

National Debate Topic 2018–19: Immigration: Resolved: The United States Federal Government Should Substantially Reduce Its Restrictions on Legal Immigration to the United States.

"National Debate Topic 2018–19: Immigration: Resolved: The United States Federal Government Should Substantially Reduce Its Restrictions on Legal Immigration to the United States." Issues & Controversies, Infobase, 13 July 2018, <https://icof.infobaselearning.com/recordurl.aspx?ID=17888>. Accessed 6 Aug. 2020.

Introduction

SUPPORTERS ARGUE

Immigrants benefit the U.S. economy and enrich American life. The United States has a moral responsibility to accept newcomers from all over the world and to reject bigoted proposals to reduce legal **immigration**.

OPPONENTS ARGUE

Outsized **immigration** levels have driven down wages for American workers, drained government resources, and posed national security risks. The government should impose more restrictions, not fewer, on who can come to the United States.



An immigrant from Mexico waves an American flag before a naturalization ceremony in San Diego, California.

John Gastaldo/ZUMA Press/Newscom

Approximately 43 million people living in the United States, or about 13 percent of the population, were born abroad. Though some of these individuals are undocumented immigrants—people living in the United States without official authorization—the vast majority are living in the country legally. Indeed, every year, hundreds of thousands of people legally come to the United States to live and work. Most commonly, immigrants receive permission from the U.S. government to enter the country by obtaining temporary student or work visas—lawful permanent residence status documents known as green cards—or refugee or asylum status. **Immigration** has been a major force of change and growth in the United States since its founding, and many agree that the country could not have become the diverse, developed, vibrant nation it is without the millions of immigrants who entered the country over the past two centuries seeking political freedom and economic opportunity.

Upon settling in the United States, however, many of those same immigrants faced religious discrimination, bigotry, and resentment from native-born Americans who questioned their right to be there. Nativism—the idea that the interests of people born in a country should take precedence over immigrants—has been a fervent force in American politics since at least the mid-19th century. Throughout U.S. history, nativists have often expressed fear that immigrants would fail to assimilate, meaning that they would not sufficiently adopt the language, customs, and values of Americans. Nearly every immigrant group—from the millions of Irish who came to the United States during the mid-1800s, to the eastern and southern European Jews, Catholics, and others who came around the turn of the 20th century, to the Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans who began immigrating in greater numbers in the mid- to late 20th century—has faced accusations of diluting or threatening to overtake American culture and society.

In addition to cultural fears surrounding assimilation, anxieties about the impact immigrants have on the U.S. economy have also shaped debates over **immigration**. The first few waves of **immigration** in the 19th and early 20th centuries came when manufacturing in the United States was booming, and many immigrants filled the unskilled, low-wage jobs that helped fuel that economic development. "The United States 100 years ago was a nation undergoing rapid industrial and urban growth," historian Joshua Zeitz wrote in *Politico* in August 2017. "It needed a surfeit of hard-working people who could operate a sewing machine, mine coal, produce rubber and steel, dig ditches and build cars—and cheaply." Even at that time, however, native-born workers often protested the use of immigrant labor and worried that the prevalence of newcomers willing to work for low pay would suppress wages. Similar concerns have surfaced in recent decades, as free trade deals have thrust U.S. manufacturing industries into stiff competition with industries abroad.

Despite these anxieties, however, many celebrate **immigration**. They argue that immigrants have consistently helped drive economic growth, and that, rather than diluting some imagined uniform American culture, immigrants have enriched an American society that is diverse, multifaceted, and constantly evolving. Supporters of **immigration** often cite "The New Colossus," a poem written by Emma Lazarus in 1883 and later inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty near Ellis Island in New York Harbor, where many immigrants entered the United States. The poem reads:

