RUTGERS LAW REVIEW
VOLUME 66  Fall 2013  NUMBER 1

ARTICLES

UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE AND EMPLOYING THE RULE OF IMMIGRATION LENIENCY

Irene Schorff*

INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 2
I. HISTORY OF THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE (CAT) AT THE UNITED NATIONS (U.N.) AND IN THE UNITED STATES .......... 4
   A. Convention Negotiations and the Specific Intent Requirement ..................................................... 10
   B. Effects of the Specific Intent Requirement .............................................................................. 12
II. CONTEXT FOR A CRITIQUE OF THE CONVENTION'S DEFINITION OF TORTURE ..................................................... 15
III. ADVERSE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS ................................................................................... 19
IV. SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF THE TORTURED DEFINITION OF TORTURE ......................................................... 24
   A. Origins of Immigration Leniency .......................................................................................... 28
   B. Immigration: Criminal Law and Immigration Law ................................................................. 27
   C. Effects of Immigration Leniency .......................................................................................... 33
   D. Effect of Chevron Deference on Immigration Leniency ......................................................... 36
      1. The Basics of Chevron .......................................................................................................... 38
      2. Putting Chevron in Context .................................................................................................. 40
      3. The Scholarly Critique of Chevron ...................................................................................... 46
      4. Reconciling Chevron and Immigration Leniency with CAT .................................................. 47
   E. Plenary Power and the Application of Immigration

* Professor of Law, University of Massachusetts School of Law. I would like to thank Rita Ricarde, Jana Lazarov, Nina Prome, and Mary Helper. I would also like to thank Kristen Parent, Crystal Desaire, and Catherine O'Neill for their research and technical assistance, and the UMass Law faculty summer research fund for its financial support of this project.

1
INTERLUDE TO RUTGERS LAW REVIEW

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

It is no small irony that the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ("CAT") (the Convention), whose primary purpose is to protect potential torture victims from deportation to countries where they are likely to be tortured, defines torture in such a narrow way that victims are unlikely to gain the protection promised.2

The expressed goals of the international human rights instrument created under the auspices of CAT, adopted by twenty states in 1984 but not enacted in the United States until 1996,4 were to criminalize torture and prevent the return of anyone to countries where they were likely to be tortured by those acting officially. The United States, however, had a competing motivation—to prevent its government officials from being prosecuted under CAT. Thus, the United States interpreted the definition of torture differently from the more than 153 other signatories, by adding a requirement that torture be "specifically intended."5 Moreover, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)6 and several federal courts have interpreted the specific intent requirement even more narrowly than initially intended.7

Currently, a noncitizen in the United States with a criminal conviction who fears being tortured if deported usually has only one option, that of Convention protection, even for a crime that may not seem particularly serious.8 The rule applies even to long-standing lawful permanent residents ("LPRs"),9 such as the noncitizen in Dalegrand v. Attorney General.10 Mr. Dalegrand, a native of Haiti, had a psychotic condition that was controlled through medication. His application for CAT relief described his fears that, as a criminal deportee in Haiti, he would be subject to indefinite detention and denied access to his medication.12 His lawyers argued that without medication he would suffer a mental breakdown, which would cause his jailers to beat him with "fists, sticks, and belts,"13 or even to torture him "by electric shock" and "burn him" with cigarettes, [choke him], or . . . [box him] in the ears.14 The BIA found that his fears, while substantiated, did not justify CAT protection.15

In the BIA's narrow view of torture, Dalegrand could not prove that his likely torturer "specifically intended" to torture him; rather, these conditions of confinement would be considered merely a byproduct of detention in the jails of an impoverished nation.16

Immigration judges in the Executive Office of Immigration Review ("EOIR") are bound by the BIA. Id. § 1033.1(q)(1)(b)(3). Subsequent appeals are heard in the federal courts. See The U.S. Dept of Justice, Board of Immigration Appeals, JUSTICE.GOV, (Nov. 2011), http://www.justice.gov/ois/ibbiat/index.htm ("Most BIA decisions are subject to judicial review in the federal courts.").


8. Asylum is the typical relief requested for those fearing persecution following deportation. Several types of convictions prevent such applications, including those for "aggravated felonies," 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(41) (2012), which have burgeoned into a broad category of offenses. See 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(2) (2012).


10. 268 F. App'x. 865, 869 (3d Cir. 2008).

11. Relief for International Law & Criminal Law Professors et al. as Amicus Curiae Supporting Petitioner at 5-6, Dalegrand v. Mukasey, No. 06-4786 (3d Cir. Nov. 20, 2007) [hereinafter Dalegrand Brief].

12. Id. at 6 (citing Francova v. Ashcroft (Francova), 343 F. Supp. 2d 327, 329 (D.N.J. 2004) (citing State Department country reports), aff'd sub nom., Francova v. Gonzales (Francova II), 448 F.3d 845 (3d Cir. 2006)).

13. Id.

14. Id. at 6 (citing Auguste v. Ridge, 395 F.3d 123, 129 (3d Cir. 2005) (citing State Department country report)).

15. See Dalegrand, 268 F. App'x at 865-60.

Situations such as Dalegrand's suggest not only the need to address the inconsistency in the U.S. courts' interpretation of the Convention, but also to advance alternative legal theories to address these shortcomings. This essay seeks to do both. In the first three sections, I examine the background of the Convention in the context of international human rights instruments (Section I); the context for a critique of the CAT's definition of torture, given the legislative history of the Convention and an existing statute that could aid in correcting the misinterpretation adversely affecting CAT enforcement (Section II); and the adverse international implications of the United States' restrictive meaning of torture (Section III). In a concluding section (IV), I offer possible solutions to the problem, invoking a robust principle of Immigration Law to prevent the return of potential torture victims to countries where they are likely to suffer torture.

I. HISTORY OF THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE (CAT) AT THE UNITED NATIONS (U.N.) AND IN THE UNITED STATES

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was adopted by unanimous agreement of the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1984, entered into force on January 18, 1987, and sent to the U.S. Senate on May 20, 1988. Much time has elapsed between 1988, when the United States signed the document, and 1994, when its ratification version was delivered to the United Nations. As President Reagan declared that CAT was not self-executing, it was not until October 21, 1994, when President Clinton signed the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 (authorizing implementation of the Convention and ordering regulations to be promulgated) that the Convention became effective in the United States.

CAT was designed to acknowledge the obligation of nations under the United Nations Charter to "promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms," and to "make more effective the struggle against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment throughout the world." By among other goals, encouraging states to combat and criminalize torture. Article 1 defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining ... information or a confession. ... when ... inflicted by or at the instigation of ... a public officer or other person acting in an official capacity." Article 2 prohibits returning people to countries "where there are substantial grounds for believing [they] would be in danger of being subjected to torture," codifying the principle of non-refoulement.

22. Id. at 3 & n.21; United States v. Mata-Balesteros, 73 F.3d 754, 755 (9th Cir. 1995) (citations omitted); Matthews v. U.S. Army, 294 F.2d 593, 599 (9th Cir. 1961) (stating CAT was "operative thirty days after its deposit by the President with the United Nations on October 21, 1994"). By 1987, eighty-nine nations had signed it, and by 1988, twenty-eight of those had ratified it. See BURGAS & DANIELIS, supra note 18, at 107-09.
23. PARRA, supra note 4.
24. 25. FARRA ordered that CAT regulations be promulgated within 120 days of its enactment. 22 U.S.C. § 2242 (2002). See also Federal Torture Statute, 18 U.S.C. § 2340A (2012) (criminalizing torture occurring outside the United States). This statute defines torture as "an act committed by a person acting under the color of law specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering." 2340(A)(i)
26. CAT, supra note 1, at 1, para. 1. The regulation defining torture reflects that language. See 8 C.F.R. §§ 1208.18(b) (2000).
27. CAT, supra note 1, at 1, para. 1. (codified in United States law at 8 C.F.R. § 208.1 (2013)). In the United States, a removal order may not be issued "in circumstances that would violate Article 3 of [CAT], subject to any reservations.
refoulement. The Convention created two defenses: withholding of removal and deferral of removal. Because those applying for relief under CAT are often ineligible to apply for asylum, "the prohibition on refoulement in Article 33 [became] the cornerstone of the Convention." Given that torture committed by official actors was already universally prohibited, one might wonder why the U.S. government saw the need to sign the Convention at all. Following World War II, the United States was a primary force motivating international human rights policy, notwithstanding ongoing contradictions in its implementation of such a policy. Yet, for many years, it was the "only major power... that had not adhered to any of the major international human rights conventions," and "opposed many attempts to impose international sanctions against violators of human rights." While ultimately ratifying all but two Protocols to the Geneva Convention, the United States did not initially sign the Protocols.


31. CAT, supra note 1, at art.3, para. 1. "Refoulement" is a French term meaning "return," defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ("UNESCO") as "the expulsion of persons who have the right to be recognised as refugees," whether to their country of birth or to another country in which they could be subjected to persecution. See Glossary of Migration Related Terms, UNESCO, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/them/thematic-topics/international-migration/glossary/refoulement/ (last visited Mar. 2, 2014). Substantial grounds are determined by "taking into account all relevant considerations including... the existence... of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights." CAT, supra note 1, at art. 3, para. 2.

32. See Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal, 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.16-18 (2010). Deferral of removal, which can be more easily terminated than can withholding if conditions change and it becomes possible to effectuate return, is employed with those who prove likelihood of torture, but are otherwise barred from receiving withholding of removal. See id.


35. See LOUIS HENKIN ET AL., HUMAN RIGHTS 1020-28 (Robert C. Clark et al. eds., 2d ed. 2009).

36. Id. at 1021.

37. See Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, opened for signature July 28, 1951, 18 U.N.T.S. 150. 38. See Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, opened for signature Jan. 31, 1967, 19 U.N.T.S. 150, 166 U.N.T.S. 237. The United States has a reputation for not cooperating with the international community on human rights issues. Professor Karen Musalo, for example, concluded her 1994 critique of imposing a proof of intent requirement for asylum applicants this way: "The 1980 Refugee Act was an expression of left American ideals to conform with international refugee protections and to extend a genuine welcome to individuals fleeing persecution in their homelands. Zocarias and its progeny have transformed the promise of an extended hand to fleeing refugees into a meaningless gesture. The time has come for a reassessment of United States policy and an examination of the extent of national commitment to international norms. An appropriate place to begin would be a reevaluation of the incorporation of an intent requirement... to individuals fleeing the infliction of torture and other human rights violations. If the United States accedes to be a leader in the "new world order," then it should lead—and hopefully it will do so in a direction worthy of following." Karen Musalo, Irreconcilable Differences: Divorcing Refugee Protections from Human Rights Norms, 15 MICH. J. INT’L L. 1179, 1180 (1994). The same can be said for the United States’ implementation of the Convention.


40. President Roosevelt "proclaimed human rights to be an aim of the Second World War" and declared, "Eleanor Roosevelt was a major force in the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." HENKIN ET AL., supra note 35, at 1020. The United States was actively involved in the United National Charter and the Nuremberg Charter. Id. at 1021. In the 1970s, amateur international human rights activists pushed for and achieved United States leadership in a series of statutes declaring respect for human rights. Id. at 1023. Despite resistance from the Reagan Administration, Congress enacted the Anti-Apartheid Act during his presidency. Id. at 1024; see also MESSAGE TRANSMITTING CAT, supra note 4, at 111 ("Ratification of the Convention by the United States will clearly express United States opposition to torture, an abhorrent practice unfortunately still prevalent in the world today."); Presidential Statement on United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 40 WELTY, COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS 1167, 1167 (June 26, 2004) ("Freedom from torture is an inalienable human right.... America stands against and will not tolerate torture. We will investigate and prosecute all acts of torture... in all territory under our jurisdiction... Torture is wrong no matter where it occurs, and the United States will continue to lead the fight to eliminate it everywhere.").

about its activities followed the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent U.S. effort both to locate those involved in the planning of those attacks and to thwart alleged conspiracies against the United States by groups such as Al-Qaeda. The most notorious alarm involved allegations of both “extraordinary rendition” of terrorist suspects to locations where they would be tortured and so-called waterboarding of detainees to extract confessions. President

George W. Bush’s administration was plagued by significant controversy surrounding his administration’s actions that many considered torturous. Even during the Obama Administration’s second term, questions persist regarding the government’s commitment to human rights in the face of strains on national security. Charges of U.S.-based torture continue.

| RUTGERS LAW REVIEW | Vol. 66:1 |

2013 UN- TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE

George W. Bush’s administration was plagued by significant controversy surrounding his administration’s actions that many considered torturous. Even during the Obama Administration’s second term, questions persist regarding the government’s commitment to human rights in the face of strains on national security. Charges of U.S.-based torture continue.


