**Table 1.** The Targets that mentions migration. [Source: Overseas Development Institute. (2017). Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Kingdom: Overseas Development Institute (ODI)]

8.8	Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.
10.7	Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.
10.c	By 2030, reduce less than 3% the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittances corridors with costs higher than 5%.
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture children.
17.18	By 2020, to enhance capacity building support to developing countries, including for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to significantly increase the availability of high-quality, timely, and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

The colony or English settlers from England after occupied the land of Indian people and made 13 colonies, they claimed as the native of America. Therefore, right now racism refers to those who are not the descendant of that 13 colonies, and those who do not hold US citizenship. Mexicans or other Hispanic are considered “the other” due to their skin color and their language in which they majority speak Spanish. Moreover, nativism is more than just racism. Nativism includes the economy and security aspects. Economic aspect in term of prioritizing American people rather than Hispanic. Security aspect refers to the protection of American from illegal aliens.

This idea of the border wall is based on some reasons: 1) The murder of young lady, namely Kate Stenlie (32) in 2015 allegedly murdered by an illegal immigrant from Mexico named Jose Ines Garcia Zarate. Zarate has been deported five times and will be deported for the sixth due to drug case; 2) Secure Fence Act 2006 strengthen Trump’s argument. This act has been implemented by building physical barriers in the form of fence; 3) in 2017, the number of illegal immigrants who were caught about 160.000. Those are not only from Mexico, but also from other Latin American countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras [6].

In this discussion paper, the author does not intend to justify illegal migration. However, there are still various ways to regulate and restrict the flow of illegal migrants entering the US. Building a wall is ineffective policy. Either with or without physical barrier, illegal migration will still exist. It has happened for a long time ago since the early history. However, Mexico’s resilient economic growth reduces the number of illegal immigrants coming to the US. As the data shows the number of Mexican unauthorized immigrants has been declining as data from 2017 there were 4.9 million immigrants living in the US, down from 6.9 in 2007 [7]. The author believes that economic growth of

the origin country is not a sole factor. Nevertheless, there are many factors that ultimately make immigrants return to their origin countries.

First, the slow recovery of the U.S. economy after the Great Recession may have made the US less attractive to potential Mexican migrants [8]. It may have pushed out some Mexican immigrants as the US job market deteriorated. Second, family reunification becomes the primary engine of return migration to Mexico [8]. As the data from the 2014 Mexican National Survey of Demographic Dynamic shows that from 2009 to 2014, 1 million Mexican and their families left the US to start a new life in Mexico. Third, stricter enforcement of US immigration laws particularly at the border may have contributed to reduction of immigrant coming to the US [9]. By these reasons, the author believes that it is unnecessary to build the border wall.

On January 2019, Trump used his authority to address the nation from his oval office to speak about the immigration. He mentioned that the US was currently in a humanitarian crisis, a crisis of the heart and a crisis of the soul because 20,000 migrant children were illegally brought into the US, a dramatic increase [10]. In the speech, Trump highlighted the emergence of building the wall.

While Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer from the Democrats on their response speech stated that the government is able to build infrastructure and roads to the ports of entry, install technology to scan trucks and cars with drugs that enter the nation, fund more innovation to detect unauthorized crossings [10]. In summary, they conveyed that stronger border security does not need to build a wall. It relates to the main SDGs target 2030 to build peaceful and inclusive societies. There will be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development (A/RES/70/01). The wall indicates US to have a closed society and exclusive development. While the sublime purpose of SDGs is to increase cooperation among countries in realizing inclusive development.

The idea of the wall is still controversial, even in the domestic politics of the US, particularly Democrats politicians who oppose the establishment of a wall worth more than \$5 billion for part of it while the total fund will be about \$23 billion until it finishes. Trump wants to spend more fund for his wall. The Pentagon has not yet determined which programs will be cut to meet the president's demand [11]. However, Trump raised the idea of the wall since the presidential campaign period. His voter might choose him due to the promise of ensuring the security of the people. Thus, Trump is working hard to realize his promise.

