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Delegation in Immigration Law

Eric A. Posner

Adam B. Cox

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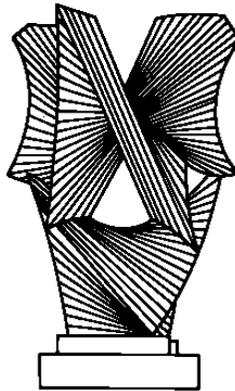
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DELEGATION IN IMMIGRATION LAW

Adam B. Cox and Eric A. Posner

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DELEGATION IN IMMIGRATION LAW

Adam B. Cox and Eric A. Posner[†]

September 1, 2011

Immigration law both screens migrants and regulates the behavior of migrants after they have arrived. Both activities are information-intensive because the migrant’s “type” and the migrant’s post-arrival activity are often forms of private information that are not immediately accessible to government agents. To overcome this information problem, the national government can delegate the screening and regulation functions. American immigration law, for example, delegates extensive authority to both private entities—paradigmatically, employers and families—and to the fifty states. From the government’s perspective, delegation carries with it benefits and costs. On the benefit side, agents frequently have easy access to information about the types and activities of migrants, and can cheaply monitor and control them. On the cost side, agents’ preferences are not always aligned with those of the national government. The national government can ameliorate these costs by giving agents incentives to act consistently with the government’s interests. Understanding these virtues and vices of delegation sheds light on longstanding debates about the roles that employers, families, and states play in American immigration law.

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[†] Professor of Law, NYU School of Law, and Kirkland and Ellis Professor of Law, University of Chicago Law School. Thanks to workshop participants at the University of Chicago Law School, and to David Woolston for research assistance.

INTRODUCTION

American immigration law is widely understood to consolidate power in the political branches of the national government. The field’s central jurisprudential feature—the doctrine of immigration “plenary power”—is taken to stand for the proposition that the federal government has nearly unfettered authority to decide which migrants to admit and deport from the United States.¹ This authority is embodied in the Immigration and Nationality Act, a prolix code that appears to describe in painstakingly intricate detail the rules that govern the screening and conduct of immigrants.² And this power is jealously guarded by the federal government: when Arizona recently enacted its own immigration-related legislation, the United States took the nearly unprecedented step of suing the state, arguing that Arizona’s statute could not stand because the national government holds *exclusive* authority over the admission of immigrants.³ Given these features, it is unsurprising that American immigration law is seldom thought to involve significant delegation of the core power to decide who gets to live in the United States. In fact, some scholars have argued that the nature of the immigration “plenary power” is such that the federal government may be constitutionally prohibited from delegating its authority to other actors.⁴

Despite this conventional wisdom, this Article demonstrates that delegation is pervasive in American immigration law. The federal government rarely makes decisions on its own about which immigrants should be admitted. Instead, it delegates to agents outside the federal government tremendous power to select the “types” of migrants who are admitted—to make decisions about the nature of their labor market skills, the level of their language proficiency, their likelihood of success in the United States, and so forth.⁵ Even more surprisingly, it also delegates

¹ See, e.g., *Chae Chan Ping v. United States*, 130 U.S. 581 (1889); see generally Stephen Legomsky, *Immigration Law and the Principle of Plenary Congressional Power*, 1984 SUP. CT. REV. 255; Gabriel Chin, *Chae Chan Ping and Fong Yue Ting: The Origins of Plenary Power*, in IMMIGRATION LAW STORIES (Martin & Schuck, eds. 2005).

² See INA §§ 101 et seq., 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101 et seq. (2010).

³ See Complaint in *United States v. Arizona*, at 8 (July 6, 2010) (“Congress holds exclusive authority for establishing alien status categories and setting the conditions of aliens’ entry and continued presence.”), available at <http://www.justice.gov/opa/documents/az-complaint.pdf>. See also *United States v. Arizona*, 10-16645, 2011 WL 1346945 (9th Cir. Apr. 11, 2011).

⁴ See, e.g., Michael J. Wishnie, *Laboratories of Bigotry: Devolution of the Immigration Power, Equal Protection, and Federalism*, 76 N.Y.U. L. REV. 493 (2001).

⁵ In most cases, the federal government does set the overall numerical limits on migration, even as it delegates significant power to pick among different prospective migrants. In some cases, however, the agents are empowered to select migrants who are exempt from the quota system—and in this way alter the overall number of migrants admitted. See INA § 203(a), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(a) (2009); *infra* text accompanying notes 89-92.

significant power to these agents to control migrants once they arrive in the country, and to decide whether they should be deported.⁶

In theory these immigration decisions could be given over to any of a vast number of possible agents, ranging from individual citizens, to private organizations like universities and religious organizations, to international entities or perhaps even other nations. And while many different agents do play some role in American immigration law, two prominent private agents stand out—employers and families. Employers are given wide powers to choose which foreign workers will be awarded coveted labor migration visas. They often also have the power to remove those workers from the country.⁷ Similarly, the federal government delegates to family members the power to select immigrants by filing petitions on behalf of their foreign-born spouses, children, and other relatives—who without the sponsoring family member’s petition could never legally migrate to the United States.⁸

Moreover, in addition to these private agents the federal government often delegates significant screening and regulatory authority over immigrants to states and local governments. This basic fact was overlooked in the brouhaha surrounding *United States v. Arizona*, in which the U.S. government challenged an Arizona law that criminalized certain U.S. immigration law violations, thus raising the effective sanction from violating federal immigration law.⁹ Some of the commentary suggested that Arizona had violated basic legal principles by enacting migration-related laws that supposedly lie outside the authority of the states. In fact, Arizona’s attempt to strengthen the enforcement of federal law has many precedents, and in other contexts the U.S. government encourages such behavior. The problem was that, in this case, the U.S. government believed that Arizona’s law was unwise for policy reasons and sought, in effect, to withdraw certain delegated powers so as to curtail Arizona’s enforcement strategy.¹⁰

The American approach is radically different from that used by most other countries. Rather than use a bottom-up, decentralized approach to admit immigrants, these nations employ a top-down approach in which the government determines the number and type of people who will be admitted each year either as temporary workers or permanent migrants. In Canada, for example, the government

⁶ Even within the federal government there are large-scale delegations to the President that have often been overlooked by immigration scholars. For an extended discussion of the importance of this delegation, see Adam B. Cox & Cristina Rodriguez, *The President and Immigration Law*, 119 YALE L. J. 458 (2010).

⁷ See *infra* Part II.

⁸ See *infra* Part III.

⁹ *United States v. Arizona*, 10-16645, 2011 WL 1346945 (9th Cir. Apr. 11, 2011).

¹⁰ See *infra* Part IV.

uses a merit-based points system, which assigns higher points to migrants with strong credentials, useful experience, language ability, and related characteristics.¹¹

Approaches like Canada's seem to set up a screening mechanism that provides the best way of distinguishing between the types of migrants a state values and those it does not. And, in fact, this was a criticism leveled against the U.S. system during the last major round of congressional debates about comprehensive immigration reform. During those debates, many advocates argued that the U.S. should shift toward a more top-down approach like Canada's. Indeed, one prominent proposed amendment to the legislation would have scrapped much of our existing system and replaced it with a points-based system similar to Canada's.¹²

Given the seeming rationality of such an approach, what could justify the comparatively decentralized nature of U.S. immigration policy? This Article argues that delegating to agents (partial) authority to admit foreign migrants enables the government to exploit the informational advantages of those agents. As the standard principal-agent model suggests, individuals and institutions can obtain significant gains by delegating authority to agents in a range of circumstances.¹³ In the case of the immigration system, the U.S. government can obtain better migration outcomes—admitting more socially valuable migrants while excluding less socially valuable migrants—by delegating the decision-making to agents. Employers can often do a far superior job of evaluating the productivity of foreign workers. Family members are generally in a better position than the government to evaluate the capability of potential migrants to integrate after arrival. And states have more information about local immigration conditions—and vastly more information about where individual immigrants are located—than does the federal government.

But the principal-agent model also teaches that agents can take actions that diverge from the principal's interests, and that principals need to construct contracts or (in the immigration setting) rules that provide agents with proper incentives. We argue that the employer and family sponsorship systems can be understood as reflecting these tradeoffs. The delegation to private agents and to states and local governments is partial. In many cases, the restrictions imposed on the agents' decisionmaking powers can be seen as efforts to align the agents' incentives with those of the federal government, or at least to blunt shirking when those interests inevitably come into conflict. Employers cannot admit workers who will inflict certain negative impacts on the U.S. labor market.¹⁴ Family members are by

¹¹ See Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Six Selection Factors and Pass Mark, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/apply-factors.asp>; see also *infra* Part II.D (discussing points systems for labor migration).

¹² See Citizenship and Immigration Canada, <http://cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/busimm.asp>.

¹³ See *infra* Part I.

¹⁴ See *infra* Part II.

definition limited to picking from a very small pool of prospective migrants—except in the case of marriage, where complex rules discourage the agents from selling their spousal sponsorship to the highest bidder.¹⁵ And state and local governmental actors face a monitoring scheme designed to curb both under- and overzealous screening behavior by those actors.

Principal-agent models can therefore help us better understand and evaluate the structure of American immigration law. In what follows, we show how the theory provides an important defense of some oft-criticized features of the U.S. system. However, we do not argue that the U.S. system is the best possible. We identify a number of features that are perverse from a principle-agent perspective, suggesting grounds on which those features should be reformed. Moreover, the introduction of a new way of thinking about immigration delegation raises larger questions that are beyond this Article’s scope of inquiry—such as questions about what other potential agents an institutional designer might employ were she structuring the immigration system from scratch.

This Article builds on two earlier articles on what we call the second-order structure of immigration law—the legal rules that are designed to promote certain first-order migration goals.¹⁶ While we are interested principally in these second-order questions, as in our earlier work we must make some assumptions about first-order goals in order to motivate the analysis. Throughout the Article we draw these assumptions about first-order goals from the structure of immigration law itself: they include broad assumptions that the government would like to control the flow of both the numbers and types of immigrants, as well as more specific assumptions—for example, that the government would like to increase the pool of human capital available to U.S. employers, or perhaps even promote a certain racial, ethnic, or cultural mix among immigrants. As in our earlier work, our central interest is not the defensibility of the particular goals we discuss. It is, instead, the relationship between these goals and the use of delegation as a second-order design strategy in immigration law.

Part I of this article sets out the theoretical framework. Parts II, III, and IV apply the framework to employers, families, and the states.

I. PRINCIPALS, AGENTS, AND DELEGATION

Delegation refers to the transfer of authority from one party to another, with the expectation that the delegate (or “agent”) will use that authority to achieve the

¹⁵ See *infra* Part III.B.

¹⁶ See Adam B. Cox & Eric A. Posner, *The Second-Order Structure of Immigration Law*, 59 Stan. L. Rev. 809 (2007) [hereinafter Cox & Posner, *Second-Order Structure*]; Adam B. Cox & Eric A. Posner, *The Rights of Migrants: An Optimal Contract Framework*, 84 N.Y.U. L. Rev. 1403 (2009) [hereinafter Cox & Posner, *Rights of Migrants*].

goals of the other party (the “principal”). Such agency relationships are ubiquitous. Employers delegate power to employees; governments delegate power to agencies; firms delegate power to outside contractors. The essence of the agency relationship is the superior information of the agent: the principal delegates to the agent in order to take advantage of the agent’s expertise; but because the agent has better information than the principal, the principal will have difficulty monitoring the agent and ensuring that the agent acts in the principal’s interest. Economists and political scientists use principal-agent models to analyze these relationships.¹⁷

In a principal-agent model, the principal hires an agent to perform a task that benefits the principal. The agent’s preferences and the principal’s preferences are not the same. In some models, the agent chooses between a high level of effort and a low level of effort (“shirking”). The agent prefers to engage in the low level of effort because it is less work, but the principal gains more from the high level of effort. In order to encourage the agent to engage in the high level of effort, the principal must give the agent incentives. In other models, the principal and agent have different goals. “Shirking” now means that the agent pursues her own goals rather than the goals of the principal; again, the principal must give the agent incentives to encourage her to achieve the principal’s goals. In both models, the principal cannot directly observe what the agent does and give her a reward for engaging in a high level effort and punish her for engaging in a low level of effort. If the principal could do this, the problem would be easily solved. The principal would simply reward the agent for a high level of effort and punish the agent for a low level of effort, and the agent would respond by engaging in the high level of effort.

Because the principal cannot directly observe what the agent does, the principal can reward or punish her only on the basis of the observed outcome of her action. But effort and outcome are not perfectly related: this is what makes it difficult for the principal to monitor the agent directly. A high level of effort will thus sometimes lead to a bad outcome for the principal, and a low level of effort will sometimes lead to a good outcome for the principal. A principal can give an agent optimal incentives by rewarding her if the optimal outcome occurs and punishing her if the bad outcome occurs. To maximize her expected payoff, the agent will use the high level of effort even though there is a chance that the bad outcome will nonetheless occur and she will be punished. But many people would turn down such a scheme. Even if the chance of being rewarded for low effort (an unfair reward) is equal to the chance to being punished for high effort (an unfair punishment), a risk-averse agent will be reluctant to enter into such an agency relationship. In such situations, the principal will have to moderate the reward and punishment to entice the prospective agent to accept the delegation—in effect, insuring the agent against the bad outcome. This insurance blunts the agent’s incentives, leading a rational agent to invest less effort in the task.

¹⁷ See, e.g., JEAN-JACQUES LAFFONT & DAVID MARTIMORT, *THE THEORY OF INCENTIVES: THE PRINCIPAL-AGENT MODEL* (2002).

Immigration law pervasively raises the sort of information problems that are frequently addressed through delegation. As we have written elsewhere, migration policy in large receiving nations like the United States presents a screening problem.¹⁸ The state would like to control the “types” of migrants who are admitted—where a migrant’s “type” refers to characteristics of the migrant that make her “desirable” to the state, however those characteristics or a migrant’s desirability might be defined. For example, states often seek migrants who are highly-skilled. These migrants will make money, contribute skills to citizens they interact with, start businesses, and help finance public goods through their taxes. Nations also often seek migrants who possess or are likely to invest in country-specific human capital—that is, skills that are valuable only within the receiving country.¹⁹ These migrants include those who speak the dominant language (or can quickly learn it), have personal connections with existing residents, share the dominant culture’s values, and understand (or can quickly learn) the prevailing social norms.²⁰ For many states, such migrants—those who have skills that are in high demand, or possess country-specific human capital, or (ideally) both—are considered “good types.” The problem is that a migrant’s type is hidden information. The migrant knows her type but the government does not. The government thus faces what economists call a hidden information (or screening) problem.

The information problems for the state do not disappear once the migrants are selected. The state also cares about what the migrants do once they arrive. For example, states often want new migrants to work and make country-specific invests. But not all migrants will act in this way. States will thus worry that migrants will arrive and shirk by underinvesting in their country-specific human capital, by failing to integrate, or worse by entering the social welfare system or turning to crime.²¹ Even good types might display such bad behavior, though they are less likely to do so than bad types. The problem for the government is that migrants who engage in bad behavior may be difficult to detect, punish, and (if necessary) remove. The government thus faces what economists call a hidden action (or moral hazard) problem.

A state can address these two problems—hidden information and hidden action—without delegating authority to those outside the national government. Ex ante, the government can try to screen out bad types by demanding proof of work

¹⁸ See Cox & Posner, *Second-Order Structure*, *supra* note 16.

¹⁹ For the definition of country-specific human capital, see Cox & Posner, *Second-Order Structure*, *supra* note 16, at 828.