2 These included lists of approved interrogation methods. See Mike Allen & Susan Walsh, Memo on Interrogation Tactics Is Disclosed; Justice Department Had Said Torture May Be Defensible, WASH. POST, June 25, 2004, at A1 (discussing declassification of an internal Department of Justice (“DOJ”) opinion that torturing terrorism suspects might be legally defensible, and exposing a February 7, 2002 memo signed by President Bush indicating his belief in his authority “under the Constitution” to deny protections of the Geneva Conventions” to combatants detained during the Afghanistan war); Kathleen Clark & Julie Matt, Torturing the Law: The Justice Department’s Legal Con tortured on Interrogation, WASH. POST, June 20, 2004, at B3; Anthony Lewis, Making Torture Legal, N.Y. REV. BOOKS, July 15, 2004, available at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2004/07/15/making-torture-legal/?pagination=false (discussing authorization of torture by the president); Dana Priest & Bradley Graham, Guantánamo List Details Approved Interrogation Methods, WASH. POST, June 10, 2004, at A13, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2002/07/04/Ar2002070411578.html (discussing lists of various interrogation techniques used on detainees); R. Jeffrey Smith, Slim Legal Grounds for Torture Memos; Most Scholars Reject Broad View of Executive’s Power, WASH. POST, July 4, 2004, at A13 (describing one critic’s view that Bush administration memos condoned torture); see also Bell & Davis, supra note 17, at 726-727 (pointing out that the 2002 memo “is widely believed to have been used to legitimate United States practices in detention centers in Iraq and Afghanistan, including the Abu Ghraib facility”).

A 2004 DOJ Memo rejected “parenting the specific intent element... to approve as lawful conduct that [which] might otherwise amount to torture.” Memorandum from Daniel Levin, Acting Assistant Att’y Gen., Office of Legal Counsel to James B. Comey, Deputy Att’y Gen., Legal Standards Applicable Under 18 U.S.C. §§ 2420-2420a (Dec. 30, 2004) [hereinafter Memorandum from Daniel Levin], available at http://www.justice.gov/crt/2004/2004123001002.htm; see also Editorial, Torture Policy, ASSN POL. NEWS, Dec. 22, 2004, 2004 WLNR 2170001 (politicians and editors from The Washington Post (publishing the Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo prison practices endorsed by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld); Editorial, Torture Policy, WASHINGTON POST.COM, June 21, 2004, available at 2004 WLNR 24400550 (citing a Pentagon-led task force, which, with the DOJ’s support, concluded in March 2003 “that the president was authorized to order torture as part of his war-making powers and that those who followed his orders could be immunized from punishment”); the editorial went on to say that “[d]ictators who wish to justify torture, and those who would mislead Americans, have no need to read our editors; they can downplay the Inquisitor’s 50-page legal brief issued by Mr. Rumsfeld’s chief counsel,”); Robert M. S. Frieder, Jr., Letter to the Editor, “To Adhere to the Law” on Torture, WASH. POST, June 17, 2004, at 25 (discussing the outrage of Sept. 11, 2001, does not authorize the outrage of torture”.

A. Convention Negotiations and the Specific Intent Requirement

The U.S. government played an active role in negotiations to draft the Convention, but was reluctant to agree with other signatories on key issues. While succeeding in its effort to narrow the definition of torture to only "severe" pain or suffering," it lost in its effort to limit the definition to acts that were "specifically intended," ultimately, the Convention prohibited all intentional acts leading to torture. In the United States, following the Senate debate on CAT, the document was forwarded to the President, subject to various reservations, understandings, declarations, and one proviso. While these interpretative guidelines were said to


47. See CAT Ratification, supra note 6, at S17,486 (statement of Sen. Pell); see also ANKE, supra note 7, ¶ 7.2 n.1 (citing BURGESS & DANIELIS, supra note 18, at 39-99).


49. See Holzer, supra note 17, at 762. The United States suggested that torture be limited only to acts constituting "severe' pain or suffering." Id. This limitation was not adopted. See BURGESS & DANIELIS, supra note 18, at 110-11.

50. Holzer, supra note 17, at 762. BURGESS & DANIELIS, supra note 18, at 118-19. It is noteworthy that all the signatories to CAT, except the United States, define torture as acts committed with general intent, which may include grossly negligent acts, reckless acts, or even negligence. AIRCRIE DE LA FONDATION MUNROE, LA CONVENTION SUR LE TORMENTER ET LES PRONONCIAIS DES PERSONNES EN PRISONNE DE GUERRE, 26 COMMISSION DE LA CONVENTION POUR LA PREVENTION ET SUPPRESSION DE LA TORTURE ET DE LA TORTURE DES PERSONNES EXPOSÉES AU DANGERS DES COMMISSIONS INTERNATIONALES DE DROIT, 267 (1998) (noting that proposals to require deliberate, malicious, or systemic infliction of torture were explicitly rejected); BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY 825-26 (8th ed. 2004) (defining general intent as a form of recklessness or negligence).

51. CAT Ratification, supra note 5, at S17,486 (statement of Sen. James Sanborn);

2013] UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE

merely "clarify the meaning of certain provisions," not "exclude or modify the legal effect of a treaty," they effectively did modify the treaty as to the definition of torture. The final version contained an understanding requiring that, to constitute torture, an act must be "specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering." The 1999 implementing regulations reflect this


52. TREATY HANDBOOK, supra note 61, at 3.

53. Id. at 12; see RESTATEMENT (THIRD) OF FOREIGN RELATIONS LAW § 514 cmt. d (1987) (providing the following definition of "understanding": "A treaty that is ratified or acceded to by the United States with a statement of understanding becomes effective in domestic law . . . subject to that understanding. If no such statement is made, indication that the President or the Senate ascribed a particular meaning to the treaty is relevant to the interpretation of the treaty by a United States court in much the same way that the legislative history of a statute is relevant to its interpretation."). Understandings are intended to signal a signatory country's perception of certain language in a treaty without changing its meaning. See Holzer, supra note 17, at 816 n.208 (citing LIEBERFLY LINNARED, RESERVATIONS TO UN-HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES: RATIONALE AND RUT 60 (1990)). Understandings are used, with "reservations," which are often considered countermatters to treaty language. Curtis A. Bradley & Jack L. Goldsmith, Treaties, Human Rights, and Conditional Consent, 149 U. Pa. L. Rev. 399, 428-30 (2000).

54. S. REP. NO. 101-30, at 9 (1990) (text of Resolution of Advice and Consent to Ratification as reported by the Committee on Foreign Relations); see also S. C.F.R. § 209.16(b)(9) (2002). The context in which this understanding arose is significant: the requirement of "intentional infliction of mental" pain and suffering (which included in the definition of torture to reflect the increasing and deplore use by States of various psychological forms of torture and ill-treatment, including mock executions, sensory deprivations, use of drugs, and confinement to mental hospitals). U.N. Commm. Against Torture, Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 19 of the Convention: Addendum, ¶ 50, U.N. Doc. CAT/C/200/Add.5 (Dec. 15, 1999). Because all legal systems recognize that assessment of mental pain and suffering can be subjective, some in the United States criminal justice system have suggested that in respect the Convention's definition fell short of the United States constitutionally-required definition for a criminal offense. Id. To provide clarity, the United States conditioned its ratification upon an understanding that, in order to constitute torture, an act must be specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering, and then specified to what that mental pain or suffering referred ("prolonged mental harm caused by or resulting from . . . ."). Id. Because this was an understanding, not a reservation, it was not to be included in the treaty's meaning. Holzer, supra note 17, at 816. An 'understanding' . . . is a statement of United States interpretation of a particular provision. "Understandings are to be contrasted with 'reservations,' which do modify the terms of a treaty . . . and therefore change the international obligations among these states." See Articles of Agreement of Nov. 7, 1956, at 7/2, at 610 n.3. "As such, the 'specifically intended' language in the understanding should not be considered an attempt to modify the intentionality requirement in the Torture Convention. Rather, the language should be interpreted consistent with the Torture Convention. Any interpretation contrary to the Torture Convention's purpose
criminal law,\textsuperscript{60} a contrary answer was provided by the BIA in \textit{In re J-E.},\textsuperscript{61} holding that a Haitian applicant for CAT protection was properly denied relief, as he had not proved sufficiently that the torture he feared would "be specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering,"\textsuperscript{62} key to the BIA’s decision was its understanding of the regulation’s term "specifically intended."\textsuperscript{63} While opposed vigorously by several dissenting judges,\textsuperscript{64} and since criticized by scholars and commentators alike,\textsuperscript{65} the ruling has been widely—although inconsistently—followed in the federal courts.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{60} See infra Section II.

\textsuperscript{61} 23 J. & N. Dec. 291, 300, 303-04 (B.I.A. 2002) (15-7 decision) (ruled that fear of imprisonment in Haiti’s inadequate prisons was insufficient to prove the government specifically intended to cause severe pain and suffering and thereby inflict torture even though it intentionally detained criminal deportees knowing that the detention facilities were substandard); see also Bell & Dosa, supra note 17, at 718-20. But see Holper, supra note 17, at 796-806 (criticizing the decision in \textit{In re J-E}).

\textsuperscript{62} See \textit{In re J-E.}, 23 J. & N. Dec. at 296-306; see also Aksher, supra note 17, at 722-26, at 301 n.18 (noting cases following \textit{J-E.}, including those in the First, Second, Third, Fifth, Ninth, and Eleventh circuits between 2004 and 2011). But see Habtemichael v. Ashcroft, 370 F.3d 774, 783 (8th Cir. 2004) (declining to follow the \textit{J-E.} standard).

\textsuperscript{63} In \textit{In re J-E.}, 23 J. & N. Dec. at 300-01 ("Specific intent is defined as the `intent to accomplish the precise criminal act that one is later charged with,’ while `general intent’ commonly `takes the form of recklessness . . . or negligence.’") (quoting BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 813-14 (7th ed. 1999); 3 C.F.R. § 208.1(a)(6) (2002)). In fact, the \textit{In re J-E.} majority seems to have forgotten, at least for this case, that immigration remedy have long been considered to be civil, not criminal proceedings. See Bihoumy v. Tod, 263 U.S. 145, 154 (1923) ("[t]he article of no rule of law which prohibits officers charged with the administration of the immigration laws from drawing an inference from the silence of one who is called upon to speak."); see also Fong Yue Ting v. United States, 149 U.S. 698, 730 (1893) (deportation proceedings are civil in nature).

\textsuperscript{64} Dissenting opinions were filed by Board Member Paul Wickham Schmidt, joined by John W. Guedselsberger, Noel Ann Brennan, Cecelia M. Espezon, and Juan P. Osuna; a separate dissenting opinion was filed by Board Member Lory Diana Rosenberg, joined by Cecelia M. Espezon. In \textit{In re J-E.}, 23 J. & N. Dec. at 304, 310 (Schmidt, Board Member & Rosenberg, Board Member, dissenting).

\textsuperscript{65} See Bell & Dosa, supra note 17, at 718-20; Holper, supra note 17, at 796-806; Mascia, supra note 17, at 289, 310-15.

\textsuperscript{66} Examples abound. See, e.g., Callahan v. A.E.V, Inc., 182 F.3d 237, 261 n.15 (3d Cir. 1999) ("Although harm to the plaintiffs may have been a probable ultimate consequence of the defendants’ actions, we do not think they specifically intended to cause such harm."); United States v. Blair, 54 F.3d 639, 642 (10th Cir. 1995) ("In short, a specific intent crime is one in which the defendant acts not only with knowledge of what he is doing, but does so with the objective of committing some unlawful act."); United States v. Twinco, 655 F.2d 576, 583 (9th Cir. 1981) (holding that to prove specific intent, "the level of culpability must exceed a mere transgression of an objective standard of acceptable behavior (e.g., negligence, recklessness"); United States v. Neiswender, 590 F.2d 1269, 1270 (10th Cir. 1979) ("In our view, to prove specific intent the defendant need only have had knowledge or notice that success . . . would have likely resulted in an obstruction of justice. Notice is provided by the reasonable foreseeability of the natural and probable consequences of one's acts."). For purposes of this article, the term "domestic" means the United States.

\textsuperscript{67} See Holper, supra note 17, at 796-806 (describing the complexity of "intent" in criminal law, and its relationship to immigration law).
Strong opposition has also arisen among both concuring and dissenting justices at both the BIA and federal court levels, which have noted that the opinion is “inconsistent with both international and domestic criminal law” and runs afoul of CAT when it places “a greater burden on claimants than is permissible under the Torture Convention.”

The Supreme Court has not ruled on the definition of torture under CAT. Given the Court’s historic reluctance to speak to matters related to immigration based on its long-held principle that Congress and the Executive Branch have plenary power over immigration, it

67. For a thorough summary of the jurisprudence on this issue since In re J-E, see ANGER, supra note 17, 729-30, at 649 nn.2-4.
68. Id. at 729, at 651.
69. Id. at 729, at 649.
70. While the plenary power may be falling from the Court’s favor, oddly, it was cited by President Bush as he targeted Arab and Muslim noncitizens for special rules during the so-called ‘war on terror’ following September 11, 2001. See Kevin R. Johnson, Hurricane Katrina: Lessons About Immigrants in the Administrative State, 45 Hous. L. Rev. 11, 33-35 (2006). For a detailed summary of the key plenary power cases, see Irene Scharf, The Exclusionary Rule in Immigration Proceedings: Where it Was, Where it Is, Where it May Be Going, 12 SAN DIEGO INST. L.J. 53, 56 n.6 (2010).


is unlikely to resolve the issue in the near future, elevating the urgency to address the confusion surrounding this key issue of humanitarian concern. As Professor Mary Holper has suggested, it is vitally important to clarify the meaning of torture, as its proper and expeditious resolution could avoid a “life-or-death situation for most applicants.” She documents thoroughly the adverse effects of these decisions—the BIA’s disregard, even contradiction, of standard domestic criminal law jurisprudence concerning specific intent; and the inadequate protection this affords potential torture victims.

