Global Migration:
A World Ever More on the Move

By Jason DeParle

Gordon Brown's rant[1] about a "bigoted[2]" voter sped his exit from the British prime minister's post. What punctured[3] his cool? Her complaint about immigrants. When an earthquake shattered Haiti, Dominicans sent soldiers and Americans sent ships—to discourage potential immigrants. The congressman who shouted "You lie!" at President Obama was upset about immigrants. "Birthers[4]" think Mr. Obama is an immigrant.

There was also the Hamas rocket that landed in Israel this spring, killing a farmworker. Not so unusual, except that the worker was Thai.

Perhaps no force in modern life is as omnipresent[5] yet overlooked as global migration, that vehicle of creative destruction that is reordering ever more of the world. Overlooked? A skeptic may well question the statement, given how often the topic makes news and how divisive[6] the news can be. After all, Arizona's campaign against illegal immigrants, codified[7] in an April law, set off high-decibel[8] debates from Melbourne to Madrid. But migration also shapes the landscape beneath the seemingly unrelated events of *the headlines[9]. It is a story-behind-the-story, a complicating tide, in issues as diverse as school bond fights and efforts to isolate Iran. (Seeking allies in Latin America this month, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had to emphasize the dangers of a nuclear-armed Tehran while *fending off[10] complaints about the Arizona law.) ▶

Even people who study migration for a living struggle to fully grasp its effects. "Politically, socially, economically, culturally—migration bubbles up everywhere," James F. Hollifield, a political scientist at Southern Methodist University, said. "We often don't recognize it."

One realm[11] where migration has particularly powerful if largely unstated effects is school finance. Political scientists have found that white voters are more likely to oppose spending plans when they perceive the main beneficiaries to be children of immigrants (especially illegal immigrants). The outcome, of course, affects all children, immigrant or 10th generation.

"When you get increased diversity, you weaken support for the common good," said Dowell Myers, a demographer[12] at the University of Southern California.

Professor Myers studied Proposition[13] 55, a 2004 ballot[14] initiative in California that sought $12.3 billion in bond sales to relieve overcrowding and upgrade older schools. Publicly, most opponents framed[15] their concerns in economic terms, saying the government wasted money and ran unsustainable debts. Still, anger about illegal immigration was, as one opponent put it, *the "elephant in the living room[16]." School crowding, he wrote in a letter to The Riverside Press Enterprise, was "solely caused by America's foolish open-borders policy."

Holding all else equal (like other political views), Professor Myers found, voters who saw immigration as a burden were nearly 9 percentage points more likely to oppose the measure than those who called immigration a benefit. "That's a big effect—it was almost enough to take it down," he said. The measure squeaked[17] through, with barely 50 percent of the vote.

Immigration also quickened the bitter split in the American labor movement. In 2005, a half dozen unions left the venerable[18] A.F.L.-C.I.O.[19] to form a rival federation, ▶

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1. rant rænt *n.*
2. bigoted 'bɪɡətɪd *a.*
3. puncture 'pʌŋktʃə(r) *vt.*

4. birther:

5. omnipresent ˌɒmnɪ'prezənt *a.*
6. divisive dɪ'vaɪsɪv *a.*
7. codify 'kəʊdɪfaɪ *vt.*
8. high-decibel 'haɪ'desɪbel *a.*
9. the headlines
10. fend off

11. realm relm *n.*
12. demographer diː'mɒɡrəfə(r) *n.*
13. Proposition ˌprɒpə'zɪʃn *n.*
14. ballot 'bælət *n.*
15. frame freɪm *vt.*
16. the elephant in the room
17. squeak skwiːk *vi.* < > *by, through*
18. venerable 'venərəbl *a.*
19. AFL-CIO *abbr.* American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization

Change to Win. (The dissident[20] unions included the Service Employees International Union and UniteHere[21].)

On the surface, the fight was mostly about the pace of organizing, with the breakaway group pledging more aggressive moves to enlist members. But the dissidents also counted more low-wage immigrants in their membership.

As Daniel B. Cornfield, a labor scholar at Vanderbilt University, said, the immigrants' marginal (and sometimes illegal) status created a constituency[22] for a more aggressive approach. "I don't think it was a split about immigration, but immigration shaped the split," he said.

The split, in turn, has had repercussions[23] beyond the labor movement. Janice Fine, a political scientist at Rutgers University, noted that the Change to Win unions played an important (some have argued decisive) role in the early stages of Mr. Obama's presidential campaign.

"If they were inside the larger bureaucracy, it would have been harder for them to make an early endorsement[24] and move money his way," Professor Fine said.

Theorists sometimes call the movement of people the third wave of globalization, after the movement of goods (trade) and the movement of money (finance) that began in the previous century. But trade and finance follow global norms[25] and are governed by global institutions: the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund. There is no parallel group with

Arizona's House has passed the nation's toughest legislation against illegal immigrants, making it a state crime to be undocumented in the United States and compelling local law enforcement agencies to verify the status of anyone suspected of being an illegal immigrant.

"migration" in its name. The most personal and perilous[26] form of movement is the most unregulated. States make (and often ignore) their own rules, deciding who can come, how long they stay, and what rights they enjoy.

While global trade and finance are disruptive—some would argue as much as migration—they are disruptive in less visible ways. A shirt made in Mexico can cost an American worker his job. A worker from Mexico might move next door, send his children to public school and need to be spoken to in Spanish.

