



CLIMATE VANGUARD

Imperialism is the root cause

IMPERIALISM AND
IMMIGRATION PT. 1/2

of *'illegal'* *immigration*



Background

So-called 'illegal' immigration continues to dominate public discourse, driven by **reactionary forces'** **demonisation of migrant communities.**

Reform UK has made it a cornerstone of their political strategy, especially amplifying anti-immigration sentiment since the 2024 far-right riots. The Labour government further fuels this narrative with promises to “stop the boats” and end asylum hotels.

Across the Atlantic, the Trump administration has conducted mass arrests and deportations of undocumented migrants while stripping others of their legal status.



The Border

The border is a key flashpoint in the politics of 'illegal immigration'.

Reactionaries utilise images of asylum seekers crammed onto small boats to invoke the fear of foreign invasion.

The US-Mexico border has played a similar role in MAGA politics, with Trump's never-ending promises to "build the wall."

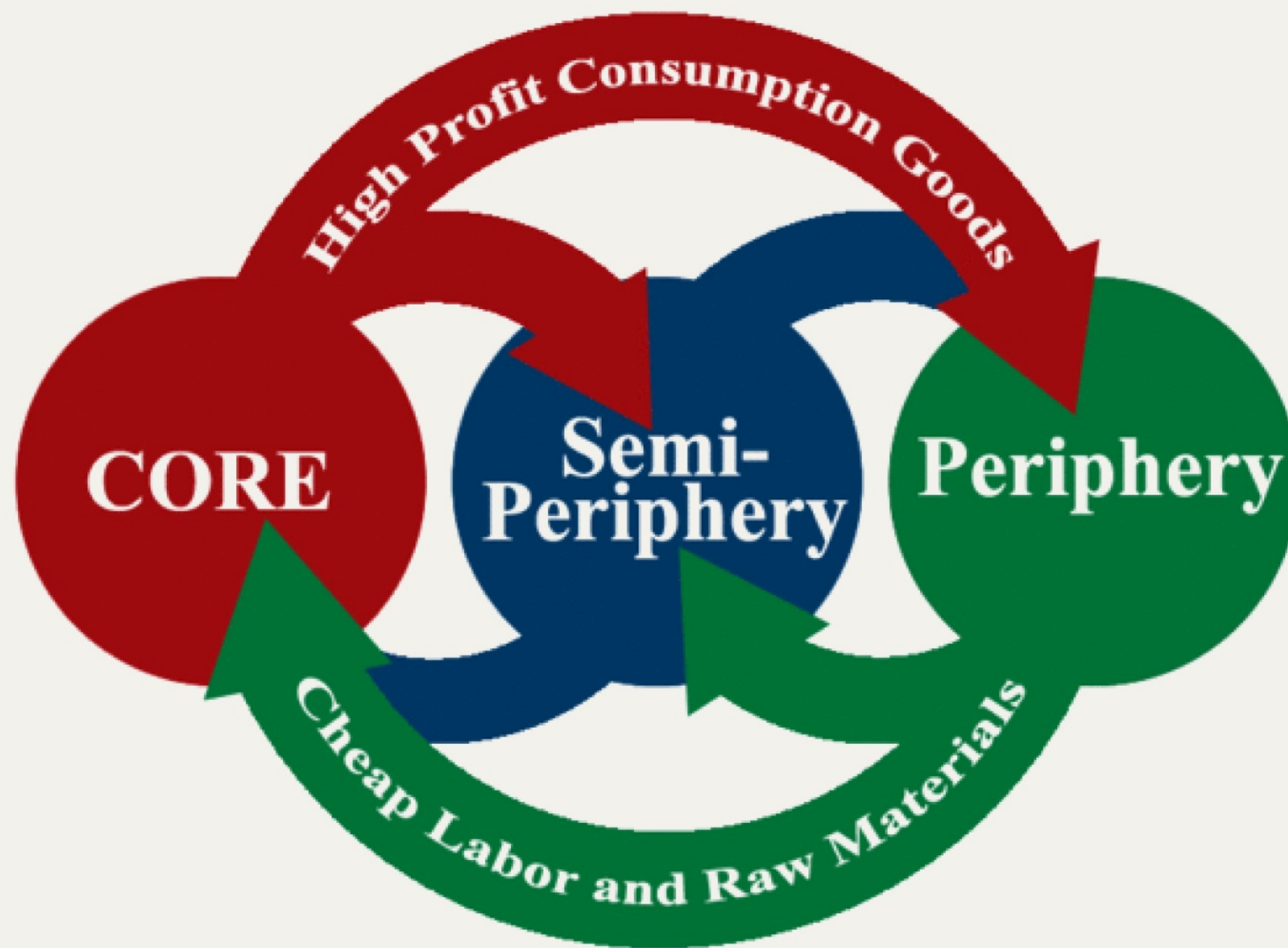


The Role of Imperialism

Defences of refugees and asylum seekers tend to rest on humanitarian appeals or on highlighting the social and economic benefits migration brings to the host country.

These narratives are part of the story but **neglect imperialism's role in driving 'illegal' immigration** by building and hardening national borders while simultaneously producing the political, economic, and ecological conditions that force people to risk crossing them. →

Image: US Border Patrol agents question undocumented immigrant families, Texas (2018). CNN.



Wallerstein's World System Theory Model

Economic Drivers

Imperialism drives unequal development as it subordinates (semi-)peripheral economies to capitalist interests in the core. **Strategies of dispossession and exclusion create deep-rooted economic challenges** including unemployment, inequality, and lack of opportunities.

In this context, many people are pressured to leave their home and migrate to the imperial core in search of the wealth that has been stolen from their land and labour.

Conflict Drivers

Imperialism is the primary cause of violent conflict around the world.

This has historical roots tracing back to colonial partition, in which the capitalist core carved up the Global South along arbitrary state lines – a continued source of conflict today.

The US in particular plays a major role in reproducing a state of disorder in the Global South, stoking war and conflict to maintain underdevelopment, assert its global dominance, and secure markets for domestic firms to profit from.

One in six people are said to have been exposed to violent conflict in 2024, with more than 117 million people victims of forced displacement.

Each individual conflict has its own specific causes, **but the global condition of permanent war is undoubtedly a feature of US imperialism.**

Migration to the imperial core is therefore a direct product of the system that core countries reproduce and benefit from.



Ecological Drivers

There could be 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050, exacerbated by global heating's intensification of both unequal economic conditions and violent conflict.

Global South countries are especially vulnerable as their geography often makes climate effects more extreme. This interacts with underdevelopment, leaving them with insufficient resources to adapt to extreme weather. For agrarian societies, the economic impacts of ecological shocks are particularly acute.

Extreme weather only exacerbates the economic and conflict conditions already driving migration, as has been seen in places like Syria and Central America.



Climate Imperialism

The climate crisis itself is, of course, also rooted in imperialism. **Empire was the key mechanism of imposing capitalist production regimes around the world.** This often involved the destruction and dispossession of local ecologies to fuel capital accumulation.

Imperial expansion also enabled discovery and exploitation of new fossil fuel reserves, making it inextricably tied to the process of capital accumulation. This continues today despite the urgent need to decarbonise.



“The principal factor generating international migration is not globalization but imperialism, which pillages nations and creates conditions for the exploitation of labor in the imperial center.”

– James Petras