II. CONTEXT FOR A CRITIQUE OF THE CONVENTION’S DEFINITION OF TORTURE

The legislative history of CAT demonstrates that the intended meaning of torture by U.S. government officials is not as narrow as has been interpreted by either the BIA or by some federal courts. Noteworthy is the failure of a Deputy Assistant State Department official testifying before a House Congressional subcommittee in 1999 concerning U.S. policy towards victims of torture to mention specific intent. When asked what she believed torture to be, the official responded, "we often refer to exactly what it says in the Convention, ... the term 'torture' means 'any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person ...' [i]t is fairly comprehensive." This is evidence that, as late as 1999, specific intent was not vital to the
executive branch.

Prior to approving the Convention, neither the Senate nor the President indicated precisely what they expected when using the phrase "specific intent." To be sure, neither indicated that they meant it to mean the same thing when applied to both lay applicants and U.S. officials subject to criminal prosecution. In fact, both President Reagan's and the State Department's transmitials to the Senate disbelieve claims that they intended such a narrow meaning. Secretary of State Shultz's letter explained that "[b]ecause specific intent is required, an act that results in unanticipated and unintended severity of pain and suffering is not torture for purposes of this Convention." The President stated his intentions differently in 1990 when, at hearings before the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations, through an assistant, the President added that "to constitute torture the action must be done in a deliberate and calculated manner, or, to put it in customary U.S. legal terminology, it must be done with specific intent to inflict such a high level of pain." This presidential sense is wholly different from and far less restrictive than that later adopted by the BIA in J-E, where the Board ruled that applicants needed to prove that authorities "intentionally inflicted" pain and suffering or that the conditions resulting in harm had been deliberately created for "a proscribed or prohibited purpose," such as obtaining confessions or punishing detainees.

To be sure, there were concerns that a broad understanding of torture would lead to prosecutions of U.S. government officials. These concerns were raised during the Senate ratification hearings, and apparently plagued the negotiators. Whether or not well-founded, these apprehensions do not justify an interpretation of torture that denies protection to potential torture victims.

The legislative history of the Torture Victim Protection Act ("TVPA") supports the view that Congress's use of the word "torture" is not restricted to the narrow concept understood by U.S. courts vis-a-vis CAT. Enacted during the same time, the purpose of the TVPA was to establish "a Federal right of action against violators of human rights." It defines torture as "any act...by which severe pain or suffering (other than pain or suffering arising only from or inherent in, or incidental to, lawful sanctions), whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on [an] individual." Notably, a "specific intent" requirement is absent in this definition.

The House of Representatives' discussion leading to the TVPA's enactment supports the conclusion that Congress understood torture to mean the same thing as that meant by all CAT signatory nations other than the United States. The discussion also reveals that the legislators had CAT in mind when considering the TVPA, with Congressman Swindall noting that "[i]n 1984, Congress adopted and the President signed into law a joint resolution condemning acts of torture. Public Law 98-447 [TVPA] reaffirms [the United States'] strong objections of [sic] the use of torture under any circumstances." The definition of 'torture' contained in the

76. Even scholars of criminal law disagree over the meaning of specific intent. See, e.g., Holper, supra note 17, at 779. Not all U.S. criminal prosecutions require specific intent; some require only the general intent to do an act. See, e.g., 2 CHARLES R. TORCIA, WHARTON'S CRIMINAL LAW §§ 107, 111 (Clark Boardman Callaghan ed., 15th ed. 2012). "...the crime charged requires only a so-called 'general intent' (usually connoting general malice or its equivalent), such intent is presumed simply by showing that the defendant engaged in the prohibited conduct..." Id. § 111 (citing general intent crimes of manslaughter, reckless endangering, and criminal property damage). "[T]he drafter of the CAT did not wish this definition to be understood as a definition in the strict sense of penal law...[Article 1] gives a description of torture for the purpose of understanding and implementing the Convention rather than a legal definition for direct application in criminal law and criminal procedure." Holper, supra note 17, at 802 (citing BURGERS & DANIUSIS, supra note 18, at 122 (omission in original)).

77. MESSAGE TRANSMITTING CAT, supra note 4, at iii-vi (message from state department to President on May 10, 1988 and message from the President of the United States transmitting the CAT on May 20, 1988).

78. Id. at 3.

79. CAT Hearing on S. Treaty Doc. No. 100-20, supra note 19, at 16-17 (statement of Mark Richard, Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, Department of Justice); see also Holper, supra note 17, at 788 n.64.


81. Id. at 298; see supra Section 1.B (discussing and critiquing In re J-E).

82. CAT Hearing on S. Treaty Doc. No. 100-20, supra note 19, at 16-17 (statement of Mark Richard, Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division, Department of Justice); see also Holper, supra note 17, at 788 n.64.

83. Holper, supra note 17, at 788 n.64 (referring to the CAT Hearing, statements of Senators Helms and Pressler).


87. See id.


89. Id. (statement of Rep. Swindall). In later years, President George Bush, under pressure following accusations of torture by soldiers in Afghanistan, reaffirmed the government's opposition to torture in saying, "America stands against and will not tolerate torture. We will investigate and prosecute all acts of torture...in all territory under our jurisdiction...Torture is wrong no matter where it occurs, and the United States will continue to lead the fight to eliminate it everywhere." Presidential Statement in Support of Victims of Torture, supra note 40, at 1167-68.
[TVPA]." he explained, "is derived from the widely recognized definition contained in the U.N. Convention against Torture."

The argument that the TVPA and the CAT are distinct statutes, so each may offer its own definition of torture, cannot stand. While there is scant evidence of the U.S. CAT drafters' concern for potential torture victims, the intended beneficiaries of the TVPA are clearly in similar situations to CAT applicants-TVPA beneficiaries are torture victims for whom a civil cause of action was created to offer them compensation; CAT beneficiaries are those who reasonably fear they will be tortured if forcibly returned to their home countries. The similarity of focus in the two Acts highlights the need for a shared definition.

The puerility of successful Convention cases attests to the effectiveness of the narrow definition of torture, yet it also attests to the adverse humanitarian effects that have befallen CAT applicants. Only a few successful CAT cases have been identified in which the U.S. government challenged the applicant's proof of specific intent.

91. In fact, other than President Reagan's limited statements, I have been unable to find additional presidential statements invoking concerns for potential victims. See supra note 40 and accompanying text. Discussions in the legislature concerned governmental officials as torture defendants. CAT Hearing on S. Treaty Doc. No. 100- 26, supra note 13, at 10. Some concern was also expressed about the constitutional rights of accused torturers. See id.
93. See supra note 40 (arguing that the 1991 and 1996 CVCA's are distinct statutes).
94. Compare M. Olivera v. Attorney Gen., 476 F.3d 138, 170-72 (3d Cir. 2007); Zabed v. Ashcroft, 333 F.3d 463, 473 (3d Cir. 2003) (stating that "we do not interpret this as a severe pain or suffering that is the unintended consequence of an intentional act."). The Third Circuit's take is more nuanced. Shortly after Olivera, Pierre v. Gonzales, 602 F.3d 109 (3d. Cir. 2007), was decided, disagreeing with Olivera but very particularly, ultimately allowing the ruling to stand. In note ten of the Pierre opinion, the court stated that the reasoning of the defendant in Olivera (native of Haiti, HIV-positive, with criminal convictions) occurred: because both the IJ and the BIA summarily relied on "[f]ailure... on the specific.... The Olivera panel purported to further hold that Olivera had [sic]... argument that the extremely high likelihood of an HIV-positive petitioner's death in Haitian prison camps is that any Haitian official who detained such a petitioner would exhibit "reckless indifference" to the likelihood of death; the panel reasoned that this would adequately show specific intent. This proposition seems to us inconsistent with the Third Circuit's holding in Olivera that "this mere fact that the Haitian authorities have knowledge that severe pain and suffering may result by placing detainees in those conditions does not support a finding that the Haitian authorities intend to inflict severe pain and suffering... . To the extent the two cases are in tension, Olivera is the more persuasive precedent, though it is hard to contest Lauria's chief holding: IJs should carefully consider evidence that individual petitioners put forth to distinguish their cases from [f]ailure... on the specific...." That is what the IJ did here.

2013] UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE

while U.S. government officials have avoided prosecution under the Convention.

95. In the last year for which CAT and asylum figures are extant, fiscal year ("FY") 2011, of the 27,044 CAT applications filed in immigration courts tracked through the judicial process, only 629 were granted, a meager 2.3 percent grant rate, as compared with a 52 percent grant rate for asylum cases brought in immigration court. Granted, the comparison of asylum and CAT cases is not necessarily one of "apples to apples." Distinctions between asylum and CAT necessitate that fewer CAT applications will succeed as compared with those asking for asylum. Nor do, we know the number of potential CAT applicants who, upon learning of the likelihood that their applications were to be denied, have either failed to apply or have withdrawn their applications. Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine that there would not have been additional successful CAT claims had torture been defined more appropriately.

III. ADVERSE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Other nations seem to agree that the definition of torture is being, literally, tortured by the United States. Recently, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board ("IRB") noted,
the Torture Convention's definition of torture "does not require malicious intent." ... Severe pain or suffering is considered to be intentionally inflicted if ... it is a desired consequence ... or it is known to be a likely consequence, if severe pain or suffering is the result only of an accident or negligence, it is not intentional. However, where the perpetrator commits an act which is objectively harmful, the tribunal may presume that pain or suffering was intended." International war crimes tribunals have interpreted the phrase "intentionally inflicted" in a similar manner, construing it to require an act or omission which is deliberate, not accidental. ... The lack of a subjective desire to cause severe pain or suffering does not constitute a valid defense. Rather, knowledge that prohibited consequences would result from intentional acts satisfies the intentionality requirement.

These concerns were reflected in a ruling by a Canadian federal court that reviewed the 2004 Safe Third Country Agreement ("STCA") with the United States, causing it to rule against implementation of the STCA. The agreement between the two countries provides that the "country of last presence" is responsible for deciding asylum claims presented at a land border port of entry. The country of last presence is either Canada or the United States when the person applying was physically present there immediately before claiming refugee status at a land border. Article IV of the STCA permits each nation to return to the other nation asylum applicants presenting themselves at a land border. In effect, STCAs "absolve [national] of substantively determining applications for asylum under the Convention" rather than upholding asylum as the

99. ANKER, supra note 17, § 7:26, at 643-50 (citations omitted).
101. See discussion infra Section III.
102. STCA, supra note 100, art. 1(a).
103. Id. art. 4.
104. Id.
107. "Article 33 of the Refugee Convention expressly refers to refoulement in any manner whatsoever. 'Chain refoulement' by causing a person to return to another place from which refoulement occurs is prohibited. Rejection of asylum seekers at the frontier is also prohibited by this phrase and agreement as to the interpretation of the Convention on this point is reflected in numerous conclusions of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR." Penselope Mathew, Australian Refugee Protection in the Wake of the Tampa, 96 AM. J. INT’L L. 661, 668 (2002) (internal citation omitted); see U.N. High Comm'n for Refugees, Human Rights and Refugee Protection, Self-Study Module 3, vol. II, at 60 (Dec. 15, 2000), available at http://www.unhcr.org/pub/PUHL3/4534a7d712a.pdf ("Non-refoulement obligations under human rights law would also entail protection against chain-refoulement, that is, removal to a country from which the individual would, in turn, be transferred or returned to another country where he or she would be subject to a serious human rights violation from which the non-refoulement obligation derives.").
109. Id. at 111-12.
110. The BOIR is the administrative body that decides deportation cases. U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE, EXEC. OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW, OFFICE OF PLANNING, ANALYSIS AND TRENDS, supra note 88, at B1.
Immigration Services (USCIS),\textsuperscript{111} one was terminated, two cases were not reported on, one person moved to change venue, and the rest (besides the USCIS-referred case) were awaiting Master Calendar hearings.\textsuperscript{112} While the paucity of data (fifty-seven cases) makes it difficult to make firm inferences, and not all reports followed the cases to finality, the data illustrate that, of the fifty-seven cases documented, sixteen were subject to the STCA and thirteen additional applicants may also have eventually been subject to it, for a potential total subject to the STCA of twenty-nine of fifty-seven cases, nearly fifty-one percent.