²⁰ See *id.*

²¹ See Gordon H. Hanson, *The Governance of Migration Policy*, 11 *Journal of Human Development & Capabilities* 2, 185 (2010) (examining the fiscal incentives of high-income countries with regard to immigration policy, and discussing how fiscal policy drives immigration policy in such nations).

and language skills, or requiring migrants to take exams before they are admitted.²² Ex post, the government can screen out bad types by relying on information acquired after the migrant arrives—information about their success in the labor force, their criminal record, and so forth.²³ It can also try to control migrant behavior by employing both carrots and sticks—granting rights to migrants to provide security and encourage investments and integration, for example, or threatening to deport anyone who cannot keep a job in order to incentivize employment.²⁴

Most states, including the United States, employ these approaches.²⁵ But they can be supplemented with delegation to agents outside the national government. Private parties will often have superior information about how productive a migrant might be, about how likely it is that she will put down roots in the receiving state, and so on—about all of the attributes that the state might consider important to identifying the “good types” from within the huge pool of potential migrants. Employers, families, universities, religious organizations, and others might all fit this bill. In some cases smaller units of government—like U.S. states or local governments—will also have better information. Moreover, these various potential agents will also often be in a better position than the federal government to monitor the migrants and control their behavior after they arrive.

This possibility is often overlooked in discussions of immigration law. Part of the reason, as we noted above, is that American immigration law is not generally thought to involve much, if any, delegation of power. Instead, the federal government is typically described as jealously guarding its “plenary power” over immigration. The structure of the federal immigration code contributes to this way of thinking. The Immigration and Nationality Act runs hundreds of pages, leaving the impression that Congress has laid out, intricately and comprehensively, the rules that govern the screening and conduct of immigrants.

To be sure, the possibility of delegation has not gone entirely unnoticed in recent years. One of us has written elsewhere about the structure of delegation *within* the national government.²⁶ Moreover, the surge in scholarship focusing on second-order issues in immigration law has led other scholars to identify particular, isolated

²² See, for example, the Canadian entrance requirement of language proficiency testing, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/factor-language.asp>.

²³ For an extensive discussion of the choice states face between ex ante and ex post screening, see Cox & Posner, *Second-Order Structure*, *supra* note 16.

²⁴ For a discussion of how states can use rights to encourage investment by migrants, see Cox & Posner, *The Rights of Migrants*, *supra* note 16.

²⁵ See, e.g., INA §§ 212, 237, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1182, 1227 (specifying conditions under which aliens can be deported both for committing certain crimes or for violating the terms under which they were admitted).

²⁶ See Cox & Rodriguez, *supra* note 6.

instances where immigration enforcement authority has been delegated to private parties.²⁷ But these papers generally conceptualize private delegation as unusual and as focused almost exclusively on questions of enforcement—that is, the identification of immigration violators. As we will show, delegation is not unusual or limited to the periphery of immigration law; delegation is thoroughgoing and affects the vast majority of immigration decisions. Moreover, delegation does not exclusively, or even principally, concern enforcement. The national government has given over to private parties authority to shape core selection decisions in immigration law—to decide what types of people should have lawful immigrant status in the United States, not just to identify those who have violated their status.

Our aim in the following Parts is twofold. The first is descriptive: we explain how three different groups of agents—employers, family members, and sub-federal units of government—have been given significant control over who gets to come to the United States and over who is forced to leave, and we explore the scope and limitations of the delegation to each group of agents. The second goal is theoretical: we provide a framework for analyzing the trade-offs that the government faces when it is deciding whether, and to what extent, to delegate immigration authority. Principal-agent theory highlights the balancing act the national government faces with respect to each type of agent. The government can take advantage of the superior information of the agent by giving the agent some power to select migrants and control their behavior. But because the interests of agents always diverge, a little or a lot, from the interests of the national government, there are serious costs to giving too much power to the agents. To show how states can combat these costs, we draw on an extensive economics literature about designing institutions to mitigate agency costs.

Consistent with our previous work, this theoretical framework focuses on second-order design issues rather than first-order policy goals. It also continues to explore the ways in which the information problems posed by immigration law are central to the design of immigration institutions. Before proceeding, we should emphasize that the arguments in the following Parts about the structure of delegation within immigration law are not causal claims. The theoretical framework we provide can help explain and justify certain patterns of delegation, but we do not mean to suggest that the theory necessarily explains *why* the United States has structured immigration delegation as it has. In some cases—such as with respect to the spousal visa requirements—the evolution of legal rules suggests that the government was in fact focused, at least implicitly, on principal-agent issues. In other areas, of course, the evolution of immigration law is more likely the product of interest group politics or simple historical happenstance. Irrespective of the origins

²⁷ See Eleanor Marie Lawrence Brown, *An Addendum to Cox and Posner: A Visa to Snitch*, NOTRE DAME L. REV. (forthcoming 2011); Eleanor Marie Lawrence Brown, *Outsourcing Immigration Compliance*, 77 FORDHAM L. REV. 2475 (2009); Stephen Lee, *Private Immigration Screening in the Workplace*, 61 STAN. L. REV. 1103 (2009); Huyem Pham, *The Private Enforcement of Immigration Laws*, 96 GEO. L.J. 777 (2008).

of delegation in immigration law, however, understanding delegation's theoretical underpinnings is crucial to evaluating the current structure and future design of American immigration law.

II. EMPLOYERS

A. *Labor Immigration Rules*

American immigration law contains two tracks for labor migration. The first is for noncitizens who intend to settle permanently in the United States—people whom the Immigration and Nationality Act (“INA”) defines as “immigrants.”²⁸ The second track is for putatively temporary workers, who are defined by the INA as “nonimmigrants.”²⁹ The INA sets aside 140,000 slots per year for the first group and allocates slots according to a system of five preferences.³⁰ The first preference is for “priority workers” consisting of persons of “extraordinary ability,” internationally recognized professors and researchers, and executives of corporations with affiliates in the United States. The second preference is for professionals with advanced degrees and exceptionally talented people in the arts, sciences, and business. The third preference is for skilled workers in short supply and professionals holding baccalaureate degrees. These three preferences receive most of the immigration slots, with the fourth and fifth preferences being allocated a smaller number of visas for religious workers, former employees of the U.S. government and international organizations, and investors who will invest at least \$10 million in the U.S. economy and create at least ten jobs for Americans.³¹

Noncitizens seeking admission under the first three categories must usually be sponsored by an employer. Some persons of extraordinary ability are excused from this requirement, as are certain others—for example, physicians with skills in areas where shortages exist who agree to work for at least five years.³² For those people who are not excused, the employer must submit a petition for labor certification.³³ To obtain a labor certification, the employer must prove that “there are not sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified . . . and available at the time of application for a visa . . . at the place where the alien is to perform such skilled or unskilled labor,” and that “the employment of such alien will not adversely affect the

²⁸ See INA § 101(a)(15), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15) (2009).

²⁹ See *id.*

³⁰ See INA § 201, 8 U.S.C. § 1151 (2009). For a general overview of the labor immigration rules, which are often difficult to deduce from the INA itself, see DAVID WEISSBRODT & LAURA DANIELSON, IMMIGRATION LAW AND PROCEDURE IN A NUTSHELL 154-72 (6th ed. 2010); ALEINIKOFF ET AL., IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP: PROCESS AND POLICY 161-166 (6th ed. 2008).

³¹ See WEISSBRODT & DANIELSON, *supra* note 31, at 154-72.

³² See INA § 203(b)(2)(B)(ii), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)(B)(ii) (2009).

³³ See INA § 203(b), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b) (2009).

wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed.”³⁴ To prove that these conditions are satisfied, the employer must advertise the exact position—with the same duties and compensation—and show that no U.S. worker applied for the job or those who did apply were rejected because they did not qualify for it.

If the application of an immigrant worker is approved, she may settle in the United States. Importantly, the immigrant is not required to stay in the position offered by the sponsoring employer. She is admitted as a lawful permanent resident (“LPR”), a visa status that does not limit the duration of her stay and does not require her to work at all—let alone for her sponsoring employer—in order to maintain her visa status.

Temporary or non-immigrant workers are those who do not intend to settle in the United States but plan to return to their country of origin. These workers apply for H visas, of which approximately 420,000 were issued in 2009.³⁵ We will focus on two types of visa: the H-1B visa for workers in “specialty occupations,” which are those which require “a body of highly specialized knowledge;”³⁶ and the H-2A visa for workers who will perform “temporary (or seasonal)” work, normally in agriculture.³⁷

The government issues H-1B visas up to a cap of 65,000, though the number can exceed that amount because of various loopholes and typically does.³⁸ These visas are reserved for employees in “specialty occupations”.³⁹ In order to obtain H-

³⁴ INA § 212(a)(5)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(5)(A).

³⁵ See Characteristics of H-1B Specialty Occupation Workers, Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Report, ii (2010), <http://www.uscis.gov/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/H-1B/h1b-fy-09-characteristics.pdf> (providing data on H-1B visas); Randall Monger & Macreadie Barr, Nonimmigrant Admissions to the U.S.: 2009, Annual Flow Report, Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, 4, (2010), http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ni_fr_2009.pdf (providing data on H-2 visas and the breakdown by type of visa). We should note that federal estimates of the size of the H visa programs vary. DHS issued two reports for FY09 that reached different estimates for the total number of H-1B visas granted, and its estimate for H-2A visas granted (approximately 206,000) differs from the estimates by the Department of State (approximately 100,000) and the Department of Labor (approximately 250,000). For a collection of these varying figures, see http://www.globalworkers.org/PDF/061110_H2_2009.pdf.

³⁶ INA § 214(i)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1)(A) (2009). See also Weissbrodt & Danielson, *supra* note ___ at 200-207.

³⁷ INA § 218, 8 U.S.C. § 1188 (2009). See also Weissbrodt & Danielson, *supra* note ___ at 159-164.

³⁸ See Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, Characteristics of H-1B Specialty Occupation Workers 3 (2010), <http://www.uscis.gov/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/H-1B/h1b-fy-09-characteristics.pdf>.

³⁹ See *infra* note 59.

1B visas, workers must obtain employer sponsorship.⁴⁰ Employers are required to file a Labor Condition Application which states that the worker will be paid at least as much as existing employees in the same occupation, that the position will not harm similarly situated U.S. workers, and that the employer is not involved in a labor dispute.⁴¹ H-1B status lasts for three years and may be extended to six years. If a person with H-1B status wants to continue working in the United States after the end of six years, he or she must leave the country for one year and then reapply for the visa. However, an H-1B visa holder may apply for permanent immigration and will enjoy certain procedural benefits compared to other applicants residing inside or outside the United States.⁴²

A temporary worker with H-1B status faces serious restrictions on job mobility: the baseline rule is that her visa is valid only as long as she remains employed with the employer who sponsored her.⁴³ Unlike an immigrant worker, therefore, she cannot quit and change jobs whenever she wants. As we will explain more fully below, however, there is some limited visa “portability.” A nonimmigrant worker with H-1B status may apply for a job with an employer who is willing to sponsor her for a new H-1B visa, and to take that position as soon as the employer files a petition.⁴⁴

Agricultural employers who need seasonal labor may take advantage of the H-2A program. Workers are admitted for a limited period of less than one year.⁴⁵ The workers do not need any special qualifications—they may be unskilled—but the employer must show that “there are not sufficient U.S. workers who are able, willing, and qualified, and who will be available at the time and place needed”⁴⁶ and that the employment of H-2A workers will “not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the U.S. similarly employed.”⁴⁷ H-2A workers must be paid the prevailing wage that would be paid to U.S. workers.⁴⁸ Like H-1B visa holders, H-2A migrants lack job mobility. But their visas are even more restrictive: during the term of their visas, H-2A holders are prohibited from seeking new jobs with different sponsoring employers.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ INA § 214(c), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c) (2009).

⁴¹ INA § 212(n), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n) (2009).

⁴² *See* Pub. L. 106-313, 114 Stat. 1251 (2000).

⁴³ INA § 214(n), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(n) (2009) (if an H-1B holder leaves the employer that sponsored his H-1B and the petition of his next prospective employer is denied, his authorization status ceases).

⁴⁴ INA § 214(n), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(n) (2009).

⁴⁵ 20 C.F.R. § 655.103; *see generally* <http://www.dol.gov/compliance/guide/taw.htm>.

⁴⁶ INA § 218(a)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(a)(1)(A) (2009).

⁴⁷ INA § 218(a)(1)(B), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(a)(1)(B) (2009).

⁴⁸ INA § 218(c)(3)(B)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(c)(3)(B)(i) (2009); *see also* 20 C.F.R. § 655.10 (describing process to determine prevailing wages for temporary labor certification purposes).

⁴⁹ *See* INA § 214(n), 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), 214(i)(1).

The central feature of this system is the partial or constrained delegation of authority to employers to select permanent immigrant workers and temporary nonimmigrant workers. Employers are given primary authority to select workers from the vast pool of noncitizens who seek work in the United States, but they must meet several criteria—including chiefly the requirements that the worker have significant qualifications and will not compete with U.S. workers. Another feature of the system that is of interest is that of portability: immigrant workers have portability while nonimmigrant workers for the most part lack portability.

B. *The First-Order Goal of Employment Migration Policy*

To understand why the government might delegate screening authority to employers, we first need some sense of why the government would want to admit any labor migrants. The first-order goals of labor migration are likely quite complex, but it is reasonable to assume that the government seeks labor migrants who are productive and have preferences for public goods that are close to those of the median citizen. It is also reasonable to assume that the government wants to avoid migration that reduces the wages of Americans and causes job loss. But how can the government both seek additional workers—which by augmenting supply necessarily depress wages—and avoid migration that reduces wages?⁵⁰

One possibility is that migrants enter industries for which there are literally no qualified American workers who will work for any wage. But there are probably few industries for which this is true—translation of materials from or into obscure languages may be example. It is sometimes said that U.S. citizens will not work as gardeners or nannies or nurses, but that statement is clearly false; the problem is that U.S. citizens will not work in sufficient numbers at the prevailing wage rather than at some higher wage. To make sense of American labor migration policy, we might imagine that some domestic industries are periodically hit by shocks that greatly augment the demand for their products and hence the demand for labor. The classic example was the dot-com boom which resulted from the development of the Internet.⁵¹ As the firms competed for software engineers, the wages of American software engineers skyrocketed. The migration of vast numbers of foreign software engineers, mainly from South Asia, would, of course, suppress domestic wages relative to what they would have been in the absence of the migration—but those wages would have risen more slowly rather than declined—and the migration would not have caused unemployment.⁵² For that reason, resistance among workers to the

⁵⁰ One theoretical possibility is that migrants will augment the demand for domestically produced goods, leading to higher wages for U.S. workers, although not necessarily those in the same industry as the migrant.

⁵¹ See John Schwartz, *Dot-Com is Dot-Gone, And the Dream With It*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 25, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/25/style/dot-com-is-dot-gone-and-the-dream-with-it.html> (discussing the dot-com boom and its subsequent bust).

⁵² See Norman Matloff, *High-Tech Cheap Labor*, WASH. POST, Sep. 12, 2000, at A35 (discussing lobbying by computer industry CEO's to raise the quota for H-1B work visas in response to increased demand

migration would likely have been minimal. At the same time, employers, consumer groups, and businesses that use computer products would have a strong interest in lower prices (or higher profits, in the case of employers) and for that reason would support the migration.⁵³ Thus, permitting short-term migration following exogenous shocks that increase the demand for labor is perhaps the easiest case from the government's perspective.