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*

*Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

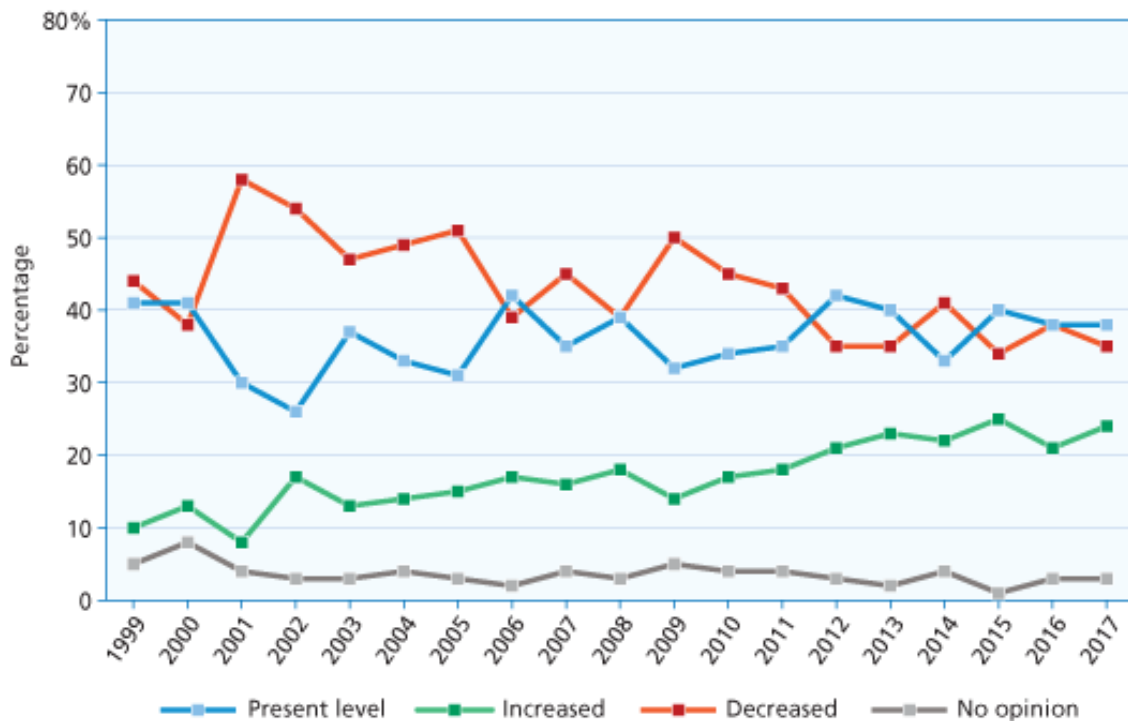
This magnanimity of spirit, many believe, has elevated the United States as a moral leader abroad, while improving the quality, depth, and variety of American life.

U.S. **immigration** law currently allows the government to admit 675,000 permanent immigrants annually. When deciding whom to grant permission to live and work in the United States, federal authorities give priority to several characteristics. "**Immigration** to the United States is based upon the following principles," a fact sheet compiled by the American **Immigration** Council, an immigrant advocacy group, explains: "the reunification of families, admitting immigrants with skills that are valuable to the U.S. economy, protecting refugees, and promoting diversity."

An opinion poll conducted by Gallup in 2017 found that 71 percent of Americans view **immigration** as a "good thing" for the United States. Yet many conservatives, including President Donald Trump (R), who took office in January 2017, have argued that the United States is admitting too many low-skilled immigrants from poor countries who take jobs away from American workers while contributing too little to economic innovation. President Trump has also denounced what he refers to as "chain migration"—the preference given by **immigration** authorities to the close relatives of people already living in the United States—and he has moved to completely block **immigration** from several countries he claims pose national security risks.

U.S. Public Opinion on Immigration

In your view, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?



Source: Gallup

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Dale Willia

Much of the debate over **immigration** in recent decades has revolved around the issue of illegal **immigration**, but President Trump's proposals have redirected significant attention to legal **immigration** policies. "This administration has ushered in what's pretty new in our political sphere, which is heavy skepticism of legal **immigration**," Julia Gelatt, a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, an **immigration** research group, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in January 2018. "Over past decades we've had big debates over illegal **immigration**, but there's been a reasonable bipartisan consensus that legal **immigration** is part of our national heritage and good for the country." Under President Trump, however, Congress has considered **immigration** reform proposals that would nearly halve the number of legal immigrants the country admits annually. Others argue that the United States should admit even more immigrants, who, they maintain, provide a net benefit to the U.S. economy and the country as a whole.

Should the U.S. government substantially reduce its restrictions on legal **immigration** to the United States?

Supporters of increasing legal **immigration** argue that immigrants help the U.S. economy by working hard, producing services, and paying taxes. The current push to restrict **immigration**, they contend, is merely the latest incarnation of the racist, nativist backlash that has tainted **immigration** policy throughout U.S. history. Fears that immigrants hurt U.S. workers or dilute American culture are overblown, they assert, and the United States has a moral duty to welcome immigrants from all parts of the globe.

Opponents of increasing legal **immigration** argue that immigrants hurt the U.S. economy by stealing jobs and suppressing wages with their willingness to work for little pay. Congress, they contend, should restrict legal **immigration**, reduce chain migration, and prioritize highly skilled immigrants from countries that share American values. U.S. **immigration** policy should protect Americans first, they maintain, rather than risking national security and prosperity by indiscriminately admitting hundreds of thousands of people every year.