The finding of a Canadian court in 2007\textsuperscript{113} that the STCA violated Canadian law\textsuperscript{114} both placed into doubt the status of the United States vis-a-vis the Convention\textsuperscript{115} and surfaced the difficulties the United States could face when interpreting treaties such as CAT.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[112] UNHCR Monitoring Report, supra note 108, at 43, 110-11.
  \item[114] Canada’s ratification of CAT did not preclude the specific intent requirement. See Canadian Council Trial, 2007 F.C. 1262. This places Canada in a difficult position vis-a-vis the United States when Canada invokes the STCA against an asylum applicant who passed through the United States; when the STCA causes Canada to refuse to entertain an application, returning the applicant to the United States, which will likely refuse that person to a country that could commit torture, is not Canada effectively violating its own CAT commitment under Article 35.
  \item[115] The Canadian appeals court overturned the decision in 2008, but on technical grounds. Canadian Council Appeal, 2008 F.C. 229, para. 105. Reversal justifications included: Charter challenges cannot be mounted on the basis of hypotheticals and the applicant’s claim was ultimately reviewed by United States immigration authorities, id. para. 102; and no factual basis upon which to assess the alleged Charter breaches, as they were not advanced by a refugee denied asylum in Canada pursuant to the Regulations and facing a real risk of refoulement in being sent back to the United States. Id. para. 103. My attempts to locate news and commentary following this case have been unsuccessful, but Professor Karen Muscal found Canadian critique of a United States Supreme Court decision on a related issue. In her analysis of the United States implementation of the Refugee Act, she cited criticism, by the Canadian IRIS Chairperson, of the decision in INS v. Biafra-Zochariis, 502 U.S. 478 (1998), for its seeming contempt for international precedent and for the decisions of other countries: "In these days of global interdependence perhaps even the Supreme Court might benefit from looking at how courts and refugee boards in like-minded countries have decided similar cases ... " (The Chairperson) noted that the majority... "failed to "cite a single international precedent, judicial or academic in reaching its conclusion."
  \item[117] Canadian Council Trial, 2007 F.C. 1262, para. 247.
  \item[118] Id. para. 248 (quoting Zabeda v. Ashcroft, 333 F.3d 463, 473 (8th Cir. 2003)).
  \item[119] Id. para. 248 (quoting Zabeda, 333 F.3d at 474).
  \item[120] Id. para. 249, “It is in the area of arbitrariness and lack of discretion where the principles of fundamental justice collide with the operation of the STCA.” Id. para. 220.
  \item[122] Canadian Council Trial, 2007 F.C. 1262, para. 281.
  \item[123] Id. para. 283-84 (reasoning that the refugee claimant’s life, liberty, or security of the person was at stake under this law).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
general intent satisfies the intent requirement of the regulations and would “more accurately implement the Senate’s purpose for the intent element, excluding unanticipated pain and suffering, because ‘causing a prohibited result through accident, mistake, carelessness, or absent-mindedness’ does not satisfy the general intent standard.” Mascia’s critique of the Third Circuit’s 2005 ruling in *Auguste v. Ridge* is apt, as he asserts that, even in criminal law jurisprudence, when a consequence is foreseeable, courts presume that the actor intended the result; thus, the natural and probable consequences of voluntary actions resulting in torture should raise a rebuttable presumption that the perpetrator intended the result. Realigning the torture definition in these ways would do much to reposition the United States into conformity with its expressed commitment to eliminate torture; the nation’s excessively narrow definition of torture employed in CAT has—because so distinct from that adopted by the other CAT signatories—essentially removed the United States from legitimate participation in this international effort.

Finally, to address the difficulties faced by potential torture victims because of this narrow definition, the principle of Immigration Lenity should be employed liberally to promote the humanitarian principles that the United States professes underlie its participation in the Convention. Thus, in cases in which respondents would otherwise be denied Convention relief because of the specific intent requirement, Immigration Lenity can prevent refoulement for potential victims of the worst punishment, torture.

### A. Origins of Immigration Lenity

The rule of lenity derives from criminal law. It is an “ancient canon of statutory construction which directs that ambiguities in penal statutes be construed in favor of the defendant.” In an early Supreme Court case, Chief Justice Marshall remarked that (the rule that penal laws are to be construed strictly, is perhaps

---

123. See infra Section IV.B.E. For further discussion, see ANKER, supra note 17.
124. See Bell & Dona, supra note 17, at 738-43 (“Recommendations for Advocates”).
125. Holper, supra note 17, at 820-22.
126. Id. at 787-826 (describing the criminal law jurisprudence on general and specific intent, the varying understandings as to what constitutes specific intent, and the Model Penal Code’s interpretations; studying also the immigration law context, from the BIA case of *In re J-E*, to various federal circuit courts of appeals (including the Third, which decided the issue and then changed its mind), and finally, to the view of the Justice Department).
127. Id. at 815.
128. Id.
129. Id. at 819-20. Holper’s article is not focused on lenity; she mentions it only on a single occasion while emphasizing that even the DOJ had found “sufficient ambiguity in the legislative history of the CAT to interpret the specific intent requirement according to the common law definition, thus rendering more criminal defendants guilty of torture.” Id. This ambiguity, she argued, strengthens the notion that “a narrower definition of specific intent in civil immigration cases as compared to criminal cases lies in the face of the rule of lenity.” Id. at 820.
130. Memorandum from Daniel Levin, supra note 46.
not much less old than construction itself. It is founded on the
tendered law for the rights of individuals; and on the plain
principle that the power of punishment is vested in the legislative,
not in the judicial department. It is the legislature, not the Court,
which is to define a crime, and ordain its punishment.
... Where there is no ambiguity in the words, there is no room for
construction. The case must be a strong one indeed, which would
justify a Court in departing from the plain meaning of words,
especially in a penal act, in search of an intention which the words
themselves did not suggest.\(^{137}\)

As the Court explained at a later date, "[t]his policy of leniency means
that the Court will not interpret a federal criminal statute so as to
increase the penalty that it places on an individual when such an
interpretation can be based on no more than a guess as to what
Congress intended."\(^{138}\) However, leniency is "not invoked by a
grammatical possibility"\(^{139}\) and "applies only if, after seizing
everything from which aid can be derived, we can make no more
than a guess as to what Congress intended."\(^{140}\) Lastly, we are
cautions that "[a] statute is not "ambiguous" for purposes of leniency
[merely] because there is a 'division of judicial authority' over its
proper construction."\(^{141}\)

Proper occasions for invoking Immigration Leniency are sometimes
unclear.\(^{142}\) One such occasion is for ambiguous provisions, such as
sentencing requirements.\(^{143}\) For example, a 2001 Ninth Circuit case,
Lara-Ruiz v. INS,\(^{144}\) cited an earlier Supreme Court case that
discussed criminal leniency, supporting its use as it "directs us to read
'ambiguous' statutory provisions narrowly in favor of the alien in
deportation proceedings."\(^{145}\) In refusing to apply leniency in the case
in question though, the court noted that it "applies only when a
reasonable doubt persists about a statute's intended scope even after
review of the language and structure, legislative history, and
motivating policies of the statute."\(^{146}\) Thus, the court found that

\(^{137}\) Willberger, 18 U.S. at 95-96.


223, 230 (1993); Ladner, 358 U.S. at 176) (invoking appeal from prisoner denied credit
toward sentence for time spent at community treatment center while on bail).

\(^{141}\) See Korey, 515 U.S. at 64-65 (citing Moskal v. United States, 498 U.S. 103, 108
(1989)).

\(^{142}\) See, e.g., United States v. Lazaro-Quaradana, 71 F.3d 1419, 1421 (9th Cir.
1995) (describing "the term involving in the sentencing guidelines" as being "capable of
a broad interpretation").

\(^{143}\) Id.

\(^{144}\) 241 F.3d 934, 942 (7th Cir. 2001).

\(^{145}\) Id.

\(^{146}\) Id. (citing Moskal, 498 U.S. at 108).

\(^{147}\) Lara-Ruiz, 241 F.3d at 942.

\(^{148}\) Moskal, 498 U.S. at 107 (quoting Hidalgo v. United States, 447 U.S. 381, 387
(1980)). The court added, it "leaves open the crucial question . . . of how much
ambiguities constitutes . . . ambiguity," Id. at 108 (citation and internal quotation
marks omitted). Others have said that "the criminal rule of leniency survives more as a
makeweight for results that seem right on other grounds than as a consistent policy
of statutory interpretation." David S. Rubenstein, Putting the Immigration Rule of
Leniency to Good Use: A Tool of Last Resort After Chevron, 59 ADMIN. L. REV. 477,
493 n.72 (2007) (quoting John Calvin Jeffries, Legalism, Legality, and the
Construction of Penal Statutes, 71 VA. L. REV. 189, 198-99 (1985)).

\(^{149}\) Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, Pub.
L. No. 104-208, 110 Stat. 3009-546 to -724 (1996); Anthopoulos, Effective Death
are codified as amended in scattered sections of United States Code title 8.

\(^{150}\) Julie Stumpf, The Crimmigration Crisis: Immigrants, Crime, and Sovereign

\(^{151}\) NAT'L IMMIGRATION PROJECT OF THE NAT'L LAWYERS GUILD, IMMIGRATION LAW
AND DEFENSE F 838 (2d ed. 2013). ILRRA also repealed discretionary waivers of
deportation for those convicted of aggravated felonies, and applied the deportation
sentences retroactively to those who pleaded guilty before the statute's enactment. See
id.; Ryan Loney, American Diaspora: The Deportation of Lawful Residents from the
United States and the Destruction of Their Families, 32 N.Y.U. REV. L. & SOC. CHANGE
55, 60, 66 (2007); Jacqueline P. Ullén, Note, A Common Sense Reconstruction of the
INA's Crime-Related Removal Systems: Eliminating the Cavities from the Statue of
Liberty's Welcoming Words, 76 WASH. U. L. Q. 1545, 1565 (2000); Gerald J. Neuman,
Admissions and Denials: A Dialogic Introduction to the Immigration Law Symposium,
It is in the wake of these statutory changes that the term “crimmigration” was coined. First identified in an article in the Washington Post newspaper, the author, Dana Priest, referred to “Crimmigration Camps”—U.S.-controlled prisons located in other countries, cheaper than those in the United States, used “to contain noncitizen detainees and United States citizens convicted of serious crimes.” In 2006, Professor Juliet Stumpf attempted to locate the origins of crimmigration, theorizing that it derived from the notions of membership in U.S. society that emphasize distinctions between insiders and outsiders. Both immigration and criminal law marshal the sovereign power of the state to punish and to express societal condemnation for the individual offender. The use of that powerful tool in this new area of crimmigration law is troubling precisely because of the use of membership theory. Because membership theory is inherently flexible, the viewpoint of the decisionmaker as to whether an individual is part of the community often determines whether constitutional and other rights apply at all.

This trend to treat immigrants like criminals, which contradicts well-settled rulings over decades declaring immigration law to be civil in nature, has a silver lining for the issue at hand: the interrelationship created by these new statutes between immigration and criminal law warrants enhanced and robust use of the principle of lenity in the immigration context, particularly for CAT applicants, who are the most vulnerable.

Given the drastic nature of deportation, it is natural that the jurisprudence of criminal lenity would eventually bleed into immigration law. While the classic case of United States v. Wilberger concerned penal statutes with prison the potential outcome, courts have characterized the harsh effects of deportation as similar to banishment to countries unknown by deportees. This harsh consequence, so akin to imprisonment, has propelled us to attend to “the tenderness of the law for the rights of individuals; and on the plain principle, that the power of punishment is vested in the legislative, not in the judicial department.” Such tender treatment is particularly warranted in the cases making news recently—those concerning noncitizen children brought to the United States by their parents when the children were young. The generosity of

168. See, e.g., Wong Haw Tan v. Phelan, 333 U.S. 6, 10 (1948) ([“]deportation is a drastic measure and at times the equivalent of banishment or exile . . . “); INS v. Cardosa-Poncea, 480 U.S. 451, 469 (1987) (stating that “[d]eportation is always a harsh measure”); Gautham-Quiniones v. Kennedy, 374 U.S. 459, 479 (1963) ([“]deportation is a drastic sanction, one which can destroy lives and disrupt families . . . “); Barber v. Gonzales, 347 U.S. 587, 642 (1954) (Although not penal in character, deportation statutes as a practical matter may inflict the equivalent of banishment or exile . . . “) (quoting Wong Haw Tan, 333 U.S. at 10); Bridges, 320 U.S. at 154 (1944) (“Though deportation is not technically a criminal proceeding, it visits a great hardship on the individual and deprives him of the right to stay and live and work in this land of freedom.” That deportation is a penalty—at times a most serious penalty—cannot be doubted.)). Although the rule of lenity was intended to apply to statutory provisions that render aliens deportable, see Wong Haw Tan, 333 U.S. at 9-10, it has since been applied to a wide variety of immigration provisions, including those that provide discretionary relief from deportation. See, e.g., Lisa v. INS, 548 F.2d 127, 139 (2d Cir. 1977) (stating that recognition of the immigration rule of lenity was “especially pertinent” in a case involving relief from deportation); Rabenstein, supra note 148, at 492 n.67; Ng Pung Ho v. White, 359 U.S. 276, 284 (1959) (stating that “[d]eportation can be a penalty because of a clause which itself has not been shown to bear a penalty.”) (citations omitted)); Slocum, Lenity and Chevron Deference, supra note 156, at 526 n.65.

159. I recall a client of the Immigration Law Clinic about a decade ago who, while in his late fifties, had no defense to his deportation to Portugal, a country he had left as a young child, never having returned. Because of his shame over his situation, he told his adult children that he was simply “retiring” there.

160. Wilberger, 18 U.S.C. at 95; see also Slocum, Lenity and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 526 n.65.