There are several problems with this theory. First, the quotas for temporary employment visas are in practice quite sticky. While the quotas are occasionally changed by Congress—the dot-com boom being one example—for the most part they remain unchanged year after year, even while labor market conditions are fluctuating significantly.⁵⁴ Second, the same industries tend to receive most of the H-1B and H-2A workers year after year.⁵⁵ This makes it look like the programs are more the product of interest group politics and inertia. Third, a theory grounded in labor market shocks cannot account for the large-scale system of permanent labor migration. Permanent migration appears instead to reflect a goal of improving the aggregate stock of human capital.

As this thumbnail sketch suggests, the wage and employment effects of labor migration are extremely complicated and contested. Nonetheless, the INA appears to reflect the twin goals of (1) increasing the labor supply in response to labor shortages (that in theory are most likely to arise in response to exogenous shocks to the labor market), and (2) upgrading the stock of human capital available to domestic employers even in the absence of any shortage of workers. In what follows, we explore what structure of delegation can best advance these first-order goals.

for high-tech laborers during the dot-com boom); John P. De New & Klaus F. Zimmermann, *Native Wage Impacts of Foreign Labor: a Random Effects Panel Analysis*, 7 J. of Population Econ. 2, 177 (1994) (examining the labor market impacts of foreign workers on native worker salary and unemployment figures).

⁵³ See Norman Matloff, *High-Tech Trojan Horse: H-1B Visas and the Computer Industry*, Center for Immigration Studies Backgrounders and Reports (Sept. 1999) (discussing the tech industry's lobbying efforts to raise the H-1B quota and the resulting legislation); S. Res. 1440, 106th Cong. (1999) (proposed legislation to increase the H-1B visa quota; H.R. 2687 (1999) (proposed legislation to extend the duration of H-1B visas).

⁵⁴ See Pub. L. 106-313, 114 Stat. 1251 (2000) (raising the H-1B limit to 195,000 for FY 2001 to 2003). For annual reports on H-1B quotas and petitions, see the annual reports produced by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, available at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.cb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=9a1d9ddf801b3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=9a1d9ddf801b3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD>.

⁵⁵ See John Miano, *H-1B Visa Numbers: No Relationship to Economic Need*, Center for Immigration Studies Backgrounders and Reports (June 2008) (examining the consistency of the breakdown of H-1B visas allocated by industry).

C. The Advantages from Delegation to Employers

Employers will generally have better information than the government about the quality (in particular, productivity) of potential applicants. Employers can better evaluate credentials, such as diplomas, and the quality of the match between the applicant's talents and the employer's needs. In addition, the employer will have better information about the local labor market—the availability of U.S. workers who could perform the same job. It is possible, although less certain, that employers will be in a better position than the government to evaluate the applicant's preferences about public goods, which may be revealed through interviews and other parts of the application process.

Employers do not always have informational advantages. In general, the advantages will be greater if the government is interested in using labor migration to ameliorate transitory labor shortages within particular job sectors, or where the government has independent reasons to want to structure labor migration as a matching of prospective immigrant employees to specific employers. Where the government is interested instead in using labor migration to augment the supply of human capital within the state, the informational advantages of the employers are somewhat weaker. This is because the firm-specific job requirements about which the employer has clearly superior information are less relevant if the goal is to pick migrants who have skills or training that will, over the long run, benefit the state.

Employers may also have fewer informational advantages when the government seeks to expand the pool of what is generally referred to as “unskilled labor.” In the immigration code and the economic literature, unskilled workers are typically those without specialized training or educational credentials. Sometimes these workers are admitted for jobs that require “skill” even though they involve no specialized training or educational prerequisites—jobs where some workers will be vastly more productive than others. Cane cutters admitted to Florida as part of the H-2A program are often said to constitute such workers. But in other cases unskilled workers admitted to perform jobs that require little skill of any sort, and for which the productivity differences among employees are negligible. In such cases the employers have little to contribute to the screening process, because there is few skills differences among workers for the employer to suss out.

A government that wants to capitalize on the informational advantages of employers is therefore likely to delegate to employers more—or will delegate in a less constrained fashioned—for temporary migrants than for permanent migrants, and for skilled migrants than for unskilled migrants.

D. Disadvantages of Delegation: Misalignment of Preferences

Employers do not necessarily or even usually share all the interests of the government. As we have explained above, the government likely seeks labor immigrants (or nonimmigrants) who will advance productivity, share the policy

preferences of the majority, and be able to live and prosper in the United States. Employers seek workers who advance productivity alone. In addition, the government may have reasons to favor certain industries or groups of workers; employers as a group obviously do not and could not share these interests.

To see the problem, consider a system where the government determined the number of migrants to be admitted in a given year—say, 100,000—and then distributed slots at random to employers or sold them by auction. Employers would then choose to fill the slots however they wanted to. Employers would choose migrants with the highest level of productivity for positions that need to be filled. But in most cases employers would not consider the migrants’ policy preferences—for example, whether they share American civic ideals or instead harbor authoritarian and intolerant political preferences. Employers will also not take account of the various costs that workers may impose on society if they quit or are fired. In the case of permanent migrants, these costs may be considerable because unemployed workers can often benefit from social services.⁵⁶ But even in the case of temporary migrant workers, these costs will often be high because workers may overstay their visas. A specialized translator of technical manuals into Urdu may not be able to find another job if he is fired, and instead become a public charge.

Employers could shirk in other ways. Employers will invest resources into screening where the marginal costs equal the marginal benefits for the employer, not for society. An intensive screening procedure will not be cost-effective for the employer if it can identify highly productive people with adequate probability simply on the basis of their diplomas. The employer may expect to employ the worker for, say, five years on average, in which case the downside from misjudging the productivity of the worker will be limited to a lost opportunity for five years. But if the worker can stay beyond five years, then an intensive screening process will benefit future employers (who, in the case of low-productivity workers, will be spared the cost of screening, if the first employer had screened them out). However, the first employer has no incentive to take these benefits into account.

Finally, when the worker arrives, the employer will have strong incentives to encourage the worker to invest in firm-specific human capital, not country-specific human capital. At the end of the three or five years, the worker may therefore be highly productive at the workplace for which she was sponsored, but not at any other workplace in the country. And the employer has no incentive to teach her

⁵⁶ Lawful permanent residents are prohibited from receiving some federal benefits until they have resided in the United States for five years. See Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, Pub. L. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105, § 403, 8 U.S.C. § 1613. But other federal benefits are available immediately, and state government often extend the social safety net to LPRs prior to their eligibility for federal benefits. See ALEINIKOFF ET AL., *supra* note __, at 1228-32 (listing initial exceptions to the five-year bar and describing subsequent statutes that relaxed the bar in additional situations); *id.* at 1246-47 (explaining that “more than half of the states provide benefits to at least some noncitizens who are ineligible for federal services.”).

skills that will make her a productive citizen. For this reason, an employer-based sponsorship system is more suitable for temporary than for permanent migration.

These considerations suggest a rough prediction about the appropriate degree of delegation for different types of foreign workers. Because permanent workers produce benefits and costs for the state well beyond their period of employment with the sponsoring employer, delegation should be greater for temporary workers than for permanent migrants. This point reinforces our earlier argument that because employers' information advantages over the government will be greater for temporary migrants than for permanent migrants, delegation should be greater for temporary migrants.

E. The Structure of Employment Delegation

From society's standpoint, the optimal immigration law will take advantage of the employer's superior information while preventing the employer from "shirking." But how can the government capitalize on the employer's superior capacity for screening migrants and simultaneously prevent the employer from choosing migrants who serve the employer's private interest but harm the public's interest? The above discussion suggests a few design principles—such as delegating greater authority over temporary than permanent labor visas. More generally, we can see that immigration law will sometimes need to give the employer an incentive to screen migrants well by offering a reward, while at the same time constrain the reward or impose sanctions in order to deter the employer from choosing privately beneficial but socially harmful workers. The following discussion considers how immigration rules might be designed to accomplish those goals.

1. Nondelegation: Merit-Based Point Systems

To begin, let us consider a baseline system without delegation. A number of countries use a merit-based point system to screen (permanent) migrants,⁵⁷ and such an approach has been proposed for the United States as well. Under a 2007 bill, applicants would be assigned points according to various criteria that emphasize domestic labor demand, skills, education, and compatibility.⁵⁸ For example, an

⁵⁷ Examples include Canada, *see* Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Six Selection Factors and Pass Mark, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/apply-factors.asp>, New Zealand, *see* The Skilled Migrant Category Points Indicator, <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/pointsindicator>, and Australia, *see* What is the Points Test?, <http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/points-test.htm>. For an overview of point systems, see Demetrios G. Papademetriou & Madeleine Sumption, Rethinking Points Systems and Employer-Selected Immigration, European University Institute, Migration Policy Institute (June 2011).

⁵⁸ S. 1639, 110th Cong. (2007) (proposed legislation to provide for comprehensive immigration reform), *discussed in* Aleinikoff et al., *Immigration and Citizenship: Process and Policy*, 461-62 (6th ed. 2007).

applicant who could be employed in a “specialty occupation”⁵⁹ would receive 20 points; an applicant who could be employed in a “high demand” occupation would receive 16 points; and an applicant who could be employed in the sciences and related fields would receive 8 points. Applicants also would receive points for U.S. work experience, English-speaking ability, relatives in the United States, success on a U.S. civics exam, and advanced education attainment—for example, 20 points for an advanced graduate degree, 5 points for a certified vocational degree.

Point systems are attractive because they enable a country to choose people directly on the basis of criteria that matter from a social standpoint. As we saw, employers may seek highly productive workers but they do not take account of the costs and benefits of workers for society outside the workplace (including after they quit and take a new job). Importers of unskilled agricultural labor, for example, may not care that the workers cannot speak English; but these workers may have trouble integrating themselves into American society without English language skills. Under a point system, the government makes the tradeoff between productivity and assimilability directly and embodies the tradeoff in an algorithm that better serves the public interest.

However, we are skeptical of the utility of point systems. In a market economy, the highest-valued workers are not necessarily those with the highest educational attainments. The highest-value workers are those in industries where demand greatly exceeds the supply of workers. When demand spikes (or supply declines), wages will rise as well, and that will encourage U.S. workers to move into the industry, so even when labor shortages open up, they can close quickly. The government can try to determine where the shortages are located by conducting surveys and engaging in statistical analysis, but it cannot foresee the future as well as employers with experience in the field, and will at best be able to aggregate information in a crude fashion. The case for delegation rests on the assumption that employers are in a better position to understand their labor needs than the government is. The government can superimpose other requirements (such as English language ability) in order to minimize the risk that employers will choose people who are ill equipped to live in the country or integrate, but there is no reason to abandon delegation altogether.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The INA defines a “specialty occupation” as an occupation that requires “theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and attainment of a bachelor’s or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the U.S.” INA § 214(i)(1), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1) (2009).

⁶⁰ Papademetriou & Sumption, *supra* note 57, at 3, criticize points systems because arriving workers often are unable to find jobs. This is consistent with our point that the points systems do not necessarily select the most valuable workers, but their immediate concern could be addressed with a dual requirement that migrants who are qualified on the basis of points must still obtain a job prior to receiving a visa.

Even if the government is interested not only in solving the problem of labor shortages, and instead also wants to add human capital to the country, it is not clear the state is best equipped to pick those who will be the most economically productive and socially beneficial. Certainly it is easier for the state to do so with respect to highly educated people, because at least in those contexts there are objective criteria like awarded degrees and English language ability. But these are often crude measures, in the same way that LSAT scores and undergraduate GPA only crudely predict who will become the most successful lawyers. The United States government is not well equipped to determine whether a degree in economics from a university in Taiwan is equivalent to a degree in economics from universities in Norway, South Africa, or Peru. It is even less able to evaluate work experience in different types of firms in different places around the world. Employers have specialized experience in evaluating candidates for employment, and therefore are in a stronger position than the state to determine the quality of their human capital.

2. Employer Sponsorship

One could argue that even if employers have better information about migrant types than the government does, the best system would be one in which employers provide that information to the government, and then the government acts on it. The government could, for example, conduct surveys of employers' labor needs, aggregate the information, and then allocate visas on the basis of what it learns.

The problem with such a system is that employers have no incentive to provide accurate information to the government. All employers benefit from a large labor pool, and so all employers will have a strong incentive to tell the government that they face labor shortages even when they do not. The government might admit low-value workers as well as high-value workers, but employers could engage in sorting if and when they decide they need to hire more people, and they can thus avoid these sorting costs if they decide that they do not need to do so. If the government follows the advice of employers, it will either admit too many workers or allocate visas randomly rather than to the most productive workers.

Employer sponsorship solves this problem by requiring employers to bear the some of the cost of admission. Employers must incur the cost of identifying particular migrants if they want the U.S. government to issue visas in their industry, and of complying with bureaucratic procedures. Employers will incur these sponsorship costs only if they expect a benefit from them, which means that they actually expect to hire the worker and obtain returns high enough to cover the costs. Sponsorship rules should greatly reduce admission of low-value workers.

3. Temporary and Permanent Workers

In the U.S. system of delegation, one major distinction is that between temporary and permanent workers. Temporary and permanent workers have different purposes: in theory, temporary workers augment the labor supply after an

exogenous shock causes wages to rise, while permanent workers augment the population with people who have valuable skills and politically compatible preferences. Employers will internalize more of the costs and benefits of temporary workers simply because temporary workers are more likely to remain with the employer during their entire stay, while permanent workers are more likely to find another job. Thus, it makes sense to give employers who hire temporary workers greater screening authority than employers who hire permanent workers.

The law reflects this conclusion in three ways. First, the quality standards for admitting permanent workers are higher than the standards for admitting temporary workers.⁶¹ Thus, an employer may screen in a relatively low-quality workers for three to six years, but not permanently. Second, although the employer of temporary migrants must prove that the applicant will receive the prevailing wage⁶² and that her presence will not harm U.S. workers,⁶³ it need not attempt recruitment of Americans for the position, as is required by the labor certification process for permanent workers.⁶⁴ Third, workers admitted on a temporary basis must generally leave the country early if they lose their position with the sponsoring employer.⁶⁵ This means that employers can admit temporary workers only to the extent that those workers continue to work for the sponsoring employer. There is no such condition for employers who screen in permanent workers.

4. Portability

Under the INA, temporary labor visas significantly restrict the labor mobility of migrants. For some visa categories workers are categorically prohibited from quitting and finding a new job in the United States. The visa is tied to the employee's sponsoring employer, and he cannot be sponsored for a new visa unless he departs the United States. The H-1B visa relaxes these restrictions a bit, but all temporary visas come with limited "portability" at best.

⁶¹ For empirical evidence, see U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Approval and Denial Statistics for I-140 Immigrant Petitions for Alien Workers, <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=2be702798785e210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=cdfd2f8b69583210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD> (listing approval and denial rates for petitions for classification as an "Alien of Extraordinary Ability," the first preference category for permanent workers; the yearly acceptance rate ranges from 49% to 62% over the past six years); cf. supra note 11 at ii (listing an approval rate for H-1B temporary visas of 86% in FY09).

⁶² INA § 218(c)(3)(B)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(c)(3)(B)(i) (2009); see also 20 C.F.R. § 655.10 (describing process to determine prevailing wages for temporary labor certification purposes); see also INA § 212(n)(3)(A)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(3)(A)(i) (2009).

⁶³ INA § 218(a)(1)(B), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(a)(1)(B) (2009).

⁶⁴ INA § 212(n)(1)(G)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1)(G)(i) (2009).

⁶⁵ INA § 214(n), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(n).

These post-entry restrictions on labor mobility have complex effects on the incentives of the employer and the temporary worker. Because the worker often cannot quit and find a new job, the employer can underpay her after she has arrived, and in this way earn rents on the admission.⁶⁶ By the same token, because potential migrants know that they may be underpaid and without recourse, they may be reluctant to apply for visas in the first place. The employer and worker may mitigate this effect by contract but, as always, it is not clear that a contract can anticipate all future contingencies or that the worker will, as a practical matter, be able to enforce it after she has returned to her home country.

