Social Calculus Missing from Decisions on Immigration and International Trade

Robert C. Camp, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Prashanth N. Bharadwaj, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

This year’s presidential election in the United States has brought out the long knives on both sides of the argument related to immigration and international trade. Displaced workers and those at risk of displacement have been enthralled by Donald Trump’s proclamations about reducing the numbers of illegal immigrants in this country and canceling/renegotiating various trade agreements. Free traders have pointed out, however, that the net benefits related to immigration, both legal and illegal, are positive and likewise, the net benefits to the U.S. from international trade are overwhelmingly positive while acknowledging that the government/society has failed to provide adequate assistance to those displaced. In fact, it has been pointed out that the loss of jobs in manufacturing has been caused more by advances in technology than because of competition from low wage countries. It can be argued, of course, that automation has been spurred precisely by the need for greater cost efficiency in the face of competition from low wage countries.

There has been less attention, however, paid to the overall social calculus related to global societal relationships. Social calculus is simply the process by which social consequences are taken into account for a given action/decision. In the history of the world societal relationships have always mattered. Tensions between the “haves” and the “have nots” have often been acute, but there is little question that modern communications have accentuated the inequality across and within countries. It can be argued, therefore, that the social calculus for any given context has become more critical to the future of individual countries as well as to the worldwide society.