# Introduction

Suppose you are the NFL Commissioner and you want to find a new way to distribute tickets to the Super Bowl. The price system is in place for too long and you want fresh ideas. You ask your assistants to come up with suggestions. How to increase revenue, to give a higher chance to the little guy or to have a more diverse crowd are some of the issues you are interested in.

The first option they present you is a rules-based system, in which you assign tickets to fans who meet certain criteria: how many games they have been to during the regular season, their income, their age, their demographics, etc. The NFL screens fans and, if they meet the criteria, they can buy tickets. A second option is a ticket lottery, where everyone who signs up has an equal chance at a ticket. For simplicity, you thus have three options on your table: prices, rules or chance. Which one of these admission policies best maximizes ticket revenue? Which is more just to give every fan a chance to attend the game? Some people will be happy. They could not afford the tickets otherwise and now have a better shot at going to the Super Bowl. Others will be upset because they were willing to pay old prices and now they are not guaranteed a ticket.

Immigration is a very similar issue. Countries have to decide whom to admit in a fair and balanced manner.

While this is a valid exercise for businesses and governments, most countries are not asking the same question when it comes to immigration: are current policies, such as random lotteries or skill-selection, any fairer than a market for immigration rights? In this paper, I draw from a growing literature in economics proposing market solutions to policy problems and analyze if an immigration market is morally acceptable. Gary Becker first proposed it in 1987, but it has gone by largely unnoticed except for a few scholars such as Julian Simon and Richard Vedder.

Becker’s proposal is a special case of his work on the economic approach to human behavior. Social scientists are likely familiar with the efficiency argument of markets for human organs, women’s reproductive rights, pollution permits, etc. Although these are largely uncontroversial issues for economists, they required a deeper analysis of ethical objections raised by political philosophers. While economists claim that markets carry no moral judgment of the transactions they bring about, Walzer (2008) argues that free markets can corrupt moral character and crowd out valuable social norms. They should therefore be blocked from the marketplace, just like political power is limited because of its corrosive nature.

An analysis of Becker (2011) radical solution thus involves first understanding the rise of the market reasoning in the 1980s. Sandel (2012) points out that we have moved from a market-based economy to a market-based society. This change is the backdrop against which I build my argument. I show that a market for immigration does not corrupt citizenship, or citizenship-related values, so it is a morally acceptable exchange. This discussion of the morality of the radical solution is the first contribution of this paper. By testing Becker’s solution under ethical principles, I lend moral support to an economic policy that governments should seriously consider.

Second, I compare the market policy to existing immigration policies. Under utilitarian principles of justice and acknowledging the right to exclude, I show that current rules-based restrictions are less efficient than the radical solution. I run a back-of-the-envelope cost-benefit exercise to show that the radical solution produces more benefits and less costs than existing policies and that prices are a more transparent way to convey immigration restrictions than rules-only criteria.

Despite the efficiency gain, the radical solution is not fair. It places an excessive burden on migrants while the benefits of immigration are widespread. Compensatory justice requires that these people should receive reparations for the losses in immigration. I suggest some amendments to make it a more just policy.

This paper contributes to the ethics literature by providing a systematic analysis of immigration markets and if governments should adopt them. Political philosophers will be increasingly required to evaluate the commodification of social goods and this is such an exercise. The work also advances economic theory by raising two objections to economic solutions to policy problems which are poorly addressed by economists. They purposely avoid moral and fairness considerations by claiming that markets have no intrinsic values and utility suffices as a measure of justice. Both are inadequate explanations.

Lastly, a side effect of this paper is establishing a serious discussion about the design of immigration markets amongst policymakers and scholars. There is an increasing inflow of migrants to developed countries but existing solutions do not seem adequate to deal with them. Additionally, there are many undocumented immigrants in the U.S. and Europe for which an immigration rights market could provide a feasible path to legalization.

Section I addresses the claim that immigration is a blocked exchange in line with the argument put forth by Walzer (2008). Section II presents Becker’s radical solution and compares it to existing rules-based restrictions. The cost-benefit analysis is a subsection in II. I discuss the shortcomings of the market solution in section III by introducing the prioritarian and compensatory analyzes of justice. Section IV concludes.

# References

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