The lack of portability might be defended as a method for rewarding employers for undertaking the task of screening on behalf of the government. The employer must invest in finding foreign workers that suits its needs, and then must underwrite the cost of the migration process. An employer will not incur these costs unless it can be guaranteed a return—in the form of wages that are below the prevailing American wages. To be sure, employers face a similar problem when they try to recruit domestic workers: they may incur considerable expense in finding and recruiting workers, hire them, and then lose them to a competitor a short time later. But this problem is more significant for migrant workers. In domestic contexts, prospective employees apply for positions because they want the position. In the visa context, however, they often have twin motivations: they want the job, but they also want the visa. Once they have received the visa, therefore, there should be a higher probability that they will choose to leave the initial employer than there would be for an employee hired in a purely domestic context. Thus, by coupling one's ability to enter the United States to one's ability to get a labor visa, the INA introduces a distortion into the employer-employee matching market—in the form of strategic behavior by prospective employees. This distortion might lower the employer's incentive to screen, and so this distortion must be offset with the portability rule, which permits the employer to obtain above-market rents. In addition, if the employer rather than the temporary migrant receives the surplus, that money will ultimately benefit (mostly) Americans (shareholders, customers who receive lower prices) rather than (mostly) foreigners, who will benefit from remittances and the worker's expenditures after she returns to her country.

However, the lack of portability also creates a deadweight loss: workers may have difficulty moving to employers where they would be more productive. Even if the visa system were restructured so that employees could pay prior employers to release them, this anticipated cost will suppress the incentive to apply for temporary work in the first place. The employer will also have a perverse incentive to overinvest in the worker's firm-specific human capital rather than in her country-specific human capital, so as to minimize her ability to find another sponsor and switch jobs. Moreover, the incentive system is crude. Employers receive a payoff that increases with the productivity of the worker, which will encourage employers to

⁶⁶ See Papademetriou & Sumption, *supra* note 57, at 4.

choose the best workers but not necessarily the workers who produce positive externalities in the form of conformity to the law and other characteristics or activities.

Possibly reflecting this concern, in 2000 Congress amended the portability rule so that temporary workers can move to new employers when they file a petition for a new H-1B visa rather than when their petition was accepted (as required under the old rule).⁶⁷ This amendment mitigates the negative effects of lack of portability but does not eliminate them.

5. *The Labor Shortage Requirement*

The central question in immigration applications is whether the applicant seeks a position for which there is a labor shortage. In some cases, the government lists occupations for which it believes that shortages exist.⁶⁸ In other cases, the employer must prove that a shortage exists by showing that it cannot find a U.S. worker willing to fill the position even though the employer offers the position at the “prevailing wage.”⁶⁹ The prevailing wage standard is nonsensical. If a prevailing wage exists, then U.S. workers would be willing to fill the job (at that wage). And if the employer must pay the prevailing wage to the migrant (as it must), then the employer gains no benefit by hiring that person—hiring the person does not reduce labor costs. We suspect that employers manipulate the prevailing wage requirement by paying foreign workers less than U.S. workers would be willing to accept.⁷⁰

One theory for a labor shortage requirement is that, in the absence of such a requirement, employers would sponsor migrant workers who impose high negative externalities on society, for example, people likely to become criminals or public charges, or people who will likely fail to assimilate in other ways. To minimize these costs, the government might authorize employers to sponsor migrant workers only when they generate a relatively high surplus—which will be partly enjoyed by employers and partly transformed into public revenue through the tax system. But if this is the goal of the labor shortage requirement, it would need to be transformed, so that it made economic sense. As we discussed in Part II.B., a revised labor

⁶⁷ See Immigration Services and Infrastructure Improvements Act of 2000, Pub. L. 106-313, 2000 Stat. 2045, *codified at* INA § 214(n), 8 U.S.C. § 1184(n) (2009).

⁶⁸ The Department of Labor lists such occupations on Schedule A. See 20 C.F.R. § 656.5 (including nurses, physical therapists, and a few other job categories).

⁶⁹ See INA § 218(a)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(a)(1)(A) (2009) (requiring the employer to show a labor shortage); INA § 218(c)(3)(B)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1188(c)(3)(B)(i) (2009) (requiring the employer to pay the prevailing wage).

⁷⁰ On both theories, labor migration will depress U.S. wages. For some suggestive evidence, see MAE NGAI, IMPOSSIBLE SUBJECTS: ILLEGAL ALIENS AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA 142-143 (2004) (arguing that the Bracero guest worker program in the 1940s coincided with stagnation of farm wages in the south over the next few decades).

shortage requirement could limit visas except when an exogenous shock increases the demand for labor well beyond historical levels, as in the case of the dot-com boom in the 1990s. When labor demand exceeds supply, the surplus generated by hiring will be greater than normal, and thus the tax revenues benefiting society will be greater than normal as well. These increased tax revenues would offset the negative externalities from the migration.

On this approach, however, the labor shortage requirement is poorly designed and should be changed. Instead of requiring the employer to prove that it cannot find a U.S. worker at the “prevailing wage” (which is impossible), the government should require the employer to show that the wages of U.S. workers in the relevant industry have increased at historically unprecedented rates. In theory, the precise threshold would be the rate at which the extra tax revenue (and other benefits) from hiring a migrant exceed the expected negative externalities associated with that migrant. In practice, the government would need to use a cruder threshold, but we expect that one could be formulated, based on historically abnormal wage increases and similar factors.

Another view is that the current system is adequate because its overall effect is to impose a cost on employers, which will discourage them from hiring marginal migrant workers who would impose negative externalities greater than their benefits. If the labor certification requirement is a sham, then employers must satisfy it by paying a lot of money to lawyers, consultants, and others, so as to provide the documentary evidence that will satisfy the immigration authorities. This is, in effect, a tax. It follows that employers will decline to sponsor migrant workers who contribute only marginally to their profits, and will focus their energies on sponsoring migrant workers who contribute a great deal to their profits—professionals like computer programmers rather than, say, factory workers. Assuming that negative externalities among potential migrant workers do not vary much, then a system that admit high-surplus workers and rejects low-surplus workers is more likely to be socially beneficial than one that does not distinguish them.

However, if this theory is correct, then the system can certainly be improved. First, society would do better if employers paid an actual cash tax to the treasury rather than wasted money on paperwork. Second, the tax should not be a constant amount but should be a function of the negative externalities that a migrant worker imposes on society. If some migrant workers impose high negative externalities, then the employer should be required to pay a high tax; when migrant workers do not impose negative externalities, the tax should be low or zero.

There is an obvious tension between encouraging employers to sponsor migrants and penalizing them for sponsoring migrants because they create negative externalities. In Part II.E.4, we suggested that the portability rule encouraged employers to sponsor high-value workers by giving employers a large portion of the surplus generated by employment. If employers went to the expense of sponsoring a

worker, and then the worker immediately quit and found work with a competitor, employers would not sponsor workers in the first place. But if we believe that workers impose negative externalities, then we should tax employers who sponsor migrants. How do we resolve this tension?

The answer is the employer must capture enough of the surplus that it is worthwhile to sponsor the migrant but that some portion of the surplus must also go to the state. As we noted above, the portability rule is probably too crude for this purpose. If the employer can simply negotiate a long-term contract with the migrant worker at a wage that is below the U.S. rate, then the employer will gain from the sponsorship even if it must pay a separate real or implicit tax. Meanwhile, that tax is necessary so as to ensure that only the highest-value migrants are sponsored.

6. *Ex ante and Ex post Screening: The Transition from Temporary to Permanent Status*

A traditional rule is that foreign workers who seek temporary status must attest that they do not intend to seek permanent residence. They must lack “immigrant intent”⁷¹ in order to receive the visa. A related rule was that holders of H-1B visas had to have a permanent foreign residence.⁷² Both rules have eroded over the years.⁷³

These rules were likely driven by the concern that foreign workers would game the system by first obtaining a temporary visa and then, once in the United States, taking advantage of a path to citizenship. For example, it would be easier for someone in the United States for three years to arrange a sham marriage with a U.S. citizen than for someone living in a foreign country where access to potential American spouses is more limited. Or some people might plan to overstay their visa and hope for an amnesty, which periodically recurs. Or they might hope that contact with American employers will make it more likely that they will be able to persuade an employer to sponsor them for a permanent labor visa. To screen out such people, the law required evidence that they planned to return to their home country after their visa expired, and had a financial reason—such as a foreign residence—to do so.⁷⁴

Why might these rules have eroded? One possible reason is that often the best evidence of a person’s suitability as a permanent resident comes from her experience on American soil. Indeed, many people who spend three years in the United States may voluntarily return home because they decide they prefer to live in their native country. Among those who seek permanent residency, their experiences in the

⁷¹ See INA § 101(a)(15)(B), (F), (J), 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(B), (F), (J).

⁷² INA § 101(a)(15)(O)(IV), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(O)(IV) (2009).

⁷³ See Aleinikoff et al., *supra* note 30, at 400-01.

⁷⁴ INA § 101(a)(15)(O)(IV), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(O)(IV) (2009).

United States—whether they obtained and kept a job, paid taxes, avoided crime, learned English, were integrated into their communities—provide useful evidence as to the likelihood that they will continue to be successful as a permanent resident. As we have discussed elsewhere, the immigration system has therefore gradually undergone a transformation to a two-period approach, where migrants have more limited rights during a probationary period, successful completion of which facilitates application for permanent residence.⁷⁵

The delegation question reemerges with respect to second-period evaluations of people who have already entered the United States on temporary visas and seek to remain permanently. Again, the state could directly evaluate the migrant by monitoring her behavior while on American soil. The state could question her directly about her activities, such as whether she committed crimes, held a job, learned English, made friends, and so forth; and in many cases, her answers can be verified by giving her tests and examining government records (for example, criminal records). The state can also delegate or partly delegate this ex post screening decision to agents such as employers, and indeed this is what happens in the United States. An employer effectively provides for the removal of the visa holder by firing her before her time has expired (unless she finds another sponsor); it can also help a temporary worker obtain permanent status by sponsoring her for a green card.⁷⁶

Why would the government give the employer the de facto power to deport migrant workers through the act of firing them (or failure to sponsor them for green cards)? One possibility is that if the migrant is not a suitable worker for the sponsoring employer, then she is most likely not a suitable worker for any U.S. employer. If the employer has better information about the worker's human capital, this rough judgment may well be good enough for public policy purposes. In addition, if the employer fires the worker not because of poor quality but because of poor economic conditions, then there is a risk that the worker will become a public charge or depress wages or contribute to unemployment during an economic downturn, when there is often political hostility toward foreign workers. This view that temporary admission can serve as probationary period, which permits better evaluation of the "quality" of the migrant, can be contrasted to a more popular view, which is that temporary migrants should be given permanent residence because they develop affiliations in the United States.⁷⁷ If this view is correct, then the two-period approach imposes an unacceptable hardship on migrants, and instead they should either be denied entry or given permanence residence from the start. Whatever the

⁷⁵ See Cox & Posner, *Second-Order Structure*, *supra* note 16, at 824-827.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., INA §§ 212, 237, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1182, 1227 (specifying conditions under which aliens can be deported for violating the terms under which they were admitted); INA § 1255, 8 U.S.C. § 1255 (discussing rules and procedures for adjustment of status from nonimmigrant to that of person admitted for permanent residence).

⁷⁷ See, e.g., HIROSHI MOTOMURA, *AMERICANS IN WAITING: THE LOST STORY OF IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES*, 80-114 (2006).

merits of this idea, one should be clear that it has significant costs, as it deprives the state of important information for evaluating potential migrants, whose experiences in the state can provide a basis for determining their suitability as citizens.

F. *Choosing and Coordinating Multiple Agents*

We have so far abstracted from a significant problem with delegation. By assuming that the government delegates to a single employer, we have avoided the question how the government should choose among the thousands of employers who could serve as screening agents.

Imagine that the government has determined that 100,000 slots should be made available for permanent workers.⁷⁸ All employers would apply for these slots. Under a baseline randomization system, the slots would be randomly assigned to employers. If one million employers each apply for a single slot, then each employer would be given a 1/10 chance of obtaining a slot. Of course, if employers can apply for more than one slot, they will strategically apply for more slots than they need in order to increase their chances of winning at least one in the lottery. In order to avoid these types of strategic behavior, employers' applications would be subject to a ceiling, for example, one that is determined by the size of the firm.

A randomization system would be quite crude, because it does not ensure that the highest-value workers end up at the highest-value employers. Those employers who obtained a slot would search out the highest-value workers for them, but it is possible that those workers would be more suited for different employers who did not win the lottery, or that different worker-employer matchups would be more productive. This problem could be ameliorated if the slots were tradable. Employers with higher-value opportunities would then buy slots from employers who won the lottery.

Current immigration law in the United States resembles a randomization system. All employers may seek slots; if they seek more than are available, the slots are distributed at random.⁷⁹ There are a few additional screening elements that increase the cost for the employer. Employers must show that the migrant is (in most cases) highly educated and skilled, and hence highly productive. In addition, the employers must obtain a labor certification that shows (or purports to show) that employment of the migrant will not lower the wages of Americans or cause unemployment. The high cost and trouble of negotiating the immigration bureaucracy may serve as a limited screening mechanism, ensuring that employers will not attempt to obtain slots for workers who fall below a threshold of

⁷⁸ We could also imagine a system in which the government delegated to employers the decision how many migrants to admit in the first place, but such an approach is sufficiently remote to present-day realities that it can be safely ignored.

⁷⁹ INA § 203(e)(2), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(e)(2) (2009).

productivity. There is a great deal of skepticism about whether the labor certification system works as intended, however.⁸⁰

A more direct approach would be for the government to auction off the slots. Now, the highest-value employers would purchase the slots, and those highest-value employers would import the highest-value workers for their positions. Although auctions must be carefully designed, and can be gamed, an auction would be superior to the baseline randomization system. Alternatively, the government could auction off visas directly to potential migrants.⁸¹ The most productive migrants would bid the most for the visas, assuming that they can borrow against their future earnings (if not, perhaps they could borrow from the government of the receiving state which could use its power to tax to secure repayment).

The literature addresses the possibility of workers bidding for visas, and has not considered an approach in which employers rather than workers bid for visas.⁸² An employer-centered approach has a number of advantages. Employers will face fewer capital constraints than foreign workers, who without a source of capital may not be able to bid very high for visas. Employers also have considerably better information about employment opportunities in the United States than potential migrants do.

III. FAMILIES

Modern immigration law also delegates significant screening authority to family members.

A. *Family Reunification Rules*

Today family reunification is a core feature of American immigration law. Historically, however, it played a much smaller role. When Congress first enacted general numerical restrictions on immigration law in the wake of World War I, the quota system was based on national origin.⁸³ While some limited family-based

⁸⁰ Concerns about whether the migrant will conform to American norms and values are addressed in other ways—for example, the removal of those who commit crimes. See Cox & Posner, *Second-Order Structure*, *supra* note 16, at 819-821.

⁸¹ See JULIAN SIMON, *THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF IMMIGRATION* (2nd ed. 1999); cf. Gary Becker, Institute of Economic Affairs Hayek Memorial Lecture 2010, Jun. 17, 2010, <http://www.iea.org.uk/multimedia/video/annual-hayek-memorial-lecture-2010-prof-gary-becker> (proposing that anyone who pays a fee be admitted as a migrant).

⁸² See *supra* note ____.

⁸³ See MAE NGAI, *IMPOSSIBLE SUBJECTS: ILLEGAL ALIENS AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA* 21-55 (2004).

migration was permitted,⁸⁴ the modern migration categories—under which the vast majority of visas are allocated on the basis of labor demand or family connections—did not exist.