162. See Stumpf, supra note 150, at 374.

165. United States ex rel. Bilkovinsky v. Tod, 263 U.S. 149, 154 (1923) (“Deportation proceedings are civil in their nature”); see also Bridges v. Wixon, 326 U.S. 135, 154, 176 (1946) (explaining that, though a deportation proceeding involves a serious penalty, it is “not a criminal proceeding”); Daniel Kastrow, Deportation, Social Control, and Punishment: Some Thoughts About Why Hard Law Makes Bad Cases, 136 HANY. L. REV. 1989, 1991-92 (2000) (arguing that because deportation is now a nearly certain “consequence of criminal conviction[,]” the criminal justice and immigrant removal systems are necessarily one, so “constitutional norms applicable to criminal cases” should be applied to deportation).

166. Immigration Lenity in immigration law is a classic of statutory interpretation whereby a judge is required to allow a noncitizen to remain in the United States if otherwise the law would create an absurd or excessively harsh result, such as excluding someone who is likely to become a victim of torture. See Rubenstein, supra note 148, at 491-92 

Copyright © 2020 NYTimes.com. All rights reserved.
Wilberger should also apply to the sympathetic situations of CAT applicants.

The Rule of Immigration Lenity is not novel, yet it is underutilized. Beginning with *Fong Haw Tan v. Phelan*, the Supreme Court announced that it would "resolve [statutory] doubts in favor of a more narrow" construction because deportation is a drastic measure and at times the equivalent of banishment or exile. The Court reasoned that, "since the stakes are comparatively considerable for the individual, we will not assume that Congress meant to trench on his freedom beyond that which is required by the narrowest of several possible meanings of the words used." As to doubts or ambiguities arising in this principle, was later characterized as a "canon of statutory interpretation uniquely applicable to the immigration laws, which requires [that] any doubts in construing those statutes [are] resolved in favor of the [noncitizen] due to the potentially drastic consequences of deportation." Since *Fong Haw Tan*, the Supreme Court has repeatedly paid homage to the principle that courts should construe ambiguous immigration statutes favorably for aliens. In *In re Cordova-Fonseca*, the Supreme Court referred to the "harshest measure" of deportation as it characterized lenity as the "longstanding principle of construing any lingering ambiguities in deportation statutes in favor of the [non-citizen]." Most recently, in *INS v. St. Cyr*, by referencing the same principle, the Court of this writing, President Obama did assert his executive authority in June 2012 to enable a subset of these immigrants, colloquially called "Dreamers," to be temporarily protected from removal. See *Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Process*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGR. SERVS., http://www.uscis.gov/childhoodarrivals (last updated July 2, 2013).

162. 333 U.S. at 6.

163. Id. at 10 (citing Delgadillo v. Carmichael, 332 U.S. 388 (1947)).

164. Id.; see also *In re Cromb*, 23 I & N. Dec. 9, 29 (B.I.A. 2001) (Rosenberg, Board Member, concurring).


167. 440 U.S. at 449.

168. 633 U.S. at 289.

2013 UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE

reminded us of the ongoing power of lenity.\footnote{169} Regarding noncitizens applying for CAT relief where the possibility of torture is real, this principle is particularly relevant and, not surprisingly, the circuit courts agree.\footnote{170}

While not as long-standing as its corollary in criminal law, the rule of Immigration Lenity maintains strong judicial support, even in recent years.\footnote{171} Particularly in the context of potential torture victims, and considering the United States' expressed commitment to fostering human rights and opposing torture,\footnote{172} support for a robust rule of Immigration Lenity is as strong as warranted as is the rule of Immigration Lenity, as the stakes involved in immigration cases, particularly those concerning torture, are extreme.\footnote{173} Adding to the equities supporting use of Immigration Lenity is the powerless nature of immigrants in our political system—among other deprivations, they cannot vote;\footnote{174} unlike criminal defendants, they are bereft of most protections accorded criminal defendants because of the

169. Id. at 320 (stating that the principle construes "any lingering ambiguities in deportation statutes in favor of the alien") (quoting *Cordova-Fonseca*, 460 U.S. at 449) (internal quotation marks omitted). Professor Brian Slomcom noted: \footnote{[1] There is a similar, but lesser known, canon of construction in immigration law, often similarly referred to by courts as the rule of lenity, which directs that statutory ambiguities in deportation provisions be resolved in favor of the noncitizen. Despite the extreme judicial deference traditionally given to the executive branches in immigration matters, courts have long employed this canon in light of the harshness of deportation. Indeed, the immigration rule of lenity still retains its validity today, as evidenced by the Court's citation to it in a recent decision, *INS v. St. Cyr*.


171. See *Rubenstein*, supra note 148, at 492 nn.68-70. See, for example, the following cases, which applied the rule of lenity to reach a statutory interpretation that effectively nullifies the 1996 Amendments: *Pudash*, 358 F.3d at 1161 (affirming favorable asylum determination).

172. See *Rubenstein*, supra note 148, at 492 nn.68-70. See, for example, the following cases, which applied the rule of lenity to reach a statutory interpretation that effectively nullifies the 1996 Amendments: *Pudash*, 358 F.3d at 1161 (affirming favorable asylum determination).

173. See *Rubenstein*, supra note 148, at 492 nn.68-70. See, for example, the following cases, which applied the rule of lenity to reach a statutory interpretation that effectively nullifies the 1996 Amendments: *Pudash*, 358 F.3d at 1161 (affirming favorable asylum determination).

174. See *Johnson*, supra note 70, at 20. In addition to not having the franchise, noncitizens are an unpopular group who can be victimized by legislators who "may be immigrants are an unpopular group who can be victimized by legislators who "may be
determination that deportation hearings are civil and not criminal;\textsuperscript{175} they are neither entitled to appointed counsel nor to confront witnesses against them,\textsuperscript{176} nor to ex post facto prohibitions.\textsuperscript{177}

Ironically, the Convention's paucity of legislative history strengthens the argument in favor of Immigration Lenity, precisely because of the vagueness of the rule in a 1989 case,\textit{In re Tiwari.}\textsuperscript{178} There, the BIA found that "[t]he Service has not pointed to any legislative history or legislative intent to support its position" that the respondent was deportable for his alien smuggling conviction, notwithstanding that the statutory requirement for "gain" was not met.\textsuperscript{179} In rejecting the government's argument, the BIA reflected lenient language, adding, "any lingering ambiguities regarding the construction of the Act are to be resolved in the alien's favor."\textsuperscript{180}

Principles such as that cited in Tiwari should be employed to assist CAT applicants who are otherwise unable to obtain relief because of the narrow definition of torture. Nothing in the legislative history supports the view that the specific intent requirement should be interpreted as narrowly as it has been. As already noted, President Reagan and others, in fact, expressed the opposite.\textsuperscript{181} If the harshness of deporting Tiwari created the urgency to invoke leniency, so should the harshness of deportation when torture is likely to be visited upon unsuccessful CAT applicants.

---

\textsuperscript{175} See \textit{Stumpf, supra note 150, at 392-93}. Noncitizens in deportation hearings enjoy far fewer protections than those available to criminal defendants. \textit{Id.} Despite the long-standing tenet that deportation is civil, commentators are expressing growing concern about the hypocrisy of the recent treatment of noncitizens, essentially as criminals, while denying them the concomitant rights. \textit{See id. at 376-79}. On the intersection of immigration and criminal law, see \textit{id. at 378} ("Many criminal offenses, including misdemeanors, now result in mandatory deportation. Immigration violations previously handled as civil matters are increasingly addressed as criminal offenses. The procedures for determining whether civil immigration laws are violated have come to resemble the criminal process. . . . [T]he trend toward criminalizing immigration law has set us on a path toward establishing irreversibly intertwined systems: immigration and criminal law as doppelgangers." (citations omitted)).

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Id.} at 390-91. The government recently announced a new policy, in anticipation of a district court ruling, that it will provide counsel to immigration detainees with serious mental disorders that may render them mentally incompetent to represent themselves. ERO and ICE Adopt New Policies in Anticipation of District Court Ruling, \textit{90 INTERPRETER RELEASES 990, 990-91} (2013).


\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Id.} at 880-81.

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Id.} at 881 (citing INS v. Cardoza-Fonseca, 480 U.S. 421 (1987); Fong Haw Tan v. Phelan, 333 U.S. 6 (1948)).

\textsuperscript{181} See \textit{supra Section II.}

\textsuperscript{182} 326 F.3d 367, 376 (2d Cir. 2003) (citing Dailey v. Aschcroft, 267 F.3d 200, 208 (2d Cir. 2001)) (deciding whether second-degree manslaughter in New York is a crime of violence and thus an aggravated felony, rendering Indian ineligible for most relief). The section at issue was 18 U.S.C. § 16, which defined a crime of violence as a felony if it involved "by its nature . . . a substantial risk that physical force against another will be used in the course of committing a crime." \textit{Id.} at 376 (citing 18 U.S.C. § 16 (1998)).

\textsuperscript{183} CAT, \textit{supra note 1}, pmbl.

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{185} Deborah E. Anker, \textit{Determining Asylum Claims in the United States: A Case Study on the Implementation of Legal Norms in an Unstructured Adjudicatory Environment}, 19 N.Y.U. REV. L. & SOC. CHANGE 433, 477 & n.176 (1999) (deciding, for example, that "lawful permanent residents who are convicted of crimes determined to be aggravated felonies are categorically ineligible for discretionary relief from deportation, regardless of equitable factors in individual cases." \textit{Id.} at 376 (citing INS v. St. Cyr, 538 U.S. 289, 296-97 (2003))).

\textsuperscript{186} See Rubenstein, \textit{supra note 148}, at 480-81 nn.6-7.
"interpretation of a statute" was reasonable. Others have characterized it as a "tiebreaker." In any event, the suggestion here is for a more robust use of Immigration Lenity, especially as applied in CAT cases, for applicants struggling with the narrow definition of torture. The reasons supporting a more robust use of Immigration Lenity are numerous: alien immigrants remain relatively disadvantaged in the United States, they have no vote, and thus no say about the laws to which they are subject; many immigrants are unable, even if legally present in the United States, to either become LPRs or, if already in that status, to naturalize and thus participate fully in the political process through voting; finally, the humanitarian purposes of CAT, to strengthen the existing prohibition of torture and other cruel, abusive, and inhuman treatment, will be furthered with more frequent use of Immigration Lenity. In the short term, while the narrow definition of torture under CAT prevails, Immigration Lenity could offer a stopgap measure to protect potential torture victims.

Enhanced use of Immigration Lenity is particularly warranted in the context of the narrow definition of torture because of the imposition in the 1980s of harsh amendments to the U.S. immigration laws, which removed much discretion from immigration judges, made deportable thousands who were not before, and denied relief to so many others. Moreover, Immigration Lenity requests should gain momentum in light of aspects of the 1996 law, commonly coined "IRAIRA," which altered the structure of proceedings to evict noncitizens from the United States. The IRAIRA merged immigration proceedings to evict noncitizens, which had been divided between "deportation" and "exclusion." In the past, those deemed to have entered the United States were subject to deportation hearings, while those considered not to have "entered" were subject to exclusion hearings, with fewer rights attendant there. Under this scheme, Immigration Lenity arguments were not made in exclusion hearings, presumably because those considered to have not entered were assumed to be ineligible for leniency. Now, with the merging of deportation and exclusion into unified hearings termed "removal," the era of a more expansive call for Immigration Lenity has arisen. Convincing arguments can now be made that principles of Immigration Lenity should apply equally to all those in removal

193. See HENKEN ET AL., supra note 85, at 405-12.
194. See CAT, supra note 1 (adding a requirement that torture be specifically intended).
196. Id.
197. Slocum, Liability and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 512. Under the former INA, even if physically in the United States, if noncitizens had not been formally inspected and admitted they were considered not to have made an entry. See Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, Pub. L. No. 82-414, 66 Stat. 183 (1952). The 1996 Act eliminated (and deleted?) the concept of "entry" in the INA and replaced it with the concept of "admission." See 110 Stat. at 3009-575 (codified as amended at 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(13)(A) (2012)).
199. See Slocum, Liability and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 512-79. Because noncitizens admitted to the United States are entitled to greater statutory and constitutional protections than are inadmissible ones, "the immigration rule of lenity should be enlisted to less, if any, weight when statutory provisions applicable only to inadmissible noncitizens are at issue." The consequences of deportation—the Court's justification for lenity—are certainly harsher for those who have been admitted into the country. Id. at 524-35, 579.
proceedings.200

D. Effect of Chevron Deference on Immigration Litigants

Notwithstanding the generous and compassionate notion underlying the principle of Immigration Lanty, the case of Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., if layered onto a court's de novo review of a fervent plenary power,212 could likely prevent review of agency interpretations and have an adverse effect on the applicants requesting Immigration Lanty.213 This result would undoubtedly be contrary to the longstanding traditions in U.S. immigration law and to the beneficent purposes of the Convention.214

200. "Thus, while the application of the immigration rule of lanty to provisions applicable to excludable noncitizens had never been authoritatively settled, the issue is now even more unclear due to the enactment of IRAIRA." Shaver, Lanty and Chevron Deference, supra note 130, at 525. (discussing post-IRAIRA's blurring of the distinction between deportation and exclusion).

201. The implications of Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837 (1984), demand a study of its own. I include the discussion here because Chevron is important to consider when discussing Immigration Lanty; however, I do not pretend that space here permits a full discussion.