Immigration Policy in Early U.S. History

During the colonial era, British authorities imposed few restrictions on who could come to America. Most immigrants were European, particularly from England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Sweden, Holland, France, and Spain. Immigrants founded businesses, farms, and mining operations, and settled on the eastern seaboard and inland, often violently displacing Native Americans in the process. During this period, European and American slave traders forcibly transported millions of Africans to work in the colonies. **Immigration** and slavery helped fuel the colonies' growth in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Although British authorities, eager to populate the colonies and develop the nascent economy, welcomed immigrants as much-needed labor, cultural tensions arose. American statesman, printer, and entrepreneur Benjamin Franklin, for example, complained of the prevalence of Germans in the colony of Pennsylvania and criticized their customs, including what he perceived as their unwillingness to learn English. "Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English," he wrote in 1751 in *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, "become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion." Germans "are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation," Franklin wrote in a letter in 1753. "Not being used to Liberty, they know not how to make a modest use of it."

After gaining independence from Britain by fighting in the American Revolution (1775–83), the United States continued to maintain the open **immigration** policies of the colonial era. The Naturalization Act of 1790, the first **immigration** law passed by the new government, established that any "free white person" could become a U.S. citizen if he or she lived in the United States for two years, demonstrated good moral character, and took an oath to support the U.S. Constitution. The Naturalization Act of 1795 extended the residency requirement to five years, and also required potential citizens to forswear all foreign allegiances and titles.

Later that decade, as the United States approached the brink of war with France, some raised alarm about the possibility of foreign sympathizers living within the United States. In 1798, Congress passed a series of laws known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. Signed by President John Adams (Federalist, 1797–1801), the measures authorized the president to deport any foreigner he deemed "dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States," prohibited criticism of the U.S. government, and increased the residency requirement for citizenship from 5 to 14 years. Many lambasted the legislation for infringing on civil liberties, and Adams lost his bid for reelection. Thomas Jefferson (Democratic-Republican, 1801–09) became president in 1801, and Congress allowed the Alien and Sedition Acts to expire.

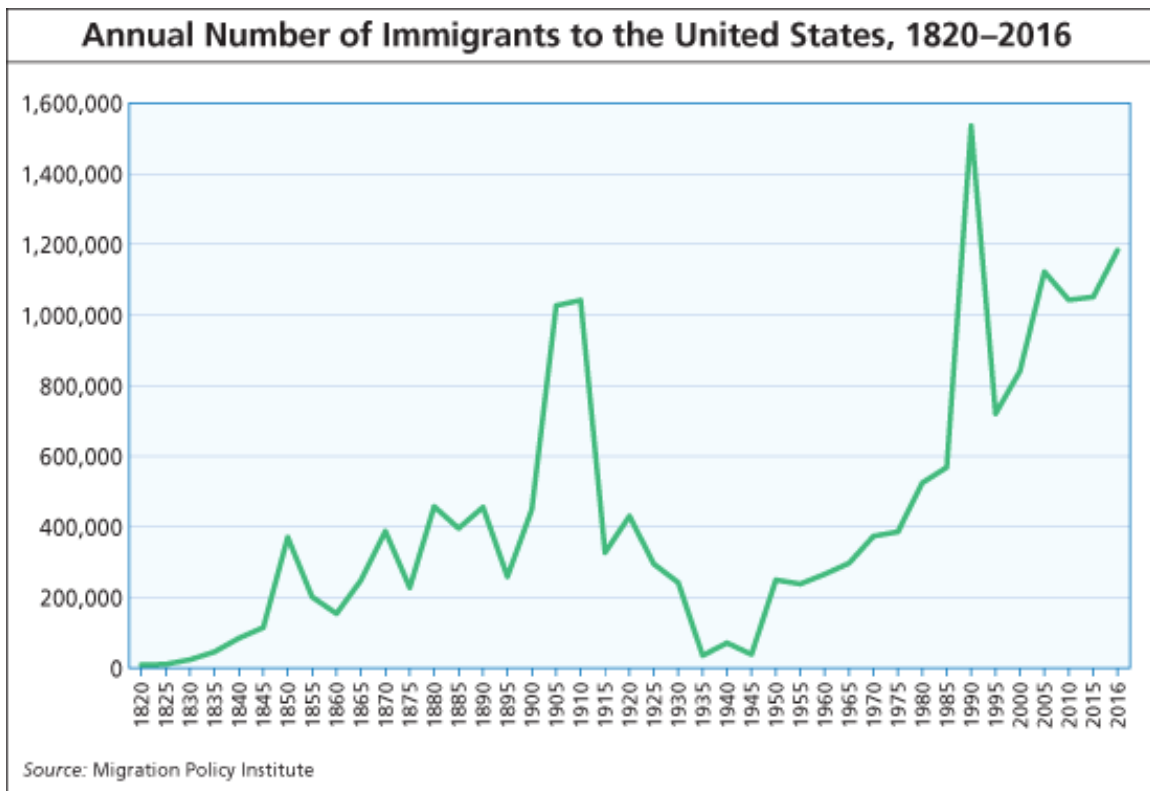
The Alien and Sedition Acts proved an exception to the generally open **immigration** policies that characterized early U.S. history. In 1841, President John Tyler (Whig, 1841–45) welcomed immigrants to the United States. "We hold out to the people of other countries an invitation to come and settle among us as members of our rapidly growing family," he said in a message to Congress, "and for the blessings which we offer them we require of them to look upon our country as their country and to unite with us in the great task of preserving our institutions and thereby perpetuating our liberties."