In 1965, Congress abolished the national origins quota system in the Hart-Celler Act⁸⁵ and put in place a new framework for allocating visas. The new framework relied primarily on family-based migration: nearly three-fourths of the visas were allocated for qualifying relatives. Today, nearly half of all the visas awarded for permanent residence each year are awarded under this system.⁸⁶

The family-based visa allocation rules are exceedingly intricate, involving a number of different “preference” categories and complex quota formulas.⁸⁷ To understand the basic structure, however, it is important to recognize that all family-based visas must begin with a petition by a sponsoring relative already living in the United States.⁸⁸ Thus, one must distinguish between two important questions: (1) which existing residents are permitted to sponsor their family members for visas; and (2) who may be sponsored for a visa by a resident family member.

Both citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) are permitted to sponsor relatives for family-based visas. But the code treats citizens more favorably than LPRs. First, citizens are exempt from numerical restrictions on visas when they seek to bring in their “immediate family members”—defined as spouses, unmarried minor children, and (in some circumstances) parents.⁸⁹ LPRs, on the other hand, are subject to quota restrictions even for these immediate family members.⁹⁰ Second, citizens have larger allocations under the quotas for relatives who are not immediate family members. Therefore, citizens have an easier time than LPRs bringing in siblings, parents, and adult children.

⁸⁴ The Quota Act in 1921, while specifying quotas for immigrants based on national origin, preferred certain relatives of U.S. residents, including spouses and unmarried minor children, see JOHN HIGHAM, *STRANGERS IN THE LAND: PATTERNS OF AMERICAN NATIVISM, 1860-1925* 330 (1963). This system was in place from 1921 until 1965.

⁸⁵ Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Hart-Celler Act of 1965, Pub.L. 89-236.

⁸⁶ See 2009 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2009/ois_yb_2009.pdf (2010).

⁸⁷ See INA § 203, 8 U.S.C. § 1153 (2009). For a description of these categories and formulas by the Department of State, see also http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1306.html.

⁸⁸ INA § 203, 8 U.S.C. § 1153 (2009).

⁸⁹ An unmarried minor child is excluded from the definition of immediate family if she is born outside of marriage to a citizen father, but she is not excluded if born to a citizen mother. The Supreme Court upheld this differential treatment on the basis of the parent’s sex in *Fiallo v. Bell*, 430 U.S. 787 (1977).

⁹⁰ INA § 201(b), 8 U.S.C. § 1151(b), § 1151(c) (2009).

Relatives who may be sponsored by citizens or LPRs include spouses, both minor and adult children, parents, and siblings.⁹¹ Before 1965, the little family migration available was limited to spouses and minor children. Hart-Celler dramatically expanded the types of family relationships that could serve as the basis for a visa application. Nonetheless, with the exception of those noncitizens who qualify as immediate family members, prospective beneficiaries of family-related visas are subject to quotas. The numerical limit applicable for any particular migrant, which is far too complex to explain in detail, turns on three principal factors.⁹² First, it turns on the nature of the familial relationship, with spouses and children generally receiving preferential treatment over brothers and sisters. Second, the quota depends on whether the sponsoring resident is a citizen or LPR; LPRs currently face a multi-year backlog for spousal and child admissions, while citizens can bring in spouses and minor children without regard to the quotas. Third, the quota turns in part on the country from which the relative is emigrating.⁹³ The employment- and family-based preferences are subject to per-country limits which place ceilings on the number of otherwise qualifying migrants who may come from a single country in any given year. The limit, which is roughly 25,000 per country,⁹⁴ has led to backlogs of more than 10 years for some relatives immigrating from Mexico and the Philippines.⁹⁵

B. *Possible Justifications for Delegating Admissions Authority to Family Members*

Why might a state give citizens (and sometimes lawful permanent residents) the option of selecting new immigrants from within the pool of their eligible family members? Unlike labor migration, where the information advantages of prospective employers are straightforward, delegation to family members presents a more complicated picture. Consider three possible reasons why a state might employ a family-based migration system: to respect the significance of family relationships to people's lives and therefore to privilege family reunification as an independent value; to speed the integration of new immigrants; and to promote the migration of people with racial and cultural characteristics that match the existing polity.

Each of these justifications for the system might help explain why the state would delegate screening authority to resident family members. But each also raises important agency issues.

⁹¹ INA § 201(b)(2)(A)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1151(b)(2)(A)(i) (2009).

⁹² INA § 201(c), 8 U.S.C. § 1151(c) (2009).

⁹³ Technically it turns on location of birth rather than nationality or place of emigration, but in practice these typically coincide.

⁹⁴ INA § 202(b), 8 U.S.C. § 1152(b) (2009).

⁹⁵ See Julia Preston, *Surge Brings New Immigration Backlog*, N.Y. Times, Nov. 23, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/23/us/23immig.html>; Philip Q. Yang, *The Demand for Immigration to the United States*, 19 *Population & Environment* 4, 357 (1998) (discussing the global demand for immigration into the U.S. and the resulting backlog).

1. *Family reunification*

To the extent the state authorizes family migration because of a desire to permit citizens to live near to those they care about deeply, delegation provides some information about the closeness of the relationship. In almost all cases, the citizen or LPR must file a visa petition for a family member to receive an immigration benefit. And in the case of spouses, the U.S. resident obviously must choose to marry the person for the qualifying relationship to exist. The sponsoring resident has far better information than the government about how close she is to her relatives. After all, parents and children aren't always close. Neither are brothers or sisters. It might waste limited immigration slots to permit family members to enter the U.S. without asking the resident to reveal whether she cares sufficiently about the relationship to file a petition on the family member's behalf.

Of course, if respecting close family relationships, or intimate relationships more generally, is the state's principal concern, the current rules clearly fall short. They define qualifying family relationships in a way that privileges mainstream cultural understanding of family. They are also biased against those whose most significant relationships are not with family members at all. These shortcomings could be ameliorated by a broader delegation. Each citizen (or LPR) could be given a small number of immigration slots and permitted to sponsor whomever he wished for a visa. But closeness is surely not the state's only concern. Such a delegation would undercut the state's ability to use the immigration system to promote traditional notions of family—a power the state has employed regularly throughout immigration history.⁹⁶

Perhaps even more importantly, delegating to existing citizens the power to pick one or more migrants would exacerbate a serious agency issue that the current system of family migration already faces. The agency problem is this: in a world where the migration benefit is very valuable, the government's agent may simply sell the benefit. The current system addresses this problem in part by limiting the scope of prospective migrants who can be sponsored by an existing citizen or LPR. The number of overseas family members is much smaller than the total number of noncitizens who might like to purchase a green card. The current system also relies for the most part on qualifying relationships that cannot be manufactured. Under most circumstances, one has no control over the identify of one's parents or siblings. And while citizen children can sponsor their noncitizen parents for visas, the code prohibits *minor* children from doing so⁹⁷—thereby preventing noncitizens from

⁹⁶ See, for example, the policing of marriage practices among Chinese immigrants during the 19th Century, the differential treatment of mothers' and fathers' relationships with their children, and the exclusion of same sex couples in recent years.

⁹⁷ See INA § 201(a)(2)(A)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1151(a)(2)(A)(i) (requiring that children sponsoring their parents "be at least 21 years of age").

coming to the United States and giving birth to a citizen in order to acquire an immediate immigration benefit.

Nonetheless, there is one qualifying relationship that is voluntary: the relationship of spouses. This raises a serious concern that citizens will sell immigration benefits by entering into sham marriages.

Historically the government tried to police this behavior by its agents by monitoring their marriage choices directly, inquiring into whether a marriage is “real” or instead fraudulent. The spousal immigration rules did this principally by relying on ex ante screening—that is, by attempting to identify fraudulent marriages only at the point of admission, when the visa would be granted. Relying on ante screening had serious problems. The government could ask intrusive personal questions to try to figure out whether the couple had entered into a “real” marriage rather than a phony one. But it was relatively easy for couples to dupe the immigration service—as Gerard Depardieu and Andie McDowell did in the 1990 movie *Green Card*—simply by living together briefly and learning the details of each other’s life.⁹⁸

To combat this problem, the 1986 Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments revised the immigration code to establish a two-stage screening system for spousal migration.⁹⁹ Today, a newly married couple cannot get an ordinary green card for the noncitizen spouse. Instead, the spouse can initially obtain only a “conditional” LPR visa. Unlike other visas conferring lawful permanent resident status, the conditional LPR visa expires after two years and is stamped prominently with its temporary status.¹⁰⁰

The conditional status introduces ex post screening into the spousal visa process. At the end of the two-year conditional period, the spouses must *jointly* file papers with the federal government in order to lift the conditional status.¹⁰¹ The filing requires that the couple include information about employment history (like pay stubs), place of residence, and so forth. They are sometimes also required to attend a joint interview. These steps provide additional information to the government that it can use to determine whether the marriage is valid—information that would not have been available for newlyweds at the point when the visa initially was issued.¹⁰² Rather than relying entirely on an easy-to-game and subjective

⁹⁸ *Green Card* (Touchstone Pictures 1990).

⁹⁹ Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments of 1986, Pub.L. 99-639, Nov. 10, 1986, 100 Stat. 3537.

¹⁰⁰ See INA § 216, 8 U.S.C. § 1186a (2009) (describing conditional status); INA § 237(a)(1)(G), 8 U.S.C. § 1227(a)(1)(G) (2009) (describing the two-year review and potential subsequent removal).

¹⁰¹ INA § 216(c)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1186a(c)(1)(A) (2009).

¹⁰² In addition, if the couple does not follow these requirements, the sponsored spouse’s visa will expire, and the prominent stamp will make it difficult for the noncitizen to continue to live in the United States without detection. It is harder, therefore, for the couple to avoid this second stage of screening.

interview process, the government can acquire more objective evidence about whether the couple has lived together, shared financial obligations, and otherwise lived the joint life that most married couples live. A couple in a sham marriage can, of course, also live a joint life for this two-year period in order to pass the ex post screen, but it is much more costly for them to do so than for a legitimately married couple. Thus, the new system imposes relatively lower costs on valid marriages than on fraudulent marriages, and in theory can help align the incentives of the citizen-agents.¹⁰³

The development of the marriage fraud rules highlights the fact that there will often be two ways that the government might try to reduce principal-agent slack when it delegates immigration authority. It can directly monitor the agent's performance. This will often be difficult, however, because the private information that justifies delegating to the agent in the first place also makes it difficult for the government to evaluate the agent's performance. Therefore, the government will often be more successful if it can structure immigration law to create incentive-compatible contracts for its agents—contracts that provide greater rewards to the agent, or are less costly to comply with, when the agent acts consistently with government's interests. The evolution of the spousal immigration rules reflects a move away from the first strategy and toward the second.

2. *Integration and social externalities*

Family-based migration can also be seen as a way of promoting integration among recent arrivals. To be sure, there are many ways a state might use its admissions system to promote integration. Many states—particularly states with relatively homogenous racial or ethnic compositions—have historically used the race or ethnicity of entering migrants as a proxy for their assimilability.¹⁰⁴ Beyond the fact that many believe race-based immigration criteria to be morally repugnant, such an approach has obvious practical limitations in diverse countries such as the United States. Family-based admissions may do considerably better than this crude proxy. For as we have explained elsewhere, immigrants may be able to integrate more quickly and easily if they have existing family in the receiving state who can provide

¹⁰³ The sponsor's continuing control over the immigrant's lawful status in the country does give the sponsor significant control over the immigrant. In the employment context this raised the possibility that employers would exploit immigrants who lacked visa portability. In the marriage context this raises concerns about exploitation or abuse by the sponsoring spouse. To ameliorate this problem, the immigration code includes a limited exception joint petition requirement. The code also includes a special visa category for those who are the victims of abuse at the hands of their sponsoring spouses. See INA § 216(c)(4), 8 U.S.C. § 1186a.(c)(4) (2009) (for the "Hardship waiver" requirements).

¹⁰⁴ See Eytan Meyers, *Theories of International Immigration Policy – A Comparative Analysis*, 34 INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REV. 4, 1245 (2000) (examining immigration systems in different countries, including an analysis of the "national identity" approach to immigration employed by homogenous countries such as Japan and Germany).

social ties, financial support, and valuable information about the immigrant's new home.

On this account, the state can also capitalize on the private information and interests of citizens (and LPRs) by delegating to them to pick immigrants from among their family members. As we explained above, citizens have better information about whether they are close to their qualifying relatives. Here that information is useful because citizens are much more likely to provide support to immigrating relatives if they feel close to them. Permitting relatives to apply for family-based visas without a sponsor, therefore, would undermine the usefulness of the family migration system as a means of promoting integration. Relatedly, citizens are more likely than the government to have a good sense of which close family members are likely to flourish in the United States. Since these citizens also likely take to heart the interests of these family members, they may be unlikely to encourage a family member to migrate if it is likely that person will be miserable in the United States, and will become dependent on her U.S. relatives for financial support. Indeed, citizens will likely encourage foreign relatives to immigrate to the United States precisely when they expect their relatives to prosper and be able to contribute financially and in other ways to the family in the United States.

But there are two shortcomings with this approach. For one thing, a citizen can pick only from among his own qualifying relatives. Even if he will do a better job than the government of picking successful immigrants from among those relatives, there is no reason he will have a better sense of whether his own family members will be better bets than other citizens' family members, or than other prospective migrants who have no family members in the United States.

An even more serious problem is that, like employers, resident family members might ignore some migration costs about which the government cares deeply. While a citizen may discourage her brother from immigrating if she thinks he will be miserable, her private calculation about his happiness may ignore various public values the state wishes to promote. For example, the state may want to pick migrants who already know English or will quickly learn it. But the sister may not worry about whether her brother is likely to learn English if she thinks that he will be able to get along fine while still speaking only his native language. Or, more generally, the state may worry about the fiscal burden the migrant could impose down the road if he ends up not being successful in the labor market. His sister might discount this risk more than the state because she will not bear the cost herself.

To ameliorate these problems, the state might simply take some discretion away from existing residents by putting additional restrictions on which family members they can sponsor. For example, the state could require that qualifying family members pass a language test before receiving a visa. Or the state could prohibit a citizen from sponsoring his spouse if their marriage did not conform to

certain norms regarding sex equality or sexuality. The INA does not impose the former restriction on family reunification, but it does impose the latter. Spouses in plural marriages cannot obtain a spousal visa.¹⁰⁵ Same-sex couples have also historically been prohibited from qualifying for such a visa.¹⁰⁶ Other countries have been even more aggressive about policing the private choices of citizens related to family reunification. Consider, for example, Denmark's recent changes to its family reunification rules for spouses. Denmark has long permitted citizens to bring their spouses into the country. Several years ago it imposed a new restriction on these visas—making them unavailable if one of the marriage partners is under twenty-four years of age.¹⁰⁷ The restriction on qualifying marriages was designed to prohibit family reunification on the basis of (and thereby generally discourage) arranged marriages among young, religious migrants—whom the state feared were likely to be Arab and Muslim.¹⁰⁸ Worried that resident's private family reunification decisions would be insensitive to public values—in Denmark's case, the state's concern about the development of a large, homogenous bloc of religious Muslim migrants—the state removed some discretion from its citizen-agents.