In fact, the venture has not kept running up to this point. He is viewed as just needs to satisfy his voters, which does not speak to most of the entire country. On February 2019, a coalition of 16 states, including California and New York challenged Trump in court over his plan to use emergency powers to spend billions of dollars on his border wall [12]. This has shown the domestic turmoil against Trump's idea. The undertaking is hampered by resistance groups who do not concur with the wall.

In partnership aspect, Trump one-sidedly construct the wall without the assent of the Mexican government. Trump repeatedly said "Mexico will pay for the wall". While President Enrique Pena Nieto rejected Trump's call for Mexico to pay for a border wall [13]. This has shown the absence of global partnership in comprehending an issue.

Mexico itself rejects the border wall, and so do other Latin American countries. This opposes SDG 17 about partnership for reaching the Goals.

Illegal migration issue can be discussed by the representative of the US and Mexico. They also can bring it to the forum with the scope of the US and Latin American countries to formulate concrete solutions to tackle this complex problem. Every country, without a doubt needs to guarantee the security and prosperity living to their citizens. Thus, they can take a peaceful measure that results in agreement instead of the media war. Media war means that both party – the US and Mexico use media to express their opinion and rejection. It will be vastly improved by the chance that country's representations can sit together to talk peacefully about the issue which hopefully reach into possible solutions to be implemented cooperatively. Solution that acknowledged by both parties and beneficial for all, for now and for the upcoming period.

Trump extreme measures are based on ultra-patriotism and nationalism. He feels that his citizens threaten by the coming of Hispanic. Even though most Hispanic in the labor market is obviously categorized into the secondary sector, even put into jobs that are segmented by race. Henceforth, the US industry will not work out without the secondary sector labor because the white folk will not take those occupations. In fact, it is interdependent relations between the US and Mexico. Hispanic need occupations. US industry needs blue collar workers.

If Mexico rejects to pay, Trump said "Mexico would immediately protest, because \$24 billion in remittances from Mexican national in the US go out each year, and it would then pay for the wall instead of losing that money". In other word, Trump will take the remittance to pay for the wall. It obviously hampers the implementation of SDG 1 about the poverty reduction, particularly SDG 1.1 "Migration is a powerful poverty reduction strategy, for migrants themselves and their families in origin countries. It has substantial positive impacts on income and other areas of human development" [5]. Migrants earn money to increase the living of their families in the origin countries. Trump's policy opposes SDG 8 "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all".

Another SDGs Goal related this case is Goal 9 "build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and promote innovation". As Appandurai stated that globalization can spread of global culture, including technology transfer (technoscapes). People who migrate from developing countries to developed countries, see developed countries as the source of modern technology and innovation. By migrating, the migrant has not only earned money, but also technology and skill transfer and innovation they gained during work. It can fasten the development when someday they go back to their origin countries. They can become agent of change to catalyse the human resources development by transferring skills and technology. It is undeniable that migration is a mechanism that can contribute to the achievement of many of the Goals.

Another important point related to SDG 10 "reduce inequality within and among countries". As the data from the World Bank, GDP per capita of the US is \$65 while Mexico's only \$9. Those number stretches the high inequality between two adjoining countries. SDG 10.1 states "migration can reduce global inequalities, among countries



and people, as people migrate from low-income countries to high-income countries, and send remittance back home”.

Migration is not a sole solution, however, gradual migration can make migrant access basic services, such as health, education and social protection, is key to migrants' livelihoods and development prospects [5]. Countries have to recognize that migrants are particularly vulnerable group who should be considered under the general principle of “leaving no-one behind”. It also relates to SDG 10.7 about the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. If the migrations are well regulated, the migrants will not become those who are exploited. Dehumanization will not happen.

