**American allure**

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Wednesday, Feb 01, 2023

In 2022 the population of China declined for the first time in decades. It is now estimated that India may have surpassed China, becoming the most populous country in the world.

China has now started to suffer the consequences of its decades-long one-child policy. Its demographic impact may take generations to correct. Some are projecting a real risk now that the Chinese economy may never catch up to the size of the US economy.

Western Europe has also been suffering from similar declining birth rates, partly due to high cost and difficulty of raising a child. The prime minister of Japan has also noted that for Japan to remain a robust, growing economy, its birth rate must increase.

The US continues to grow its population and economy. A close look at the racial breakup of the US population shows that growth in the working-age population in the US has been greatly driven by immigration and higher birth rates among immigrant families. Immigrants have a high percentage of working-age people, and birth rates among them are higher than the general population’s. Estimates suggest that new immigrants have accounted for 70 per cent of the growth in the American labor force over the past decade. This trend has continued to ensure that the US remains a younger country compared with Western Europe and Japan.

So, what is it that continues to make the US an attractive country to immigrate? Some of the answers are obvious: economic opportunities the US offers are at the top of the list. But there is much more than that.

Despite recent debates within the US about the desirability of having a large immigrant population (legal as well as undocumented), America remains a country built by immigrants. Around 13.6 per cent of the American population, over 43 million residents, are foreign born.

America’s ability to absorb and productively employ such large numbers of immigrants adds to its resilience. Also, the fact that the country has the world’s best educational institutions also attracts some of the brightest from across the globe, many of whom become permanent residents. Even if the US immigration system is not the easiest to navigate, it does provide a path to permanent residency to many. This is especially true for those with the highest level of education. Their contribution to the US economy and society is significant. For instance, one-third of the faculty at Harvard is foreign born.

However, absorbing large numbers of immigrants has its own challenges. Among them is the complexity of assimilating immigrants who may come from cultures and languages very different from the US. Former US president Donald Trump famously wanted to exclude immigrants from countries he considered ‘subpar’, to put it gently.

Since 2017 – the year he assumed office – net legal immigration to the US has been down. He “put sand in the gears of the [legal] immigration process”, reported ‘The Economist’ magazine. A study by the University of California, Davis says: “as of 2022 America is missing 1.8 million working-age foreign legal migrants relative to its past trend.” This remarkable drop in immigration has contributed to the current tight labour market. The country has two job openings for every person looking for a job.

Given the size and diversity of the US, it is able to attract and absorb people from all corners of the world who can then find areas within the country where they can feel at home. According to the 2020 census, about 41 per cent of the US population is now non-white, including about 19 per cent Hispanics, 6 per cent Asians, and 13.5 per cent African Americans.

Freedom can be an overhyped word often used to describe the core of American life. While many genuine democracies may have similar freedoms, I feel the US allows immigrants to practice their faith and enjoy their cultural heritage more easily than most. Over generations, immigrants tend to become ‘Americanized’, even as they enrich the mainstream culture of their new homeland through their cuisine, music and so on.

I believe the allure of America will remain for the foreseeable future, and immigrants will continue to find ways to come here. As their contributions become more and more visible to all, their acceptance will also continue to grow.

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