Rather than limiting discretion, the state might also try to force the petitioning family member to internalize the public values that matter to the state. For instance, if the government is worried about the potential future fiscal burden of a new migrant, it could require the petitioning party to bear some of the costs if the immigrant ends up being unable to support herself. The INA does something like this, requiring sponsoring relatives to pledge to support financially the relatives they are sponsoring.¹⁰⁹ One difficulty with this approach is that it may be difficult to enforce such pledges after the fact.¹¹⁰ And even if the pledges are enforceable, financial stability is a rather crude measure of integration or other values about which the state cares—especially in family migration contexts, where the decision to admit is less directly connected the labor market and fiscal issues that underlie the

¹⁰⁵ See, generally, Scott Titshaw, *The Meaning of Marriage: Immigration Rules and Their Implications for Same-Sex Spouses in a World Without DOMA*, 16 WM. & MARY J. WOMEN & L. 537, 583-586 (2010) (describing the general invalidity of plural marriages under immigration law in the U.S.).

¹⁰⁶ See *Adams v. Howerton*, 673 F.2d 1036 (1982).

¹⁰⁷ See Helena Skyt Nielsen et al., *The Effect of Marriage on Education of Immigrants: Evidence from a Policy Reform Restricting Spouse Import* (Inst. for the Study of Labor Discussion Paper Series No. 2899, 2007), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1000373>.

¹⁰⁸ See *id.*; see also Adam B. Cox, *Immigration Law's Organizing Principles*, 157 PENN. L. REV. 341, 363 n.76 (2009).

¹⁰⁹ See INA § 212(a)(4)(C)(ii), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(4)(C)(ii) (2009) (stating that family-sponsored immigrants are inadmissible unless an affidavit of support by the sponsor has been submitted); INA § 213A (describing required affidavit of support).

¹¹⁰ See Charles Wheeler, *The Affidavit of Support and Sponsorship Requirements*, 98-06 Immigr. Briefings 1 (1998) (discussing the difficulties of enforcing the affidavit of financial support); Robert A. Martino, *Sponsor Liability for Alien Immigrants: the Affidavit of Support in Light of Recent Developments*, 7 SAN DIEGO L. REV. 314 (1970) (discussing the uncertainty of the legal enforceability of the affidavit of financial support).

employment visa allocations. Thus, in practice it may be quite difficult to bring the sponsor's incentives in line with state's.

3. *Racial Homogeneity*

The goal of racial homogeneity does not fit neatly into our informational account of the modern family admissions system. If the state's goal is to admit migrants of particular races, the state does not face a significant information problem. Race is conventionally considered a highly visible characteristic. Therefore, the state can regulate the racial composition of the migrant pool by picking races explicitly, as the United States did in the Chinese Exclusion Act.¹¹¹ Or it can do so using proxies like nationality, as the United States did for many years in the national origin quota system.¹¹² There is no obvious informational advantage to delegating the screening decision to family members or other agents.

Still, it is often said that the creation of the modern system of family reunification in the United States was motivated in part by a desire to promote the migration of people with racial and cultural characteristics that match the existing polity. From 1921 to 1965, American immigration law regulated the racial and cultural composition of the migrant pool relatively directly through the national origins quota system.¹¹³ When pressure finally led Congress to abolish the national origin quota system in 1965, many legislators supported the modern family reunification rules because they believed those rules would largely replicate the results of the quota system.¹¹⁴ The family reunification system would replace a centralized allocation system with a delegation to multiple agents. But because these agents were thought likely to pick family members who shared their own racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds, the composition of the migrant pool would not change significantly.

¹¹¹ The Chinese Exclusion Act, May 6, 1882 (22 Stat. L. 58). The Chinese Exclusion Act was not a nationality-based exclusion. It excluded all Chinese laborers—where “Chinese” was defined in the statute as a racial category rather than a nationality. *See id.* Hence the law covered a person of Chinese descent born in Peru in the same way it covered a person born in, and immigrating from, Shanghai.

¹¹² *See* JOHN HIGHAM, STRANGERS IN THE LAND: PATTERNS OF AMERICAN NATIVISM, 1860-1925 330 (1963) (describing the U.S. nationality quota system implemented in 1921).

¹¹³ This system allocated immigration slots to each country on the basis of the number of people from that country who lived in the United States in 1910. The quotas were designed deliberately to try to fix the ethnic composition of the United States as it existed during the first decade of the twentieth century. *See generally* JOHN HIGHAM, STRANGERS IN THE LAND: PATTERNS OF AMERICAN NATIVISM, 1860-1925 330 (1963).

¹¹⁴ *See, e.g.,* ARISTIDE ZOLBERG, A NATION BY DESIGN: IMMIGRATION POLICY IN THE FASHIONING OF AMERICA 268 (2006); Gabriel J. Chin, *The Civil Rights Revolution Comes to Immigration Law: A New Look at the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*, 75 N.C. L. Rev. 273 (1996) (examining the history surrounding the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act).

On this account, delegation appears to be driven by a desire to obfuscate the effects of the admissions rules. The idea is that the public will not understand the consequences of delegating to family members or, if they do eventually realize that the system replicates the racial composition of the existing polity, will not hold legislators responsible for that result. In the congressional context, obfuscation and blame-shifting is a frequent explanation for agency delegations. The same logic appears to be at work here—though there remains the important question whether the public was actually duped.

C. Multiple Agents, Collective Action, and Path Dependency

While we have focused so far on the information and incentives of individual sponsoring family members, a central feature of the family migration rules is that they delegate immigration authority to a large number of potential sponsors. As with the labor migration rules, this feature changes significantly the consequences of the delegation.

Consider the idea that the family reunification system was designed to replicate the national origins quotas—delegating to multiple agents who would pick new migrants who shared their racial and cultural backgrounds. While this idea appears to have motivated some legislators who voted for the system, things did not work out as these legislators had hoped. Today, petitions for family-based immigration are dominated by persons of Asian and Latin American descent—a quite different mix of migrants than would have been selected under the old national origin quotas.¹¹⁵ Understanding how the family migration rules might have contributed to this state of affairs helps highlight the way in which the structure of delegation embedded in the family-based immigration rules—where the state gives limited admissions authority to a large number of agents—can promote or undermine the goal of admitting an ethnically or culturally diverse set of migrants.¹¹⁶

A rule permitting a state's existing residents to petition for the admission of their family members contains an implicit feedback mechanism. Foreign born

¹¹⁵ In 1965, the flow of LPRs was made up predominantly of Europeans: xx% of new green card recipients were from Europe, x% were from Latin America, and x% were from Asia. Today, x% are from Latin America, x% from Asia, and only x% from Europe. See Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000, 11 (U.S. Census Bureau 2001) (for the breakdown of immigrants by country of national origin over time), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-206.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ As we have explained in other work, there are plenty of reasons why a state might have preferences about the aggregate composition of the pool of arriving immigrants. For example, promoting heterogeneity in the migrant pool might facilitate integration and reduce the likelihood the migration results in the large scale social exclusion of an identifiable racial group. While diversity may also come with costs—which explains in part the longstanding debates about the virtues and vices of heterogeneous versus homogenous polities—for present purposes we remain agnostic about that question. Instead, we are interested in how that the disaggregated structure of family admissions influences the composition of the pool of arriving immigrants. See Cox & Posner, *The Rights of Migrants*, *supra* note 16, at 1438.

residents are much more likely than native born citizens to have family abroad. They are also more likely than native born citizens to marry noncitizens (many of whom will either be living abroad or be living in the United States without a green card).¹¹⁷ Consequently, family-reunification rules delegate admission authority to multiple agents, but the agents are principally foreign born residents.

In short, the migrants who enter in period 1 become a large fraction of the people to whom power is delegated in period 2.¹¹⁸ This creates a path-dependency in the structure of delegation. The path-dependency would be strongest if family connections were the only basis for entry—for then all of the migrants entering in period 1 would have been admitted by the family reunification rule. But even if there remain other bases for admission, such as labor visas, the large fraction of migrants admitted to the United States because of family connections ensures that the feedback mechanism is significant.

The fact that early migrants get to pick later migrants does not itself determine the diversity effect of the delegation. Whether this feedback mechanism results in a diverse set of delegates depends significantly on the composition of the migrant pool in the early periods. If the migrants admitted in the first periods after the rule's introduction are diverse, their admission will make it more likely that the pool of later migrants are also diverse. But if a homogenous pool of migrants is admitted in early periods, it becomes increasingly unlikely that the migrants admitted in the future under the system will compose a diverse pool.

This makes the system quite sensitive to shocks during the early periods. If migration during the early period is quite diverse, the system is likely to converge to one that selects a diverse pool of migrants over time (so long as a period 1 migrant is likely to pick a period 2 migrant similar to herself along whatever dimension we are evaluating diversity). If migration during the early period happens to include a more homogenous group of migrants, the system is likely to replicate that homogeneity over time. In the United States, it appears that just such an early period shock to the composition of the migrant pool is in part responsible for long term, persistent changes to the demographic effects of the family migration system. The years immediately following the adoption of the family quota system saw an unanticipated

¹¹⁷ See Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000, 33 (U.S. Census Bureau 2001) (for native and foreign-born intermarriage statistics), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-206.pdf>; Sharon M. Lee & Barry Edmonston, New Marriages, New Families: U.S. Racial and Hispanic Intermarriage, Population Bulletin Vol. 60, No. 2, (Population Reference Bureau 2005) <http://www.prb.org/pdj05/60.2newmarriages.pdf> (finding that in 2000, about 92% of foreign-born residents who married, married other foreign-born residents); Matthijs Kalmijn, *Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, and Trends*, 24 ANN. REV. SOCIOLOGY 395-421 (1998).

¹¹⁸ There is a related general feedback inherent in all immigration systems, where today's migrants become tomorrow's citizens and voters who will control the future content of immigration law. The mechanism we describe here is different because it is driven by the current immigration rules, rather than by the possibility that immigration law will change in the future because of the political preferences of current migrants.

surge of migrants from Latin America and Asia.¹¹⁹ The reason for the surge is not fully understood. But whatever its causes, it created a large pool of recent migrants, many of whom had overseas family members they wished to sponsor for visas under the new system. This set in motion a path-dependent process whose effects are still felt more than four decades later. As with labor migration, this highlights the importance of paying close attention to the disaggregated structure of delegation in immigration law.

IV. STATES

Recent events have reinvigorated longstanding debates about the role of states in American immigration law. Arizona, Georgia, Alabama, and other states frustrated by the failure of federal immigration reform have passed their own statutes related to immigration enforcement.¹²⁰ In an unusual move, the federal government has sued Arizona, arguing that the state has no authority to legislate in an arena traditionally reserved to the federal government.¹²¹

The controversy in Arizona might be taken as evidence that the federal government does not want states and local governments involved in immigration enforcement. But the opposite is true. In recent years the federal government has increasingly delegated authority to states to screen immigrants. And this delegation is nothing new. Since the birth of modern immigration law in the 1880s, the federal government has often allowed state and local officials to decide which noncitizens could enter and remain in the United States.

Why would the federal government delegate immigration screening authority to states? One important possibility is that states and local governments have better information than the federal government about two matters relevant for screening

¹¹⁹ See Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2000, 11 (U.S. Census Bureau 2001) (for the breakdown of immigrants by country of national origin over time), <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-206.pdf>.

¹²⁰ See S. 1070, 49th Leg., 2d Reg. Sess. (Ariz. Apr. 23, 2010); Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act, 2011 Alabama Laws Act 2011-535 (H.B. 56); Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act Of 2011, 2011 Georgia Laws Act 252 (H.B. 87); Labor and Employment, 2011 South Carolina Laws Act 69 (S.B. 20); 2011 Indiana Laws (S.B. 590); 2011 Utah Laws (H.B. 497); see also Randal C. Archibold, *Arizona Enacts Stringent Law on Immigration*, N.Y. Times, A1, April 23, 2010 (discussing S.B. 1070 in Arizona and similar statutes in other states); *D.I.Y. Immigration Reform*, N.Y. Times Editorial, Mar. 19, 2011, WK9 (discussing Utah's H.B. 497 and the trend of states passing immigration reform statutes)..

¹²¹ *United States v. Arizona*, 10-16645, 2011 WL 1346945 (9th Cir. Apr. 11, 2011). Federal courts have enjoined the implementation of portions of the recent state enactments. See *id.*; *Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights v. Deal*, 1:11-CV-1804-TWT, 2011 WL 2520752 (N.D. Ga. June 27, 2011); Kim Severson, *Parts of Georgia Immigration Law Blocked*, N.Y. Times, June 28, 2011 (discussing pending litigation against several states' recent immigration legislation).

decisions.¹²² First, state and local law enforcement agencies often have superior access to information about immigration violators. Second, states and local governments have better information about the local effects of migration. This Part first surveys the landscape of delegation to the states and then discusses these twin possibilities.

A. *The Role of States in Federal Immigration Law*

1. *Formal Screening Criteria*

The Immigration and Nationality Act's formal criteria for admission and deportation delegate authority to states by incorporating into these criteria the content of state law. State law thus often determines whether a noncitizen can obtain a visa, or whether she will be deported.

To see this, consider the family migration system. Federal immigration law provides an immigration benefit for the spouses of citizens and lawful permanent residents. As we explained above, a citizen's spouse is treated more favorably than almost any other immigrant; she is eligible for admission as a lawful permanent resident solely on the basis of her marriage to an American citizen, and her visa application is exempt the complex quotas that apply to the vast majority of migrants who enter the United States under other admission rules. A spouse of a lawful permanent resident is subject to the quota system for family migration, but she too becomes eligible for a green card by virtue of her marriage.¹²³

Immigration law incorporates state family law into its understanding of who counts as a "spouse" for purposes of this valuable federal immigration benefit. While the code does not directly define the term "spouse," courts have concluded that a person can be a spouse only if the couple is validly married according to both the law of the state in which the marriage was performed and the law of the state in which they reside (or intend to reside, if the spouse is coming from overseas).¹²⁴ Therefore, variations in state marriage law can affect a noncitizen's eligibility for a visa. Historically, this reliance on state law mattered most in instances where states differed over the age of consent, or the marriage of related persons.¹²⁵ Today, however, the most significant difference between state marriage laws concerns gay marriage. While these differences have until recently been unimportant because federal law prohibited same-sex couples from receiving any federal benefit on the

¹²² It is likely the case that some of the delegation to states is born of necessity. Providing a spousal immigration benefit without relying *at all* on state family law would be extremely costly: it would basically require the creation of a federal family law. Nonetheless, much of the delegation to states—particularly recent delegation in the enforcement arena—is hard to explain on this ground.

¹²³ INA § 203(a)(2), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(a)(2) (2009).

¹²⁴ See *Matter of Darwish*, 14 I&N Dec. 307 (BIA 1973).

¹²⁵ See *Matter of Zappia* 12 I&N Dec. 439 (BIA 1967).

basis of their marriage,¹²⁶ the Obama administration has recently announced that it believes the federal prohibition is unconstitutional.¹²⁷ For a same-sex couple, therefore, the availability of a green card for a noncitizen spouse may soon turn on whether the state where the couple lives (or wants to live after the noncitizen spouse immigrates) permits same-sex couples to marry.

Federal immigration law also incorporates state criminal law. For example, a noncitizen becomes deportable if he is convicted of, among other things, “rape,” “murder,” or a “crime involving moral turpitude” (though the latter counts only if committed within five years of entry).¹²⁸ Convictions under state law count, but of course different states use the same label to criminalize different conduct. The crime of rape does not include the same elements in every state, and in many states the formal category of rape has been superseded by a broader offense of “sexual assault.” Immigration law could provide federal definitions of these crimes and thereby render differences in state criminal codes irrelevant. Instead, however, immigration judges and federal courts have long followed an approach—known as the “categorical approach”—that makes the decision about criminal deportability turn on the way these crimes are defined in state criminal law, rather than just the conduct of the noncitizen.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Defense of Marriage Act, Pub. L. No. 104-199, 110 Stat. 2419 (Sept. 21, 1996) (codified at 1 U.S.C. § 7 and 28 U.S.C. § 1738C (2006)).

