



A free society requires open borders

By William Rampe

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The issue of immigration strikes at core cultural and economic values that many in the United States and across the world hold dear. Immigration involves change; whether this change involves new languages, foods, traditions, or industries – or even if it brings positive benefits to a majority of people in a society – is of no matter to its critics.

These critics most aptly belong under the label of conservative because their argument declares an inherent value to conservation. While politicians and commentators may proclaim themselves conservatives and simultaneously promote free immigration, they do not belong in the same category as those who oppose immigration, nor should the label apply to these libertarian-minded advocates.

The value of conservation is at the core of the anti-immigration stance because immigration inevitably disrupts the homogeneity of a society's traditions by bringing in new cultures and ideas. A society that holds certain religious and economic traditions as core to its character will necessarily feel attacked when new religions and workers enter that society, producing the "threat" of change for the original inhabitants.

Hungarian Prime Minister [Viktor Orban](#), a recent attendee of CPAC ("the largest and most influential gathering of conservatives in the world," according to the conference's website), explained this attitude in a joint news briefing with Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer in Vienna: "The position I stand for, is a cultural, civilisation (based) stance."

Orban further elucidated this stance at CPAC, stating, "This war is a culture war. We have to revitalize our churches, our families, our universities and our community institutions."

The key implication of Orban's claim is that immigrants are detrimental to the institutions that he values and conservatives should advocate policies that will prevent detrimental changes from occurring. Former U.S. President Donald Trump echoed Orban's warning in his presidential campaign announcement: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best, They're sending people that have lots of problems."

Trump's statement is objectively false; Mexicans who choose to cross the border, whether they do so legally or not, are primarily productivity-minded individuals looking for higher wages, increased security, and an overall better life for themselves and their families, not criminals.

According to Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute, in 2018, illegal immigrants were about [50 percent less likely to be convicted of a crime](#)

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than native-born Americans in Texas, which is the only state to record the immigration status of those convicted. Additionally, data from the New American Economy Research Fund has shown that 96.7 percent of Mexican [undocumented workers](#) contribute to the economy and hold \$82.2 billion in spending power.

The economic argument alone should be enough proof for a policy of open immigration; however, it is unconvincing to conservatives because of the primacy they place on maintaining culture. In their view, even economic growth that involves social change is an evil that must be prevented because, as Orban claimed, maintaining “community institutions” is the primary goal.

Both Trump and Orban place a dichotomy between civilization and immigration. The civilization they refer to is their conception of “Western civilization,” which they view as being supportive of traditional values and Christianity and, thus, moral. This dichotomy reveals the cornerstone of conservative thought about immigration and showcases the medium through which their beliefs can be contested.

This medium is morality; conservatives uphold policies that support Christianity and traditional values – whether they involve immigration quotas, tariffs on foreign-made goods, or abortion bans – because they view them as inherently moral, not because of any statistics or appeals to empathy.

The argument for immigration, therefore, must be made on moral grounds, and the only moral reasoning for immigration comes from libertarianism, specifically, the principle of voluntary action. In fact, it follows from the principle of voluntary action that the only moral immigration policy is one of open borders.

In his Second Treatise of Government, [John Locke](#) put forth the moral principle of voluntarism: “Men being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent.”

The reasoning is clear: because men are individuals “by nature” with their own inherent ability to act, any use of force violates their rights. Thus, any restriction on immigration violates the [inherent rights of individuals](#) to choose where they wish to live. Unless there is a clear threat to national defense, no government has the right to restrict the movement of its people, or the citizens of its neighbors.

Businesses that want to hire immigrant workers or move their factories across borders should not be restricted from doing so. There is no right of workers to force businesses to keep them employed. On the contrary, businesses reserve the right to hire whichever employees they desire, even if those employees are from a different country.

Conservatives that wish to uphold their institutions can do so in a free society. Muslim immigrants who open a mosque do not violate the rights of Christians to continue to attend church. What conservatives cannot do in a free society, however, is declare their religion as core to the traditions of the state and take action to ban any opposing faiths from practicing.

As long as they do not violate anyone’s rights, immigrants should be able to purchase property, engage in commerce, speak their language, and practice their faith in any manner they choose and within any borders. These actions are independent, consensual, and place no burden on the country in which they happen.

The conservative aim of upholding institutions can be moral, but there is no value inherent in conservation. Traditions and institutions should only be upheld because individuals choose to do so, the act of forcing individuals to continue practicing a tradition or take part in an institution is impermissible in a free society.

The misguided understanding of the concept of Western civilization showcases how tradition can be irrationally advocated for. Western civilization is a moral concept when it applies to countries that recognize the enlightenment and protect individual rights. Societies, such as Hungary, that reject individual liberty through attacks on immigrants and LGBTQ+ rights should not be considered “Western” simply because they are also majority Christian.

A policy of open borders is consistent with the correct understanding of Western civilization because it involves the protection of individual rights; nations with this policy, no matter where they exist geographically, should be considered Western.

Anti-immigration advocates’ arguments about the negative effects of immigration on crime and the economy have largely been discredited, however, conservatives still rely on the primacy they place on their culture as a tool to avoid any of this evidence. Thus, the advocacy for open borders as the immigration policy most applicable to a free society must take on this moral argument and demonstrate its illegitimacy.

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