202. Id.; see generally Anna Williams Shaver, The Invisible Others and Immigrant Rights: A Commentary, 45 Hous. L. Rev. 99, 146 (2008) (quoting Elizabeth, U. Nwabuzor, Comment, The City of Colossae: Disciplo v. Azacreh, Nonacquiescence, and Judicial Defiance in Immigration Law, 50 Hof. L.J. 675, 604 (2007)) ("Even before Chevron, the plenary power doctrine shielded immigration law from meaningful court review. The argument has been made, although I am not convinced, that gives the [Plenary] Power in immigration...a relaxation of... deference to agency interpretations of statutes will have little effect."). Shaver, supra, at 149. Rather, it seems that, given the noted judicial increase in scrutiny of immigration-related legislation in recent years, immigration advocates should be more concerned about expansion of Chevron to immigration than about the plenary power, although a strong plenary power coupled with a vigorous interpretation of Chevron could combine, as Professor Johnson warns, to erode further the legal rights of immigrants. See Johnson, supra note 70, at 43.

203. The recent Supreme Court case, Clapper v. Amnesty Int'l USA, 133 S. Ct. 1188 (2013), should not affect the issues discussed herein, as Clapper involved neither lanty, nor the plenary power, nor Chevron when the Court refused to accept a challenge to various anti-terrorism measures (including renditions, targeted drone killings, and government secrecy); see also Adam Liptak, Justices Reject Legal Challenge to Surveillance, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 27, 2013, at A1.

204. See supra Section I; see also Costello v. INS, 375 U.S. 120, 128 (1964). (Deportation is a drastic measure and at times the equivalent of banishment or exile... . To construe this statutory provision less generously to the alien might find support in logic. But since the stakes are considerable for the individual, we will not assume that Congress meant to trench on his freedom beyond that which is required by the narrowest of several possible meanings of the words used. ") (internal quotation marks omitted) (internal citations omitted)). The Costello Court added: In this area of the law, involving as it may the equivalent of banishment or exile, we do well to eschew technicalities and fictions and to deal instead with realities. The reality is that the petitioner's convictions occurred when he was a naturalized citizen, as he had been for almost 50 years.

2013] UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE 37

The principle of Immigration Lanty, in which ambiguities in immigration statutes are resolved in favor of the non-citizen, is in direct conflict with the main thrust of Chevron, in which ambiguities in statutes are resolved in favor of the agency.215 "On the one hand, Chevron demands that courts defer to reasonable agency interpretations of ambiguous statutes. On the other hand, the rule of lanty requires courts to construe ambiguous immigration statutes favorably for aliens."216 As the consequences of Chevron on immigration jurisprudence have not, to date, been resolved by the Court,217 Immigration Lanty should prevail when in conflict with

If Congress had wanted the relation-back doctrine of § 241(a)(4) to apply to the deportation provisions of § 241(a)(4), and thus to render nugatory and meaningless for an entire class of aliens the protections of § 241(a)(4), Congress could easily have said so.

Id. at 131–32.

Furthermore, in Fong Hau Tan v. Phelan, the Court indicated:

We express to that view by reading this provision of the statute to authorize deportation only where an alien having committed a crime, involving moral turpitude and having been convicted and sentenced, once again commits a crime of that nature and is convicted and sentenced for it.

We resolve the doubt in favor of that construction because deportation is a drastic measure and at times the equivalent of banishment or exile. It is the last resort for misconduct of a resident in this country. Such a forfeiture is a penalty. To construe this statutory provision less generously to the alien might find support in logic. But since the stakes are considerable for the individual, we will not assume that Congress meant to trench on his freedom beyond that which is required by the narrowest of several possible meanings of the words used.

333 U.S. 6, 9–10 (1948) (internal citation omitted).

205. See Slocom, Lanty and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 518–519. He concludes, "courts should consider lanty... . when reviewing agency interpretations." Id. at 519.

206. Rubenstein, supra note 148, at 501; see also Slocom, Lanty and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 559.

207. See Slocom, Lanty and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 552–53. Slocom encapsulates the state of immigration post-Chevron succinctly:

In immigration cases since the Chevron decision, majority opinions of the Court have twice cited the immigration rule of lanty with approval, but in one case a clear statement rule displaced Chevron and in the other the Court resolved the interpretive issue at Step One. In INS v. Cardoza-Fonseca, the Court mentioned the immigration rule of lanty for the first time since the Chevron decision. ... [T]he Court stated that it decided the issue at Chevron Step One, basing its decision on an "analysis of the plain language of the Act, its symmetry with the United Nations Protocol, and its legislative history." The Court found these "ordinary canons of statutory construction compelling, even without regard to the longstanding principle of construing any ambiguous immigration statute in deportation statutes in favor of the [noncitizen]." Similarly, in INS v. St. Cyr, the Court found Chevron inapplicable because of the "preemptions against retroactive application of ambiguous statutory provisions... . that... was buttressed by the longstanding principle of construing any ambiguous statutory provisions in deportation statutes in favor of the [noncitizen]."
Chevron, as it offers noncitizens the benefit of the doubt when statutes are ambiguous, whereas Chevron, by favoring the agency, removes that benefit.

1. The Basics of Chevron

Chevron, in its essence, instructs courts how to decide cases when questions arise concerning the meaning of specific statutory sections. A key reason underlying the Chevron principle is that deference to decisions of administrative agencies is important, because they have an "understanding of the force of the statutory policy in a given situation," and the experience and informed judgment in which to make the best decisions under the circumstances. However, the Court has warned that, "[i]n construing statutes, we must... start with the assumption that the legislative purpose is expressed by the ordinary meaning of the

Neither Cardozo-Ponsa nor St. Cyr should be interpreted as resolving the conflict between the immigration rule of lenity and Chevron. In St. Cyr, the Court's citation to lenity was outside the Chevron context. In Cardozo-Ponsa, one could argue that because the Court decided the case at Step One and also cited to the immigration rule of lenity, the opinion should be interpreted as implying that the canon is a traditional tool of statutory construction that should be applied in Step One. This interpretation is problematic, though, because the Court stated that it did not rely on the rule in determining congressional intent; its citation to it was therefore unnecessary. Thus... neither case resolved the conflict between the immigration rule of lenity and Chevron.

Id. (internal citations omitted). Nor did the Court in INS v. Aguirre-Aguirre, 526 U.S. 418 (1999), expressly refer to lenity, so it also failed to reconcile the issue of reconciliation with Chevron. See id.; see also Rubenstein, supra note 145, at 502.

208. Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 856-66 (1984). The bounds of what became known as the Chevron principle were articulated by the Court as follows:

[An agency to which Congress has delegated policy-making responsibilities may, within the limits of that delegation, properly rely upon the incumbent administration's views of wise policy to inform its judgments. While agencies are not directly accountable to the people, the Chief Executive is, and it is entirely appropriate for this political branch of the Government to make such policy choices—resolving the competing interests which Congress itself either inadvertently did not resolve, or intentionally left to be resolved by the agency charged with the administration of the statute in light of everyday realities.

When a challenge to an agency construction of a statutory provision, fairly conceptualized, really centers on the wisdom of the agency's policy, rather than whether it is a reasonable choice within a gap left open by Congress, the challenge must fail. In such a case, federal judges—who have no constituency—have a duty to respect legitimate policy choices made by those who do.

Id. (internal citations omitted).

209. Id. at 844-45.

210. Id.
Lenity, at which stage of its inquiry would that occur? Commentators disagree. Some, like Professor Brian Slocum, believe that "[a]lthough use in Step One is possible, the better approach is to utilize leniency in Step Two, after a statute is deemed to be ambiguous, as one factor in determining whether the agency's interpretation is reasonable."220 In Professor Rubenstein's view, Immigration Leniency should only be considered after both steps of Chevron are completed and a finding is made of both a lack of Congressional attention to or ambiguity in the matter (Step One) and unreasonable agency action (Step Two).221 In his opinion, this approach "affords the Attorney General an unencumbered first bite at balancing the competing policies underlying the immigration law when the statute at issue is ambiguous . . . and best comports with the judicial deference that judges traditionally afford to the political branches in immigration matters."222

2. Putting Chevron in Context

Does Chevron have "constitutional status,"223 or is it merely a principle of convenience? The answer is unclear. If, as with Immigration Leniency, Chevron is simply a rule of statutory construction and not of the Constitution, it should be given no more weight than is given to Immigration Leniency. Doubtful constitutional support for Chevron offers a convincing argument that the deference accorded to Chevron has exceeded that which is warranted.224 For the issue under discussion here, this is particularly true, as it involves key policy and humanitarian concerns having international implications.

According to several recent indicators, Chevron has lost much of its allure.225 First, in the 1987 case INS v. Cardoza-Fonseca,226 while

2013

the Supreme Court acknowledged that the BIA should be accorded deference, the Court employed an individualized, subtle scrutiny of the BIA's actions, more akin to a case-by-case analysis, in rejecting the BIA's view of the standard necessary to prove persecution in asylum cases.227 Then, in the 1999 case INS v. Aguirre-Aguirre, even when the Court employed the Chevron principle to defer to agency action, it essentially reaffirmed Cardoza-Fonseca.228

In Aguirre-Aguirre, the question was whether the respondent, a native and citizen of Guatemala, was entitled to relief even though "he 'committed a serious nonpolitical crime' before his entry into the United States" when he protested governmental policies by burning buses, assaulting passengers, and vandalizing and destroying private property.229 The BIA denied relief after concluding that the actions constituted serious nonpolitical crimes; ultimately the Court deferred,230 emphasizing, "judicial deference to the Executive Branch is especially appropriate in the immigration context where officials exercise especially sensitive political functions that implicate questions of foreign relations"231 as "[a] decision by the Attorney General to deem certain violent offenses committed in another country as political in nature, and to allow the perpetrators to remain in the United States, may affect our relations with that country or its neighbors."232 As it invoked Chevron, the Court stated that the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals "should have asked whether 'the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to the specific issue before it; if so, 'the question for the court was whether the agency's answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute.'"233

220. Slocum, Lenity and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 575. Slocum believes, then, regarding Steps One and Two, that "the Chevron decision left open the question of how canons fit into the Step Two review," Id. at 576.

221. For a summary of the Chevron steps, see Rubenstein, supra note 149, at 482-83, 504-519.

222. Id. at 482.

223. Slocum, Lenity and Chevron Deference, supra note 136, at 535-39. Some have averred that Chevron's conclusions follow logically from the form of government from which it derives, which involves broad congressional delegation of lawmaking authority to agencies (explicitly or implicitly), the separation of powers principle, and the political accountability of agencies that puts them in a better position than the judiciary to make policy. Slocum concludes that the rationale is most likely that the doctrine reflects congressional intent, not the Constitution. Id. at 567. Unfortunately, a thorough discussion of this question is beyond the scope of this Article.

224. See id. at 535-39 (explaining that "[t]he Chevron opinion itself did not argue that deference was constitutionally compelled").

225. See infra notes 224-226 and accompanying text.


227. See id. at 448. The federal circuit courts of appeals, as well as scholars, have dealt with this issue. In Olorio v. INS, 18 F.3d 1017, 1022 (4th Cir. 1994), for example, overturning the BIA's denial of a Guatemalan union leader's asylum claim, the court held that it need not accept an "unreasonable interpretation of the BIA." The scholarship concerning Chevron is voluminous. See, e.g., Case R. Sutin, Law and Administration After Chevron, 90 Colum. L. Rev. 2071, 2085 n.69 (1990) (citing Court rejection of agency interpretations that "will not prevail when they conflict with statutory norms"); Cynthia R. Farina, Statutory Interpretation and the Balance of Power in the Administrative State, 89 Colum. L. Rev. 452, 476-78 (1989) (disagreeing with notion that courts must defer to an agency's statutory interpretation); Case R. Sutin, Interpreting Statutes in the Regulatory State, 103 Harv. L. Rev. 405, 444-46 (1990) (expressing the need for judicial interpretation of statutory ambiguities).

228. INS v. Aguirre-Aguirre, 526 U.S. 415, 425 (1999) (stating that the BIA should be accorded Chevron deference as it gives ambiguous statutory terms "concrete meaning through a process of case-by-case adjudication") (quoting Cardoza-Fonseca, 480 U.S. at 447-48).