SDG 16.2 states “Attempts to eliminate child labor, exploitation, and trafficking through financial support to families are all likely to boost education for migrant children by freeing them to receive an education that they would not otherwise be able to have” [5]. It should also be highlighted that the education can improve the social, economic, and political inclusion of migrant children. By staying in the US, Mexican migrants' children are able to speak the majority language which is English, and it will reduce the image of Hispanic as “the other”. The skin color of Hispanic gradually resembles the white people because some of them marry Caucasian and now most of them have mixed-race. The existence of migrants from other continents such as Asia and Africa making Hispanic not striking, equal as other immigrants. The increase of migrant education can also raise their wages. In a long term, it can create prosperity for them and possibility to become US citizen.

Another threatening policy during Trump administration is the “zero tolerance” which conducting family separation from April 2018 – June 2018. Under this policy, federal authorities separated children from parents or guardians with whom they had entered the US illegally. The adults were prosecuted in federal jails, while the children placed under the supervision of the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS). Following national and international criticism, one June 20, 2018, Trump signed an executive order ending family separation at the border. However, in March 2019, government report showed that since that time 245 children have been removed from their families. It created agonized uncertainty for the parents. They were unable to communicate with their children and in many cases not knowing even where the children were [14].

This links to another point of SDG 16.2 “When migrants, including second-generation migrants, cannot obtain citizenship or residency status, they are more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers”. It is also mentioned in SDG 16.2 as the inclusion of a specific target of the ‘2030 Agenda’ to end all forms of violence against children gives renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation. Trump's family separation is an “institutionalized child abuse” [15].

Trump's nativism has led to child abuse and dehumanize the immigration process. The trauma caused by these separations is not an unfortunate by product of a necessary legal process. It is the whole point. It is a punishment designed to be as grotesque as possible in order to scare other migrants [15]. Dehumanization can be seen from the current condition, such as parents hearing their children screaming in the next room; a man committed suicide after his three-year-old child was taken from him; a woman being told by a border patrol agent that she would never see her children again and that she

would not have a family anymore. Countries regulate migration using different varieties of policies. However, people need to decide whether child abuse should be considered a valid one.

It relates to SDG 8.8 about the protection and safe environment for workers, including migrant workers. Leaving one's country to escape from economic pressure is not a decision made lightly. SDG 8.8 also emphasizes on the women migrants who are categorized into vulnerable groups and in precarious employment. Undocumented women making their way into American border towns have been beaten for disobeying smugglers, impregnated by strangers, coerced into prostitution [16]. Women migrants who come from Guatemala and Honduras they have a long journey to arrive at the American border. But they keep going and thank God because everything that they suffered, then happiness will come follow as soon as they arrive in American towns.

## 4 Conclusion

From those explanation above, it can be concluded that Trump's border wall policy hampers the implementation of numerous SDGs Goals: SDG 1.1, SDG 8.8, SDG 10.1, SDG 10.7, SDG 10.c, SDG 16.2, and SDG 17.8. These show that migration is a key to the achievement of many Goals. As the main Goal is that migrants are categorized into group that should not be "left-behind". Migration is an important strategy to reduce poverty because migration provides different opportunities and levels of development.

By understanding the impact of migration, it can ensure that migration contributes to positive development outcomes, and ultimately to realizing the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the '2030 Agenda'). Trump's border wall policy hampers the '2030 Agenda' because it indirectly closes the migration door for Hispanic who want to come to the US for better opportunities. Trump directly mentions them as "illegal aliens". It shows that Trump considers Hispanic as "the other" who should not be treated as human.

Dehumanization can be seen from the family separation and mistreat of women migrants in the border. In fact, they come to US to fill the secondary sector, which is not filled by the white folks or the US citizens. Even worse, women illegal alien got double discrimination locating them in 'blue collar jobs' which at the same time segregated by sex. The US government should regulate the migrants more humanize and legislate win-win policy to create peace. Because global partnership is needed to fully realize the '2030 Agenda'.

**Acknowledgments.** The title "ACKNOWLEDGMENTS" should be in all caps and should be placed above the references. The references should be consistent within the article and follow the same style. List all the references with full details.

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