One reason migration seems so potent[27] is that it arose unexpectedly. As recently as the 1970s, immigration seemed of such little importance that the United States Census ▶

Bureau decided to stop asking people where their parents were born. Now, a quarter of the residents of the United States under 18 are immigrants or immigrants' children.

The United Nations estimates that there are 214 million migrants across the globe, an increase of about 37 percent in two decades. Their ranks grew by 41 percent in Europe and 80 percent in North America. "There's more mobility at this moment than at any time in world history," said Gary P. Freeman, a political scientist at the University of Texas.

The most famous source countries in Europe—Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain—are suddenly migrant destinations, with Ireland electing a Nigerian-born man as its first black mayor in 2007.

As heirs to an immigrant past, Americans may have an edge in a migrants' age. As contentious[28] as the issue is here, the Americans' capacity to absorb immigrants remains the envy of many Europeans (including those not inclined to envy Americans). Still, today's challenges differ from those of the (mythologized[29]) past. At least five differences set this age apart and amplify[30] migration's effects.

First is migration's global reach. The movements of the 19th century were mostly trans-Atlantic. Now, Nepalis staff Korean factories and Mongolians do scut[31] work in Prague. Persian Gulf economies would collapse without armies of guest workers. Even within the United States, immigrants are spread across dozens of "new gateways" unaccustomed to them, from Orlando to Salt Lake City.

A second distinguishing trait is the money involved, which not only sustains the families left behind but props up national economies. Migrants sent home $317 billion last year—three times the world's total foreign aid. In at least seven countries, remittances[32] account for more than a quarter of the gross domestic product.

A third factor that increases migration's impact is its feminization[33]: Nearly half of the world's migrants are now women, and many have left children behind. Their emergence as breadwinners[34] is altering family dynamics across the ►

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20. dissident ˈdɪsɪdənt n.
21. Unite Here: Unite   Here
          2004   。
22. constituency kənˈstɪtjuənsɪ n.
23. repercussion ˌriːpəˈkʌʃən n. [~s]

24. endorsement ɪnˈdɔːsmənt n.

25. norm nɔːm n.
26. perilous ˈperɪləs a.

27. potent ˈpəʊtənt a.
28. contentious kənˈtenʃəs a.
29. mythologize mɪˈθɒləˌdʒaɪz vt. …

30. amplify ˈæmplɪfaɪ vt.
31. scut skʌt n. <   >
32. remittance rɪˈmɪtəns n.
33. feminization ˌfemɪnaɪˈzeɪʃən n.
34. breadwinner ˈbredˌwɪnə(r) n.

developing world. Migration empowers[35] some, but imperils others, with sex trafficking now a global concern.
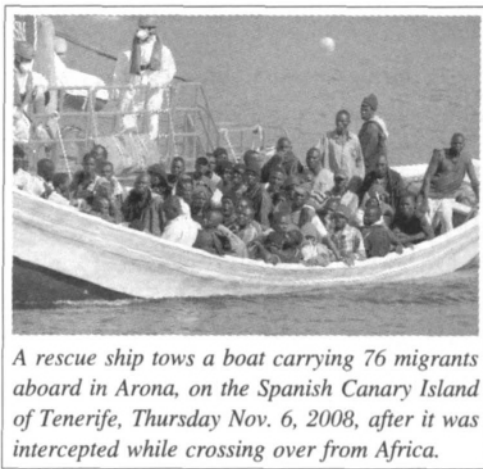
Technology introduces a fourth break from the past: The huddled masses reached *Ellis Island[36] without cellphones or Webcams. Now a nanny in Manhattan can talk to her child in Zacatecas[37], vote in Mexican elections and watch Mexican television shows.

"Transnationalism" is a comfort but also a concern for those who think it impedes[38] integration. In the age of global jihad[39], it may also be a security threat. The Pakistani immigrant who *pleaded guilty[40] last week to the attempted bombing of Times Square said that jihadi lectures reached him from Yemen, via the Internet.

At least one other trait amplifies the impact of modern migration: The expectation that governments will control it. In America for most of the 19th century, there was no legal barrier to entry. The issue was contentious, but the government attracted little blame. Now Western governments are expected to keep trade and tourism flowing and respect ethnic rights while sealing borders as vast as the Arizona desert and the Mediterranean Sea. Their failures—glaring[41] if perhaps inevitable—weaken the broader faith in federal competence.

A rescue ship tows a boat carrying 76 migrants aboard in Arona, on the Spanish Canary Island of Tenerife, Thursday Nov. 6, 2008, after it was intercepted while crossing over from Africa.

"It basically tells people that government cannot do its job," said Demetri Papademetriou, a co-founder of the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington research group. "It creates the anti-government rhetoric we see, and the anger people are feeling."

Still, rich, aging countries need workers. People in poor countries need jobs. And the rise in global inequality means that migrants have more than ever to gain by landing[42] work abroad. Migration networks are hard to shut down. Even the worst economy in 70 years has only slowed, not stopped, the growth in migration. And it is likely to grow, in numbers and consequence. ■

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35. empower ɪmˈpaʊə(r) *vt.*
36. Ellis Island   1892   1943   [1954   ]
37. Zacatecas   [   ]
38. impede ɪmˈpiːd *vt.*
39. jihad dʒɪˈhɑːd *n.*
40. plead guilty
41. glaring ˈɡleərɪŋ *a.*
42. land lænd *vt.*