229. Id. at 418 (quoting 8 U.S.C. § 1252(b)(2)(C).

230. Id. at 418-19.

231. Id. at 425 (quoting INS v. Abu-Shumays, 465 U.S. 94, 110 (1986)).

232. Id.

Court seemed convinced to defer because of the power given the
Attorney General to determine statutory entitlement to relief.234

The distinctions between the situation in Aguayo-Aguirre and
the one in question here are multiple. First, Aguayo-Aguirre involved
a criminal deportee, not one affirmatively applying for protection
from torture.235 Second, CAT is an international agreement, to
which the United States has been committed since 1984,236 and is
not truly one that concerns immigration, but rather it concerns not
refouling potential torture victims. While I have been unable to establish why
CAT regulations were placed under the purview of the BIA, an
informant can be made that, to the drafters, it was the obvious
placement for them given that applications for torture protection
would likely arise in the context of asylum applications in
deportation hearings.237 However, that determination does not
insure that the agency tasked with the delicate administration of
CAT regulations appreciates either the humanitarian concerns or
larger context of the international drafting negotiations that took
place over a number of years.238

Next, a view of more recent Supreme Court cases determining
the effect of agency interpretation hints that the Court may now be
less influenced by Chevron than in the past. In 2005, for example, in
Clark v. Martinez, the Court rejected an agency interpretation of
a section of the immigration statute without even mentioning
Chevron.239 Another encouraging note from that case is that it was
Justice Scalia’s majority opinion which concluded that the plain
meaning of the indefinite detention statute required identical
applications for lawful permanent residents and the undocumented.240 More importantly, the opinion cited two cases that

Thompson/Center Arms Co.241 Finally, several courts of appeal have
recently questioned the application of Chevron in the immigration
context.242

Nor does a recent Supreme Court decision weaken the argument
for enhanced use of Immigration Lenity. That case, Holder v.
Martinez Gutierrez,243 upheld a BIA ruling on a statutory
immigration issue244 as the Court abrogated the Ninth Circuit cases
of Caezares-Gaspar v. Gonzales245 and Mercado-Espinosa v. Holder.246
There, the Court held that the BIA’s refusal to impute a parent’s
years of continuous presence in the United States to their child
in order to establish eligibility for cancellation of removal was based on
a “permissible construction of the statute.”247 According to the Court,
the BIA “could reasonably conclude that an alien living in this
country as a child must meet” the residency requirements for a
specific period of time on his/her own.248 The Board’s “position
prevails” according to the Court, “if it is a reasonable construction of
the statute, whether or not it is the only possible interpretation or
even the one a court might think best.”249 The Court opined that the
BIA’s view was “consistent with the statute’s text”,250 despite the
“statute’s objectives of providing relief to aliens with strong ties to
the United States and ‘promoting family unity’”,251 the Court did not
believe its purposes demanded imputation in this instance.252 Nor
was the Court convinced that the BIA acted improperly in refusing
imputation in this case while accepting it in others.253

Martinez Gutierrez is irrelevant to the suggestion made in this

---

235. 526 U.S. at 423-23.
236. Inspection and Expedited Removal of Aliens, 65 Fed. Reg. 10,512, 10,516 (Mar. 6, 1997) (indicating that the INS has considered applications since Nov. 1994, the
effective date of Article 3, thus prior to finalisation of regulations).
237. I was able to locate the FARRA section concerning CAT stating: “(b) REGULATIONS.— Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act,
[Oct. 21, 1998], the heads of the appropriate agencies shall prescribe regulations to
implement the obligations of the United States under (CAT) . . . FARRA, Pub. L. No.
105-277, § 2242, 112 Stat. 3631-322 (1998)). I was unable to locate any legislative
history or other information concerning discussions as to which executive agency
should decide CAT cases.
238. See BRUCKNER & DANELIS, supra note 15, ch. 2 (describing the lengthy process,
beginning in 1977 and running through 1984, of meetings, negotiations, preparations,
drafting, redrafting, and finalizing that culminated in the convention).
240. Id. (describing that the indefinite detention sub-section must be applied in the
same manner for both LPRs and the undocumented).
241. Id. at 560-81 (citing Leocal v. Ashcroft, 543 U.S. 1, 11-13, n.8 (2004); United
242. For example, see Perdomo-Padilla v. Ashcroft, 333 F.3d 964, 987 (9th Cir.
2003), in which the government argued for Chevron deference. The court ruled against
deference where the question concerned a nationality determination as “issues of law
pertaining to nationality are for the court.” Id.; see also Hughes v. Ashcroft, 256 F.3d 752, 757-58 (8th Cir. 2001) (finding that nationality claims are not entitled to
deference).
244. Id. at 2021.
245. 430 F.3d 1013 (9th Cir. 2005).
246. 580 F.3d 1102 (9th Cir. 2009).
248. Id. at 2014.
U.S. 837, 845-44 & n.11 (1984)).
250. Id. (discussing 8 U.S.C. § 1229a(a) (1998)).
251. Id. at 2018. This case does not raise Immigration Lenity issues, as the decision
is based on examination of the statutory language itself. Id.
252. Id. at 2019-21.
253. Id.
Article. In *Martinez-Gutierrez*, a specific immigration-related regulation was at stake, not a law with international implications. A child was asking for a benefit to be bestowed that Congress had not granted. Here, noncitizens are seeking application of the universally accepted definition of torture. The fact that Congress placed CAT regulations within the BIA's purview is not an excuse for the federal courts, or even Congress, if it realizes its error, to deny its evident intent where the BIA seems unable, or unwilling, to enforce that intent. Congress apparently erred in creating these regulations, either by placing the power to determine the meaning of torture with the BIA or by not realizing that "what torture meant" would be an issue in the first place. Short of Congress acting, the federal courts should use their oversight powers to correct the BIA's errors.

In addition to the above indicators that *Chevron* may be weakening and must not pose a significant barrier to Immigration Lien, two recent Supreme Court cases that, while not immigration-related, imply that "cracks" may be emerging in the *Chevron* jurisprudence in the same way they have been identified with regard to the plenary power. The first concerned an importer challenging a tariff classification ruling by the U.S. Customs Service; the Court held that the classification was not entitled to *Chevron* deference, as there was "no indication that Congress intended such a ruling to carry the force of law." The second case found that, where the Clean Air Act authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate greenhouse gases yet the EPA refused to rule on whether these gases "cause or contribute to climate change[,] [i]t action[s were]... arbitrary, capricious, or otherwise not in accordance with law." The

---

254. Id. at 2014 (discussing 8 U.S.C. § 1229b(a)).
255. Id. at 2016.
257. Johnson, supra note 70, at 29-32.
258. See LEMOYNE & RODRIGUEZ, supra note 70, at 181-205.
260. Id. The Court stated that a Skidmore claim may be raised "where the regulatory scheme is highly detailed, and Customs can bring the benefit of specialized experience to bear on the subtle questions... . A classification ruling in this situation may therefore at least seek a respect proportional to its power to persuade." Id. at 235.
262. Id. at 527.
263. Id. at 535.
264. See discussion infra Section IV.E.
265. Elliott Greenfield, *A Lien Exception to Chevron Deference*, 58 BAYLOR L. REV. 1, 3 (2006) (supporting the view that the *Chevron* doctrine has been limited).
266. Professor Rubenstein conducted an exhaustive survey of the various federal circuit's treatment of the juxtaposition of immunity and *Chevron*:

---

EPA's broad discretion in deciding whether to bring enforcement actions mandated, said the Court, that it "must ground its reasons for action or inaction in the statute." In a manner akin to that which is developing with the plenary power, this line of cases suggests the Court's willingness to scrutinize claims of agency deference to determine accurately the extent to which it is warranted. These cases should give pause to routine deference to the BIA, as the reasonableness of its rulings have been questioned implicitly by the Supreme Court and explicitly by many well-regarded immigration practitioners and scholars, and as the humanitarian issue at stake is so weighty.

3. The Scholarly Critique of *Chevron*

Recently, Professor Kevin Johnson has enhanced our perspective on the inherent contradictions involved in imposing a *Chevron* analysis onto immigration jurisprudence. His concerns, while expressed about immigration law in general, are particularly apt when considering the issue of torture under consideration here. Professor Johnson points out that the Supreme Court's basis for *Chevron* was warranted because the executive branch, through election of the President, is politically accountable to the voters, and decisions

---

Rubenstein, supra note 145, at 502-04 & n.130-39 (internal citations omitted).
267. Johnson, supra note 70, at 42.
properly delegated to agencies are necessarily political and should be deferred to by the courts. The administration of the immigration laws thus poses a fundamental problem for the democratic rationale for deference: if we entrust agencies with making and enforcing the laws because of their political accountability, what should we do if a specific agency is only accountable to part of the group of people affected, directly or indirectly, by its decisions?268

In illuminating the contradiction where both undocumented and lawful immigrants are barred from formal political input through voting while they are also the ones "deeply affected, and often injured, by decisions of the bureaucracy,"269 he questions whether the Supreme Court is justified in deferring "to agency decisions based on the political accountability of the President."270

Lory Rosenberg, a noted immigration scholar and former member of the Board of Immigration Appeals, contextualized the strength of Immigration Leniency via-a-via Chevron deference in her concurring opinion in the case of In re Crammond, when she noted:

This approach to interpreting deportation statutes [regarding leniency] has not been altered by the Supreme Court’s intervening decisions in Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., and its progeny. For example, in interpreting the definitional term “refugee,” the Supreme Court considered both the statutory language and the relevant legislative history and concluded that “[w]e find these ordinary canons of statutory construction compelling, even without regard to the longstanding principle of construing any lingering ambiguities in deportation statutes in favor of the alien.” Thus, in interpreting a definition section of the statute, the Court found not only that the statutory language and legislative history adequately reflected congressional intent, but acknowledged the narrow construction principle. . . .

We have recognized and applied this rule with approval in over 30 precedent decisions issued since 1949.271

Perhaps Professor Holper summarized it best:

Chevron deference is only appropriate when courts are considering a statutory scheme that the agency is entrusted to administer... [Courts may interpret terms that, while they appear in an agency’s statute, do not require specialized knowledge to interpret. . . .]

In the immigration law context, several courts have held that the BIA receives Chevron deference when it is interpreting the INA, but not when it is interpreting state or federal criminal laws.

268. Johnsen, supra note 70, at 20.
269. Id.
270. Id. at 21 (recommending greater judicial review in these circumstances).

The BIA routinely interprets criminal statutes because there are myriad grounds for removal that are based upon a criminal conviction... Courts have held that when the BIA is engaged in this sort of examination of the elements of a criminal statute, the agency does not deserve any deference because courts can and often do interpret the elements of a criminal statute.

In the CAT context, the BIA is interpreting specific intent, a criminal law concept, not an immigration law term such as "refugee." Specific intent is not an obscure regulatory concept in which courts have no expertise; as stated by the Third Circuit, [the specific intent standard is a term of art that is well-known in American jurisprudence. For this reason, courts do not necessarily owe deference to the BIA's interpretation of this criminal law term.272

4. Reconciling Chevron and Immigration Leniency with CAT

Commentators disagree over the effects of Chevron on Immigration Leniency, which is generally considered to be based not on constitutional principles, as is its sister principle in criminal law,273 but rather on principles of fairness274 and canons of statutory construction.275 Recent Court pronouncements on related issues imply that, notwithstanding the Court's failure thus far to rule on this issue,276 it does favor a vibrant application of Immigration Leniency.

Short of a Supreme Court ruling, the approach of the Second Circuit's 1994 decision on Immigration Leniency is instructive. In Aii v. Reno,277 the court acknowledged that courts "acord substantial deference to an agency's construction of regulations promulgated pursuant to a statutory scheme entrusted to the agency's administration."278 However, it nonetheless employed a broad use of leniency even though it did not mention the term, as it noted that "[l]ingerin ambiguities in a statute concerning the forfeiture of residence in this country should be resolved in favor of the alien."279

272. Holper, supra note 17, at 824-26 (footnotes omitted) (internal quotation marks omitted).
274. See, e.g., Pong Hew Tan v. Phelan, 333 U.S. 6, 10 (1948) (citing the drastic consequences of deportation as a reason to support leniency).
275. Slocum, Plenary Power Doctrine, supra note 177; Greenfield, supra note 265, at 38-62 (suggesting how the conflict between Chevron and leniency may be resolved); Slocum, Leniency and Chevron: Deference, supra note 136, at 552-55.
277. 22 F.3d 442, 455 (2d Cir. 1994) (challenging termination of LPR status within five years after gaining that status).
279. Id. (citing, among others, INS v. Cardoza-Fonseca, 480 U.S. 421, 448 (1987)).
that the Court in Cardoza-Fonseca "realigned judicial review with the traditional approach," contemplating independent review by courts of declarations of law and deferential review by agencies of applications of law. 293

Professor Slocum is correct to the extent he posits that Chevron does not warrant more BIA deference than it already enjoys. The courts should decide, particularly in cases as consequential as torture claims, 290 that the definition of torture is a question of law, not simply a "deferential review of law-application." Whereas Cardoza-Fonseca notes that several federal courts recognize the continuing relevance of Immigration Law while not explicitly accounting for it within the Chevron framework, 291 he suggests that the proper distinction is whether "the issue is a pure question of law that does not implicate agency expertise," 292 in which case, presumably, deference to agency action should yield to Immigration Law. 293

Slocum's suggestion of limited Chevron deference to the BIA when pure questions of law arise advances the argument that the BIA should not be empowered to interpret the meaning of torture, for this issue, based in principles of international law and treaty, is both a question of law and beyond the purview and expertise of the BIA. 294

view in Cardoza-Fonseca was as follows:

In Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., we explained: "The judiciary is the final authority on issues of statutory construction and must reject administrative constructions which are contrary to clear congressional intent. If a court, employing traditional tools of statutory construction, ascertain that Congress had an intention on the precise question at issue, that intention is the law and must be given effect." Cardoza-Fonseca, 480 U.S. at 446-48 (internal citations omitted) (quoting Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 845, n.9 (1984)). 287


290. Recall the quote from Cardoza-Fonseca that "[d]eportation is always a harsh measure," here, where torture is at stake, that is even more true. 480 U.S. at 449. 289


292. Id. at 533 & nn.131-32. Slocum aver that "there is a conflict between the immigration rule of lenity and Chevron deference, as well as between Chevron and other substantive canons, that the Court has resolved the conflict with respect to some substantive canons by displacing Chevron when clear statutory rules are applicable." Id. at 559-60.