¹²⁷ See Letter from Attorney General to Congress on Litigation Involving the Defense of Marriage Act, February 23, 2011 (announcing President’s decision “that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, as applied to same-sex couples who are legally married under state law, violates the equal protection component of the Fifth Amendment,” and his instruction to the Department of Justice not to defend the statute in pending litigation). Prior to the decision of the Obama administration to decline to defend the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act, a same-sex couple that married in one of the states permitting such marriages were barred from obtaining an immigration benefit by DOMA. In the wake of the decision not to defend the statute, however, the state of DOMA’s enforcement in the immigration context has been changing rapidly. Because the Administration took the position that it would continue to enforce DOMA even while declining to defend it, Citizenship and Immigration Services has refused to accept visa applications filed by same-sex couples. Nonetheless, the Administration has stayed some (though not all) pending immigration decisions involving claims of spousal immigration benefits made by same-sex couples. Julia Preston, *Confusion over Policy on Gay Immigrants*, N.Y. TIMES, March 29, 2011; Julia Preston, *Justice Dept. to Continue Policy Against Same-Sex Marriage*, N.Y. TIMES, May 7, 2011. These decisions have led some judges to suspend deportation in other cases involving same-sex couples as well. See Julia Preston, *Judge Gives Immigrant in Same-Sex Marriage a Reprieve From Deportation*, N.Y. TIMES, May 6, 2011. For a general discussion of the President’s decision to enforce but not defend DOMA, see Aziz Huq, *When Should Unconstitutional Federal Laws be Enforced (but not Defended)?: The Practice of Departmentalism and Section 3 of the Defense Against Marriage Act* (working paper 2011).

¹²⁸ INA § 237(a)(2), 8 U.S.C. § 1227(a)(2) (2009) (making noncitizens deportable for, among other crimes, “crimes of moral turpitude,” “controlled substance” violations, and “aggravated felony”); INA § 101(a)(43) (defining “aggravated felony” to include, among other things, “murder, rape, or sexual abuse of a minor”).

¹²⁹ Under a pure categorical approach, the adjudicator does not look to the noncitizen’s conduct at all. It asks instead whether all of the conduct covered by the state criminal statute is a strict subset of the

Like the incorporation of family law, the incorporation of state criminal law into the criteria of admissibility and deportability delegates screening authority to states by making admission or deportation turn on the formal content of state law.¹³⁰ However, the delegation of authority is at least formally constrained by an implicit equality norm: states can use policy considerations to screen out migrants only if the same rule is applied to citizens. For example, if a state wants to screen out foreign same-sex spouses of citizens, then it also must deny same-sex marriage rights to citizens. This requirement places a serious constraint on this form of delegation—the implications of which we take up below.

2. *Enforcement*

In addition to delegating to states by incorporating state law into immigration law's formal screening criteria, the federal government has frequently asked (or required) states to play a part enforcing those criteria.¹³¹ State involvement in enforcement dates back all the way to the first large-scale immigration restrictions adopted by the federal government—the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.¹³² When this Act was passed, no federal immigration bureaucracy existed to enforce the law. So Congress turned to local officials. These officials, working in San Francisco and other ports of entry, would interview arriving migrants to determine whether they were subject to exclusion. While federal power was not entirely absent from this process—for example, immigrants whose admission was denied could file a habeas petition in federal court—local officials were frequently front-line enforcers during this early period.¹³³

As the federal bureaucracy expanded, the role of states shrank. But over the past few decades, the federal government has increasingly turned again to states as enforcement agents. The paradigmatic modern example is enforcement authority delegated pursuant to § 287(g) of the immigration code.¹³⁴ Enacted as a provision of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, § 287(g) authorizes the Attorney General to enter into agreements with states and local governments to enforce immigration law. Today there are nearly 100 such

conduct covered by the federal law's definition of a CIMT. A noncitizen's deportability will thus hinge on how the state has drafted its criminal law.

¹³⁰ Whether states would actually manipulate the structure of state criminal law or family law in order to influence the screening of migrants is an important question we take up below. *See infra* text accompanying notes 153-162.

¹³¹ Note that by “delegation,” we do not mean the loose (and often inaccurate) sense in which the power states have by virtue of our federal structure might be thought of as a delegation.

¹³² The Chinese Exclusion Act, May 6, 1882 (22 Stat. 58).

¹³³ *See* LUCY E. SALYER, *LAW HARSH AS TIGERS: CHINESE IMMIGRANTS AND THE SHAPING OF MODERN IMMIGRATION LAW* 247-248 (1995) (discussing habeas review with respect to the Chinese Exclusion Act).

¹³⁴ INA § 287(g), 8 U.S.C. § 1357(g) (2009).

agreements, and they authorize two principal types of enforcement activity. The majority of the agreements embody a jail screening model: these agreements, such as the one Los Angeles County entered into in 2005, authorize local officials to screen arrestees for immigration violations when they are booked into jail, and then issue detainers against suspected violators.¹³⁵ A minority of agreements authorize local officials to screen for status and issue detainers during ordinary policing operations—a street-level enforcement model.

Complementing § 287(g) is the Homeland Security Department’s new Secure Communities initiative.¹³⁶ This program, known colloquially as SCOMM, is an information-sharing initiative rolled out in 2008. Traditionally, whenever a person is arrested and booked by a state or local law enforcement agency, his fingerprints are taken and forwarded electronically to the FBI. The FBI compares those prints against various national criminal information databases that return a “hit” if the person has a criminal history or outstanding warrants. Under SCOMM, the federal government forwards to DHS the fingerprints already being routed to the FBI; DHS then compares the person’s fingerprints against a database designed to identify persons who have outstanding immigration violations, such as persons who are unlawfully in the country because they have overstayed their visas, or because they been previously deported and have not been legally re-admitted.¹³⁷ If the database identifies an arrestee as a potential immigration violator, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) notifies the local law enforcement agency and may place a detainer on the person.¹³⁸ The detainer requires the local agency to hold the person for forty-eight hours in order to permit ICE to transfer the person to federal custody for the initiation of deportation proceedings.¹³⁹ SCOMM has already been rolled out in more than 1,400 local jurisdictions,¹⁴⁰ and is projected to reach nationwide

¹³⁵ See, e.g., Lance Pugmire, Immigration Check at Inland Jail Is OKd, L.A. Times, Sept. 21, 2005, at B3 (discussing agreements between federal immigration officials and Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties allowing local law enforcement officials to screen for illegal immigrants).

¹³⁶ For a full description of the program see http://www.ice.gov/secure_communities/.

¹³⁷ See id.

¹³⁸ See id.

¹³⁹ See Department of Homeland Security, Immigration Detainer – Notice of Action, <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/immigration-detainer-form.pdf> (for a copy of the detainer form).

¹⁴⁰ See <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/sc-activated.pdf>, (for current SCOMM participation).

coverage within a few years.¹⁴¹ It therefore covers a much broader swath of the country than do existing 287(g) agreements.¹⁴²

SCOMM's information sharing system is similar in one sense to the formal incorporation of state criminal law into federal immigration law: both delegate screening authority to states and local governments by making screening decisions depend on an outcome in the state criminal justice system. But SCOMM is different in two important respects. First, the state action that triggers screening is arrest, not conviction. Second, the determination of inadmissibility or deportability is unconnected to the arrest decision. Under the INA's criminal grounds of removal, the state conviction can make a noncitizen removable. Under SCOMM, the arrest of a noncitizen does not affect her deportability as a matter of formal law. Instead, it provides an opportunity for the federal government to identify and apprehend an otherwise deportable noncitizen.

B. *Identifying Removable Noncitizens*

1. *The basic information advantage*

States have two different sorts of information about immigration violators. First, states are in a good position to identify noncitizens who are removable by virtue of criminal convictions because state and local law enforcement agencies already investigate and prosecute most crimes in our federal system. When a state convicts a noncitizen of a crime that might make her removable, she is often brought to the attention of the immigration authorities through jail-screening programs or other programs of cooperation between states and the federal government. Because the state has both information about the nature of the noncitizen's criminal conviction and physical custody over him, it is much easier for the state to flag noncitizens whose convictions might make them deportable under § 237 or inadmissible under § 212 of the immigration code.¹⁴³

Second, states are also in a good position to identify noncitizens who are deportable because of immigration status violations rather than because of criminal

¹⁴¹ See <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/sc-dep.pdf> for SCOMM nationwide usage projected through 2013. Some states, however, have attempted to withdraw from SCOMM. See Peter H. Schuck, Three States Short of a Secure Community, N.Y. Times, Jun. 22, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/opinion/23Schuck.html>.

¹⁴² According to ICE, state and local jurisdictions cannot opt out of Secure Communities, see Secure Communities: Get the Facts, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, http://www.ice.gov/secure_communities/get-the-facts.htm.

¹⁴³ See INA § 237, 8 U.S.C. § 1227 (2009) (grounds of deportability); INA § 212, 8 U.S.C. § 1182 (2009) (grounds of inadmissibility). While the grounds of inadmissibility may sound like they apply to noncitizens seeking to enter the country, they often apply to noncitizens who are already living in the United States. This is because the inadmissibility rules apply to anyone who has not been "admitted," and noncitizens who enter the country without inspection have not been admitted for purposes of federal immigration law. See INA 101(a)(13), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(13) (defining "admission").

conduct.¹⁴⁴ This is because state and local officials make many, many more police stops and arrests than does the federal government. In theory, every arrest provides state and local law enforcement authorities an opportunity to collect information on people's identities. This identification information can be used by the federal government to determine whether the arrestee is living in the United States in violation of immigration law—because he sneaked across the border, overstayed his visa, or violated some more technical requirement of immigration law.¹⁴⁵ From the federal government's perspective these encounters are essentially free. The only cost is the cost of comparing the identification information collected by the state with information the federal government has about immigration violators. Without these encounters federal officials would have to go out and try to locate immigration violators on their own, using costly workplace raids, roving patrols along the highways in border areas, passenger screening by ICE agents on trains and buses, or other strategies.

From an information perspective, SCOMM and § 287(g) differ in two important ways. In one way SCOMM capitalizes on more local information. For reasons we explain below, SCOMM has much wider geographic coverage, with more than eight times as many local governments already participating.¹⁴⁶ Wider participation means more information for the federal government. In another respect, however, SCOMM ignores some information local officials might possess. SCOMM relies on local officials for an arrestee's identity, but not for information about immigration status. The arrestee's status is evaluated on the basis biometric match with a federal database of immigration violators. This will lead to plenty of false negatives, because many noncitizens who are living in the United States in violation of immigration law have no fingerprints in the federal database that would lead to a hit (those who have entered without inspection and not previously been removed are a good example). In contrast, local officials screening for status under § 287(g) agreements can base their screening decisions on other grounds, such as the arrestee's responses to questions about where he was born and how he entered the country.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ While tens of thousands of noncitizens are deported each year because their criminal convictions render them deportable, far more are deported for status violations unrelated to criminal convictions.

¹⁴⁵ It is possible, of course, that law could prohibit the collection of such identification information during stops and arrests. At least in the arrest context, few constraints appear to exist in practice. We focus on arrests here for that reason—and because SCOMM, which we discuss below, is an information collection system triggered by arrest rather than simply by a stop.

¹⁴⁶ See <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/sc-activated.pdf>, (for current SCOMM participation); cf. <http://www.ice.gov/news/library/factsheets/287g.htm> (for the up-to-date list of participating entities that have mutually signed 287(g) agreements with ICE).

¹⁴⁷ See *supra* text accompanying notes 143-145.

2. *The agency problem*

Our explanation of states' information advantage assumes that the federal government wants to retain for itself the decision of which "types" of noncitizens to admit or remove. (As we have explained elsewhere, the federal government often does not wish to deport every person living in the United States in violation of immigration law.)¹⁴⁸ States are useful only because they can help the federal government locate noncitizens who fit the federal government's criteria. This arrangement raises two familiar agency issues. First, state and local officials might make mistakes that federal officials would not. Second, and perhaps more interestingly, state and local agents with different preferences than the federal government might use their authority to skew enforcement priorities within immigration law. States like Arizona that want less immigration will flag noncitizens that the federal government would otherwise not want to remove. Other states like Illinois will do the opposite, withholding information regarding noncitizens that the federal government would prefer to remove.

SCOMM and 287(g) represent different institutional approaches to mitigating these concerns. From the perspective of the principal—the federal government—SCOMM has some significant advantages over 287(g) that reduce both the risk of error and bias by the state and local screeners. These advantages may help explain why the federal government has recently moved aggressively to expand SCOMM, while 287(g) is used on a much more limited basis.

Consider first the risk of error. Section 287(g) arrangements generally require that the agents possess far more expertise than does SCOMM. Under 287(g), local officers are deputized to make the initial screening decision, deciding on the basis of their knowledge of immigration law whether a particular person is a noncitizen who is in violation of immigration law.¹⁴⁹ This screening might take place during an interview in a county jail.¹⁵⁰ Or, where local law enforcement officials have been authorized to make arrests for civil immigration violations, the screening might take place on the street or during a traffic stop.¹⁵¹ Because the initial screening decision

¹⁴⁸ See Cox and Posner, *Second-Order Structure*, *supra* note 16, at 844 (discussing the way that pervasive underenforcement can function as part of an ex post screening system).

¹⁴⁹ INA § 287(g), 8 U.S.C. § 1357(g) (2009).

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, the 287(g) resolution passed by Prince William County, Virginia in 2007, requiring officers to check the residency status of anyone in police custody who they suspect is an illegal immigrant. See Nick Miroff, Pr. William Passes Resolution Targeting Illegal Immigration, *Washington Post*, Jul. 11 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/10/AR2007071002093.html>. See also *supra* note 135.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, the 287(g) implementation in Maricopa County, Arizona, where officers are authorized to check the residency status of anyone pulled over for any traffic violation. Randal C. Archibold, Arizona County Uses New Law to Look for Illegal Immigrants, *N.Y. Times*, May 10, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/10/us/10smuggle.html?fta=y>.

requires local officers to understand and apply an immigration code that is notoriously complex, the risk of error arises.

The Justice Department often attempts to reduce the risk of error through relatively direct supervision: the federal government attempts to draft agreements that specify more precisely what is expected of local agents, the agents are required to complete training before engaging in immigration enforcement, and the Justice Department tries to monitor the agents to identify bad behavior.¹⁵² SCOMM, however, reflects a very different model: the delegation to local agents is more constrained, because their role in the screening process is only to pass identification information about arrestees along to the federal government. This eliminates the need for local officials to have any knowledge about immigration law. And one would expect that screening through the federal database, backed by individual judgment of federal immigration officers who must decide whether to issue a detainer when the database returns a hit, would almost certainly produce fewer errors than screening by local officials with little training and many duties unrelated to immigration enforcement.

SCOMM also does a better job of preventing local officials from biasing the federal government's enforcement priorities, particularly among local governments who are inclined to shirk or who consider themselves "sanctuary cities."¹⁵³ SCOMM is different from 287(g) in a way that is central to agency discretion: SCOMM participation is basically mandatory, while 287(g) required individual jurisdictions to opt into detailed agreements with DHS in order to participate.¹⁵⁴ To be clear, there is an ongoing dispute about whether SCOMM is formally mandatory. For instance, Illinois recently announced that it was withdrawing from SCOMM, but it is unclear whether this declaration has any legal effect.¹⁵⁵ Even if the program is not formally mandatory, however, ICE has shifted the default for participation with tremendous effect. It has proven quite difficult to opt out of participation, and ICE is rapidly rolling out program around the country. Technological hurdles prevented DHS from activating every jurisdiction in the country simultaneously, but in just over two years DHS has already activated nearly 1,000 jurisdictions, and the agency predicts

¹⁵² See, for example, the 287(g) Memorandum of Agreement signed by Maricopa County, available at http://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/memorandumsofAgreementUnderstanding/r_287gmaricopacountyso102609.pdf; see also Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, Justice Department Settles Lawsuit with Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, June 2, 2011 (discussing the Justice Department's settlement with the Maricopa County sheriff's department withdrawing some of their authority in light of alleged abuses).

