How Open Borders Will Win, If It Wins

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The Promise of Open Borders

• Open borders presents an historic opportunity to:
  – Dramatically increase global production.
  – End absolute poverty for all mankind.
  – Create a low-cost escape route from political and cultural oppression.

• The modest mechanism: deregulation of international labor and housing markets, ending *mandatory* discrimination against foreigners.

• Competing mechanisms are much less effective, with ample collateral damage:
  – Redistribution
  – Diplomacy
  – Military action
The Myth of the Rational Voter

• If open borders is so great, why hasn’t it happened already?
• If you think democracy gravitates strongly to good policies, this is a big puzzle.
• Contrarily, my *The Myth of the Rational Voter* argues bad policies routinely win by popular demand because:
  – Some views – such as “anti-foreign bias” – are emotionally appealing.
  – Selfish cost of political irrationality is near-0.
• Upshot: We should expect open borders to be unpopular even if the arguments are great.
Overcoming Unpopularity

• The half-full glass: Many good but unpopular ideas eventually win.
• Key: Target relatively receptive, politically influential audiences.
  – This can snowball via “social proof.”
  – Good evidence that democracies are much more responsive to elite opinion. (e.g. Gilens)
Open Borders @Harvard

• Good news: Harvard students match the desired profile:
  – Young, hence *relatively* persuadable.
  – Elite, and likely to stay that way.
  – Relatively cosmopolitan.
  – Relatively open to economic and philosophical arguments.

• Same goes for young, academic elites in general.
Winning for Open Borders

• Step 1: Convert the elite.
• Step 2: Intellectual trickle-down.
• Step 3: Disproportionate political response.
• Feedback loops:
  – The upside of status quo bias.
  – Shock doctrine.
• Consolation prize: 90% failure still does great good.