293. Id. at nn.131-32.

294. Professor Slocum agrees, emphasizing use of lenity in those cases: It is unpersuasive . . . to assume that Congress intends to delegate authority to agencies to make legal interpretations that do not hinge on their expertise. In cases involving pure questions of law that do not implicate agency expertise, the argument for Chevron deference is weak, thus the immigration rule of lenity should apply with full force . . . . [C]ourts in immigration cases have, consistent with this approach, resisted deferring to agency interpretations when the issue is a purely legal one that does not implicate the agency's expertise. . . . [I]f the statute is ambiguous, the agency's interpretation should be entitled to little . . . weight, while the

285. See Rubenstein, supra note 148, at e.203-06.

286. Professor Slocum opines "that the immigration rule of lenity should be a factor considered by courts in determining whether the Attorney General's interpretation is reasonable," as "judicial consideration of canons is consistent with democratic theory and the Chevron doctrine and . . . canons should be considered by courts when reviewing agency interpretations." 288 While recognizing "[t]he confusion among the circuits" 287 over this issue, beginning with Cardoza-Fonseca, in which the Court declared that a "pure question of statutory construction [was] for the courts to decide," 288 he posits

287. 8 C.F.R. 208.16(b)(2). In addition, in contrast to asylum, CAT applicants must prove that the torture will be at the hands of the government. Id. at 208.16(b)(1).

288. See Slocum, "Asylum and Chevron Deference," supra note 136, at 539. For this reason, some commentators, including Professor Brian Slocum, suggest that Immigration Law should be considered a "traditional tool of statutory construction," preventing reviewing courts from deferring to an "agency's interpretation because the issue would be resolved at Step One" of the Chevron analysis. Id. at 542.
The BIA’s authority and expertise is in applying immigration laws, not international ones. It has little, if any, expertise in the international legal concepts operating here, and none discerning the proper definition of torture under the Convention. In fact, until In re J-E-,
the BIA had only ruled on two cases requesting CAT protection: in one, it ruled that it lacked jurisdiction to grant relief; in the second, it ruled that the applicant failed to prove fear of torture by a government official. The decision about what constitutes torture is within the purview of the judiciary and not within an agency with no expertise and little ken for the consequential international implications of its decisions. Rather than imposing Chevron deference in these cases to benefit the BIA, federal courts should impose Immigration Lenity in cases to benefit immigrants.

If, notwithstanding this discussion, federal courts insist on imposing a Chevron analysis in these cases, the BIA’s decisions still do not warrant deference. The answer to Chevron’s first question, “is the statute ambiguous?” is clearly yes; if not, the BIA and federal courts would not have produced so many diverging definitions of the meaning of torture. The answer to Chevron’s second question, “is the agency’s interpretation unreasonable?” is again yes. Given all the arguments heretofore discussed, it is clear that the BIA’s decision as to the meaning of torture is unreasonable.

E. Plenary Power and the Application of Immigration Lenity in Convention Cases

Just as Chevron deference should not be interposed in Convention cases to deny protection to deserving applicants, the immigration rule of lenity should be used as a strong factor directing the court to construe the statute in favor of the noncitizen.

Id. at 578-79 (internal citations omitted).


298. Slocum, Lenity and Chevron Defeence, supra note 126, at 570-80. This contrasts with other types of cases involving more typical immigration law issues. Slocum advances that:

Congress often leaves statutory gaps with the expectation that the Attorney General will exercise discretion in giving meaning to the undefined term ... It is in provisions providing for relief from deportation, however, that the Attorney General has especially broad discretion. Immigration law ... is uniquely discretionary and grants the Attorney General an enormous amount of latitude, including interpretive discretion to define statutory terms and delegated discretion to decide whether to grant relief if statutory eligibility has been established. In such cases, the concept of the immigration rule of lenity as a nondelegation doctrine is in significant tension with the broad discretion delegated to the Attorney General.

Id. (internal citations omitted).

299. See Schacht, supra note 70, at 56-57 n.6 (noting that “crucia’ have developed in plenary power”).

300. See id. at 55-56 (describing the historical view of the application of the Fourth Amendment in immigration hearings).


304. Rubenstein, supra note 146, at 516 (noting that the Second and Eighth Circuits agree).

305. Id. at 502. The Aguierre-Agurire ruling does not follow the statement concerning “the BIA’s interpretation of an ambiguous statute ... unfavorable to the alien." Id., see generally Aguierre-Agurire, 536 U.S. at 424 (holding that the Ninth Circuit failed to accord the BIA’s interpretation the level of deference required under Chevron).
serious nonpolitical crime exception” in the relevant INA section. But, as with other cases touching on this issue, Aguirre-Aguirre failed to resolve the relationship between the plenary power and Chevron.

The implications of Aguirre-Aguirre are more nuanced than have been suggested. First, because it is distinguishable on the key issue addressed in this Article, the definition of torture, Aguirre-Aguirre does not control resolution of the issue. The phrase “specific intent,” from which the controversy over the meaning of torture derives, is not found in the INA, a statute the BIA interprets daily, but rather in a statute of international significance deriving from a United Nations international human rights instrument. The definition of torture involves interpretation of a phrase in a statute involving multi-lateral cooperation and mutual foreign commitments through the Convention, not a simple construction of an INA phrase. Finally, that the Convention regulations were placed under the same title of the Code of Federal Regulations as INA regulations belies the suggestion that the BIA’s opinions are entitled to deference, given that the justification for agency deference cited in Chevron—expertise of the agency—is nonexistent here.

Over-reliance on the plenary power in the immigration context has been critiqued artfully by Professor Johnson, who points out that agencies, which are not directly accountable to those primarily affected by their decisions, have limited incentive “to act professionally with the appearance of fairness. In immigration law, the courts defer to the immigration bureaucracy generally without any significant check on the harsh treatment of immigrants. This might help to explain, at least in part, the persistent charges of arbitrary and inept BIA decisionmaking.”

Professor Johnson suggests that this lack of political accountability makes an end run around the notion that there should be “Chevron-style deference to administrative agencies in immigration matters... Rather,” he suggests, we need “more scrutinizing judicial review of immigration decisions... to ensure compliance with the law and the efficient administration of the immigration bureaucracy.” He aptly locates the irony of an immigration court’s deference, pointing out that, “[d]espite the problems in the immigration bureaucracy, deference to immigration decisions of administrative agencies traditionally has been greater than that afforded other agencies.”

Johnson agrees that piling Chevron principles on top of the plenary power has only exacerbated the problems of unfettered immigration agency discretion, which is patent in the deference granted to the BIA in determining the definition of torture in the Convention Against Torture. “Chevron deference is incompatible with the plenary power doctrine to create an especially potent form of deference to Congress and the executive branch on immigration matters.” He offers a constructive suggestion to this problem: “eliminat[ing] Chevron-style deference to the decisions of the immigration bureaucracy. Meaningful judicial review would encourage the immigration agencies to take greater care in immigration matters and to comply with the law.”

The commentators agree, then, about the place of Immigration Lenity in a Chevron analysis: the rigid and narrow interpretation of “torture” for purposes of CAT must yield to a more liberal interpretation of the concept. Under Rubenstein’s theory, a finding under Step One of statutory ambiguity would lead to the Step Two analysis, to decide whether the BIA’s interpretation was reasonable. As the legislative history indicates that the BIA’s interpretation of the specific intent requirement for torture is unreasonable, the rule of Immigration Lenity would serve to give

2013] UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE 53

Professor Johnson suggests that this lack of political accountability makes an end run around the notion that there should be “Chevron-style deference to administrative agencies in immigration matters... Rather,” he suggests, we need “more scrutinizing judicial review of immigration decisions... to ensure compliance with the law and the efficient administration of the immigration bureaucracy.” He aptly locates the irony of an immigration court’s deference, pointing out that, “[d]espite the problems in the immigration bureaucracy, deference to immigration decisions of administrative agencies traditionally has been greater than that afforded other agencies.”

Johnson agrees that piling Chevron principles on top of the plenary power has only exacerbated the problems of unfettered immigration agency discretion, which is patent in the deference granted to the BIA in determining the definition of torture in the Convention Against Torture. “Chevron deference is incompatible with the plenary power doctrine to create an especially potent form of deference to Congress and the executive branch on immigration matters.” He offers a constructive suggestion to this problem: “eliminat[ing] Chevron-style deference to the decisions of the immigration bureaucracy. Meaningful judicial review would encourage the immigration agencies to take greater care in immigration matters and to comply with the law.”

The commentators agree, then, about the place of Immigration Lenity in a Chevron analysis: the rigid and narrow interpretation of “torture” for purposes of CAT must yield to a more liberal interpretation of the concept. Under Rubenstein’s theory, a finding under Step One of statutory ambiguity would lead to the Step Two analysis, to decide whether the BIA’s interpretation was reasonable. As the legislative history indicates that the BIA’s interpretation of the specific intent requirement for torture is unreasonable, the rule of Immigration Lenity would serve to give

2013] UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE 53

Professor Johnson suggests that this lack of political accountability makes an end run around the notion that there should be “Chevron-style deference to administrative agencies in immigration matters... Rather,” he suggests, we need “more scrutinizing judicial review of immigration decisions... to ensure compliance with the law and the efficient administration of the immigration bureaucracy.” He aptly locates the irony of an immigration court’s deference, pointing out that, “[d]espite the problems in the immigration bureaucracy, deference to immigration decisions of administrative agencies traditionally has been greater than that afforded other agencies.”

Johnson agrees that piling Chevron principles on top of the plenary power has only exacerbated the problems of unfettered immigration agency discretion, which is patent in the deference granted to the BIA in determining the definition of torture in the Convention Against Torture. “Chevron deference is incompatible with the plenary power doctrine to create an especially potent form of deference to Congress and the executive branch on immigration matters.” He offers a constructive suggestion to this problem: “eliminat[ing] Chevron-style deference to the decisions of the immigration bureaucracy. Meaningful judicial review would encourage the immigration agencies to take greater care in immigration matters and to comply with the law.”

The commentators agree, then, about the place of Immigration Lenity in a Chevron analysis: the rigid and narrow interpretation of “torture” for purposes of CAT must yield to a more liberal interpretation of the concept. Under Rubenstein’s theory, a finding under Step One of statutory ambiguity would lead to the Step Two analysis, to decide whether the BIA’s interpretation was reasonable. As the legislative history indicates that the BIA’s interpretation of the specific intent requirement for torture is unreasonable, the rule of Immigration Lenity would serve to give

2013] UN-TORTURING THE DEFINITION OF TORTURE 53

Professor Johnson suggests that this lack of political accountability makes an end run around the notion that there should be “Chevron-style deference to administrative agencies in immigration matters... Rather,” he suggests, we need “more scrutinizing judicial review of immigration decisions... to ensure compliance with the law and the efficient administration of the immigration bureaucracy.” He aptly locates the irony of an immigration court’s deference, pointing out that, “[d]espite the problems in the immigration bureaucracy, deference to immigration decisions of administrative agencies traditionally has been greater than that afforded other agencies.”

Johnson agrees that piling Chevron principles on top of the plenary power has only exacerbated the problems of unfettered immigration agency discretion, which is patent in the deference granted to the BIA in determining the definition of torture in the Convention Against Torture. “Chevron deference is incompatible with the plenary power doctrine to create an especially potent form of deference to Congress and the executive branch on immigration matters.” He offers a constructive suggestion to this problem: “eliminat[ing] Chevron-style deference to the decisions of the immigration bureaucracy. Meaningful judicial review would encourage the immigration agencies to take greater care in immigration matters and to comply with the law.”

The commentators agree, then, about the place of Immigration Lenity in a Chevron analysis: the rigid and narrow interpretation of “torture” for purposes of CAT must yield to a more liberal interpretation of the concept. Under Rubenstein’s theory, a finding under Step One of statutory ambiguity would lead to the Step Two analysis, to decide whether the BIA’s interpretation was reasonable. As the legislative history indicates that the BIA’s interpretation of the specific intent requirement for torture is unreasonable, the rule of Immigration Lenity would serve to give
the applicant the benefit of the doubt in proving the likelihood that he or she would be tortured if refouled.

CONCLUSION

By invoking the principle of Immigration Lenity in cases in which the BIA continues to misunderstand the meaning of “specific intent,” U.S. federal courts can help achieve the humanitarian aims of the Convention Against Torture: eradication of torture and promotion of human rights. Immigration Lenity is particularly warranted here, where it will prevent the return of potential torture victims to countries where they are likely to be tortured. In addition, it will sustain the intended meaning of the phrase “specific intent,” that pain and suffering resulting from torture needs to be anticipated or intended, not inadvertent or accidental.322 Given the stakes in these cases, principles supporting Immigration Lenity should enter prominently in any conflicts with the principles of deference imposed by either Chevron or the plenary power.

Only a totally cynical view of the political branches of government could justify signing this treaty while intending that a significant part of it, the non-refoulement principle, would offer virtually no protection to potential torture victims. Not only would this be contrary to the goals of the treaty, but it would also be contrary to the expressed purpose in enacting the Convention Against Torture.

322. CAT, supra note 1, pmbl.