¹⁵³ See Lisa M. Seghetti, et al., *Enforcing Immigration Law: The Role of State and Local Law Enforcement*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 26 (2006), retrieved from <http://www.ilw.com/immigrationdaily/news/2006,0912-crs.pdf>, for a discussion of sanctuary cities.

¹⁵⁴ INA § 287(g)(9), 8 U.S.C. § 1357(g) (2009).

¹⁵⁵ See Julia Preston, *States Resisting Program Central to Obama's Immigration Strategy*, N.Y. Times, May 5, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/06/us/06immigration.html>; see also supra note 142 (DHS fact sheet stating that participation by local jurisdictions is not discretionary).

that it will have near nationwide coverage by the end of 2012.¹⁵⁶ After fifteen years of existence, the 287(g) program still has fewer than 100 participating jurisdictions.¹⁵⁷ Thus, reluctant enforcement agents cannot easily avoid assisting the federal government with enforcement the way they could under 287(g).

Even if we focus only on those jurisdictions that do participate, SCOMM constrains local discretion more than 287(g). Because 287(g) agreements sometimes give local officials freestanding authority to enforce immigration law, it confers considerable discretion on these officials to decide when and where to target enforcement resources. SCOMM, on the other hand, piggy-backs on local arrests that, in theory, are already taking place for other reasons. Thus, it provides fewer opportunities for local officials with different preferences to bias enforcement priorities.

Fewer opportunities does not mean, of course, no opportunities. While the federal government would ideally prefer state policing behavior be inelastic to the decision to layer immigration enforcement on top of criminal enforcement, it cannot ensure that this is true. Local officials still control whether a person is screened by SCOMM, because screening requires arrest and local officials decide whom to arrest. A central question, therefore, is whether state or local officials will change their local policing behavior in response to the implementation of SCOMM in their jurisdictions.

Control over arrest authority appears to provide greater opportunities for local agents who would prefer more immigration enforcement than for those who would prefer less. It is hard to imagine that the Chicago police would forego arrests in order to prevent persons from being screened through SCOMM. Yet it is not terribly difficult for a local government to arrest persons precisely so that they will be screened. As criminal justice scholars frequently note, local officials have tremendous arrest discretion.¹⁵⁸ And the arrest need not lead to a conviction, or even to formal charges, for the arrestee to be flagged and placed in removal proceedings. Thus, SCOMM's reliance on arrests as the screening trigger afford local officials more discretion than they would have if the trigger was located later point in the criminal process, such as following a conviction.

While this discussion suggests that SCOMM may more effectively discipline sanctuary-city agents than immigration-restrictionist agents, an asymmetry in the federal government's ability to monitor local agents cuts in the opposite direction.

¹⁵⁶ See Secure Communities: The Basics, at http://www.ice.gov/secure_communities/

¹⁵⁷ See <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/sc-activated.pdf>, (for current SCOMM participation); cf. <http://www.ice.gov/news/library/factsheets/287g.htm> (for the up-to-date list of participating entities that have mutually signed 287(g) agreements with ICE).

¹⁵⁸ See Joseph Goldstein, *Police Discretion Not to Invoke the Criminal Process: Low-Visibility Decisions in the Administration of Justice*, 69 Yale L.J. 4 (discussing the discretion of local officers/authorities in making arrest decisions).

When the federal government delegates to local agents it often has somewhat asymmetrical review authority because of the nature of immigration decisions. In the early days of immigration enforcement, decisions by local officials to deny admission were subject to federal court review, because an alien “in custody” by virtue of his denial of admission could seek habeas review.¹⁵⁹ But grants of admission were not subject to judicial review and as a practical matter were likely subject to essentially no oversight.

Today the situation is reversed. The federal government can decline to initiate proceedings against someone flagged through SCOMM.¹⁶⁰ But decisions by a local cop not to arrest a person pursuant to his 287(g) authority, or not to arrest a person whom she suspects will be flagged by SCOMM’s database after booking, or a decision by a local prosecutor to reduce or drop charges that she knows will make a defendant deportable, are largely unreviewable by federal authorities. Moreover, even outside the context of SCOMM and § 287(g), immigration law’s reliance on outcomes from the state criminal justice system delegates power in a second way as well. As we noted above, convictions for certain crimes render noncitizens deportable.¹⁶¹ But because the fact of conviction and the statute under which a noncitizen is convicted often determine whether immigration consequences attach to criminal conduct, inadmissibility and deportability frequently turn on a state’s arresting, charging, and plea practices. For example, county prosecutors often have the option of charging a defendant with at least two offenses, one that will render the defendant deportable and one that will not. And even if the prosecutor charges the deportable offense, defense lawyers negotiating plea agreements can bargain for a conviction that saves the defendant from deportation. Thus, even though federal immigration law’s reliance on state criminal law *formally* imposes an equality constraint on the delegation of power to states—where changes to a state’s criminal code affects citizens and noncitizens equally—in practice local officials have considerable latitude to help a noncitizen avoid deportation through charge- and sentence-bargaining. Thus, some “shirking” by local agents intended to reduce the level of immigration enforcement is more difficult than overzealous enforcement behavior for the federal government to monitor.¹⁶²

C. Tailoring Immigration Policy to Local Conditions

In the above discussion the federal government wanted to rely on states to help it identify immigration violators, but wants immigration policy to be uniform

¹⁵⁹ See Lucy E. Salyer, *Law Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law*, 247-248 (1995) (discussing habeas review with respect to the Chinese Exclusion Act).

¹⁶⁰ See *Secure Communities: The Secure Communities Process*, at http://www.ice.gov/secure_communities/.

¹⁶¹ See *supra*note 128 and accompanying text.

¹⁶² For discussion of this general problem in enforcement regimes, see Richard McAdams et al, *Punitive Police? Agency Costs, Law Enforcement, and Criminal Procedure* (working paper 2011)

around the country. We might also imagine, however, that the federal government would like immigration policy to vary based on local conditions.

There is a longstanding debate among immigration scholars about the role that local conditions should play in shaping immigration policy. Peter Schuck,¹⁶³ Cristina Rodriguez,¹⁶⁴ Peter Spiro,¹⁶⁵ and others have suggested that state and local governments should have authority over immigration policy because migration affects local communities in different ways. While this scholarship is concerned almost exclusively with the question whether immigration law *should* be responsive to local conditions, we are interested instead in the question how a nation might design immigration law to be responsive to these conditions.

1. *Local Conditions and Information Advantages*

There are several sorts of local conditions that might be relevant to immigration policy. Local labor market conditions may influence demand for migration to a particular place. For example, purported shortages of sugar cane cutters in central Florida were part of what motivated the creation of the H-2A guest worker program in 1990.¹⁶⁶ The effect of migration on the provision of public goods may also have significant effects on the demand for migrants. Border states like Arizona and Texas frequently complain that current levels of migration strain their public schools, hospitals, and so forth.

It is important to recognize that federal immigration law already makes some local conditions formally relevant. Consider three prominent examples:

- Federal immigration law explicitly makes variation in local labor market conditions a valid reason to accept or reject a particular migrant applying for a labor visa. To qualify for a visa, an applicant's sponsoring employer must show that it has performed a search and is unable to locate another worker to fill the position. The search is often local, rather than national, in scope. As we explained in Part II,¹⁶⁷ the assumption is that immigrant workers can be absorbed without cost to areas that face labor shortages, but will drive down the wages of existing workers if they immigrate to areas without any shortage.

¹⁶³ See Peter Schuck, *Taking Immigration Federalism Seriously*, 2007 U. CHICAGO LAW FORUM 57.

¹⁶⁴ See Cristina Rodriguez, *The Significance of the Local in Immigration Law*, 106 MICH. L. REV. 567 (2008).

¹⁶⁵ See Peter J. Spiro, *Learning to Live with Immigration Federalism*, 29 CONN. L. REV. 1627, 1635–36 (1997).

¹⁶⁶ See Immigration Act of 1990, Pub.L. 101-649, Nov. 29, 1990, 104 Stat. 4978.

¹⁶⁷ See *supra* text accompanying notes 61-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- Criminal deportation rules rely extensively on the structure of state criminal law. Consequently, a noncitizen’s deportability will often depend on the state in which noncitizen was convicted of committing a crime.
- Family admission rules sometimes turn on the content of state law. Differences among state marriage requirements can determine whether a noncitizen is eligible for admission as the spouse of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident.

These examples suggest that the incorporation of local conditions may be somewhat haphazard. In the first example, the federal government is concerned about local labor market conditions. As we explained above, however, this idea often underestimates the extent to which the labor market in the United States is national rather than local. Reliance on local conditions in the labor market may therefore be largely illusory. At the same time, potentially more significant local costs are often treated as formally irrelevant by federal immigration law. Many social services, such as education, are financed predominantly at the state and local level. In theory, therefore, it might make more sense to take these local costs into account than anticipated labor market effects. Yet admission and deportation decisions are not formally responsive to the cost of providing local public goods to immigrants.

Moreover, the examples suggest several different possible types of “local conditions” of interest. In the first example, the federal government is interested in some measure of the local labor market benefits of migration. The second and third examples are quite different: the “local condition” on which admissions and deportation decisions turn is the content of state law. It is possible that some of the reliance on state law reflects the desire to ease the administration of federal immigration law. Relying on state family law, for example, saves the federal government from creating a duplicate federal family law for immigration purposes. Nonetheless, the incorporation of state law may reflect a desire to incorporate local norms embodied in those laws.

Which local conditions are relevant to federal immigration policy will affect the desirability of delegating to states. This is because states may be more likely to have better information than the federal government about some local conditions but not others. For example, states and local governments may be more likely to have superior information about the costs of local public goods, but less likely to have superior information about “local” labor market conditions. (In fact, immigration law does not delegate to states questions about local labor markets, leaving to individual employers the task of supplying this information.)

2. Interstate mobility and local variation

Even if states and local governments have superior information about local conditions, a central question is whether immigration policy can really vary around

the country on the basis of those conditions. This sort of variation presupposes that the federal government can, say, reduce the number of migrants going to Arizona while increasing the number of migrants going to New York. But immigration law is not thought to work this way. A visa entitles a noncitizen to enter the United States—not some particular state. Moreover, after a noncitizen is admitted, American constitutional law may prohibit the government from imposing formal restrictions on the ability of migrants to travel between states.¹⁶⁸ For these reasons, perhaps the idea of local immigration policy is logically impossible under American law.

How can this critique be squared with the fact that federal immigration law already does rely formally on some local conditions? For some of those local conditions—like local labor market conditions—the critique may provide a further reason to doubt the sensibility of the existing immigration rules. For the criminal deportation rules, however, existing immigration law suggests that the freedom of movement does not necessarily undermine the idea of local variation in immigration policy. There are two reasons for this. First, there are powerful reasons why migrants will not always pick states of residence based on the content of some state rule that might affect their deportability in the future. Migrants generally do not have the sort of flexibility about where to live that modern corporations have about where to incorporate. Family and social networks, financial constraints, job opportunities, and so forth are all far more powerful than the content of state criminal law.

Moreover, sometimes immigration law even effectively restricts mobility after entry. Consider the various temporary farm worker programs that the United States has employed during the twentieth century. In many of these programs, including the infamous Bracero program and the modern H-2A program, the immigrant's visa is tied to a single employer who is bringing the worker to work in a particular place.¹⁶⁹ The immigrant's admission is temporary, often lasting only a few months, and there is no visa portability. While workers are not prohibited from crossing state lines, as a practical matter their temporary admission, fixed place of employment, and lack of visa portability combine with their working conditions and economic status basically limit their stay to one state. Thus, de facto restrictions on mobility have been a common feature of American immigration law.

Thus, even if the federal government does not delegate to each state by authorizing the state to issue admissions visas valid only for that particular state, local variation in immigration policy is both possible and even relatively common in American immigration law.

¹⁶⁸ Some states, such as China, do limit internal migration, but no modern democracies formally limit internal mobility. See Delia Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*, 39-48 (1998)

¹⁶⁹ See MAE NGAI, *IMPOSSIBLE SUBJECTS: ILLEGAL ALIENS AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA* (2004) (discussing Bracero program's rules); INA § 218, 8 U.S.C. § 1188 (2009).

3. Externalities and local politics

Delegating immigration screening authority to states in areas where they have superior information about local conditions raises two important costs. First, states might use their authority to impose externalities on other states. Here the agent's advantage—it has better information about immigration's local effects and greater incentives to pay attention to those effects—becomes a disadvantage.

Second, states might use their authority to skew the federal government's enforcement priorities because of local preferences regarding migration policy. In other words, the local agents may have better information, but they may also be biased. Arizona's concern about current immigration levels might reflect the fact the state is bearing disproportionate costs from migration. This was Texas's claim back in the days of *Plyler v. Doe*,¹⁷⁰ when it claimed that it needed to exclude some immigrants (those who lacked status) from the school system because of the costs they imposed on the system. But Arizona's resistance might also be the product of the state citizens' preferences regarding migration: they might simply favor much lower levels of immigration than other voters around the country.

One way the federal government might try to ameliorate this problem is to limit the states to supplying the federal government with information regarding local conditions. As with the identification of immigrant violators, this preserves the federal government's ability to monitor the states. But if the states have superior information, it is far from clear how effective this monitoring can be. In this respect information about local conditions is different than information about violators: much of the value of that information lay in the identification of individuals in contexts where the federal government could itself determine deportability. Monitoring in that context may be relatively easier for the federal government.

A second strategy is to rely on behavior by states that provides information about local conditions but is inelastic to the states preferences about immigration law. Relying on such behavior makes it much more difficult for the state agents to misrepresent local conditions in order to bias immigration policy toward the state's preferences. For example, if the federal government wants criminal deportation to turn on conduct that is considered sufficiently serious within a local community, then relying on state criminal law to determine deportability may be a good way of getting information about local norms about criminal misconduct without the risk of the state rigging that information because it was especially pro- or anti-immigrant. It is unlikely that a state will rewrite its general criminal laws regarding assault or drug use just to increase or decrease deportations.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

¹⁷¹ As we explained earlier, however, the inelasticity of state criminal codes is undermined at least somewhat by the existing of prosecutorial discretion—something more likely an issue for minor

CONCLUSION

Canadian-style centralized systems of migrant screening are popular outside the United States, and to many people they seem more rational than the American system, which relies heavily on delegated authority to various agents. However, the American system can be explained as a decentralized system that harnesses the private information of various stakeholders by delegating authority to them to select migrants subject to various constraints.

Whether the American system is in fact superior to a more centralized immigration system is an empirical question, which we have not tried to answer as it would take us far afield. But it is worth observing that the United States has enjoyed extraordinary success in replenishing its population with waves of migrants, who have voluntarily assimilated. This experience can be compared favorably to that of Europe, where countries have found themselves with hostile groups of unassimilated migrants and their children, whose failure to assimilate has become an explosive political issue. We cannot prove that these difference outcomes show that the U.S. system is superior, but they are highly suggestive.

Readers with comments should address them to:

Professor Eric A. Posner
University of Chicago Law School
1111 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
eric_posner@law.uchicago.edu

offenses than for serious criminal offenses such as murder and rape. *See supra* text accompanying notes 157-162.

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