The 1840s saw the beginning of a large wave of **immigration** to the United States. In 1845, a blight struck potato crops in Ireland and other parts of northern Europe, leading to a widespread food shortage and prompting huge numbers of people to seek refuge in America. More than 4 million people, many of them poor, Catholic peasants from Ireland, came to the United States between 1840 and 1860. Their arrival and settlement sparked the first organized anti-immigrant political movement in American history. Protestants in the United States resented the immigrants and their Catholic beliefs, and nativist literature propagated conspiracy theories that the pope, the leader of the Catholic Church, was attempting to infiltrate the U.S. government by increasing the Catholic vote. Anti-Catholic riots broke out in Boston and Philadelphia, where many Catholics had settled.

One of the most notable anti-immigrant groups was the secretive Order of the Star Spangled Banner. Because its members were instructed to protest that they "knew nothing" if asked about the existence of the group, it became known as the Know Nothings. The Know Nothings were largely white, Protestant, and native-born, and they swore vows to fight "the insidious policy of the Church of Rome, and all other foreign influences against the institutions of our country, by placing in all offices in the gift of the people, whether by election or by appointment, none but native-born Protestant citizens."

The Know Nothings and other nativist activist groups lobbied Congress in the mid-19th century to limit **immigration**, prohibit immigrants from holding public office, and make it harder for them to become U.S. citizens. (The U.S. Constitution allows immigrants to hold any office except for the presidency and vice presidency.) These groups had little success in convincing legislators to enact such measures, however, in part because of opposition from business interests.

"Foreign **immigration** which in the past has added so much to the wealth, development of resources, and increase of power to the nation," the Republican Party platform of 1864 stated, "should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy."



The crisis of the Civil War (1861–65) temporarily sidelined **immigration** issues. After the war, Congress passed several laws designed to protect the rights of newly emancipated slaves, and in 1868, the states ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited states from denying any person "equal protection of the laws." The Fourteenth Amendment also granted citizenship to any person born in the United States. Though legislators had primarily written the amendment to ensure civil rights for former slaves, the establishment of birthright citizenship would also benefit the children of immigrants.

In the decades after the Civil War, a growing backlash to **immigration** led to the first major restrictions on who could settle in the United States. Chinese laborers had been entering the country in substantial numbers since the 1850s, often finding work in gold mines, garment factories, and railroad construction in Pacific Coast states and territories. They provided critical labor in building the first transcontinental railroad, and after its completion in 1869, many of them began seeking work in other industries. This influx of Chinese laborers into other fields added to resentment among white workers in the western United States who felt that Asian immigrants were stealing their jobs and, by accepting low pay, suppressing wages. Many nativists viewed Chinese immigrants as unable to assimilate, and, as the century wore on, they spread predictions that the "yellow peril" of Asian invaders would threaten the integrity of American society or even lead to the toppling of the U.S. government.

In 1870, Congress revised U.S. naturalization laws to allow "persons of African descent" to become citizens. Resentment against Chinese immigrants continued to simmer in the western United States for more than a decade, and in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, prohibiting almost all Chinese **immigration** to the United States for 10 years. It also barred Chinese immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens. The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first law banning any group of people from coming to the United States based on race or nationality. In 1892, Congress renewed the ban for another decade and required all Chinese already in the United States to obtain residency certificates or face deportation. Congress extended the ban again in 1902, before making it permanent in 1904. (It would be repealed in 1943.)

Historians have viewed the Chinese Exclusion Act as a turning point in U.S. **immigration** policy. "It marked the moment when the golden doorway of admission to the United States began to narrow and initiated a thirty-nine-year period of successive exclusions of certain kinds of immigrants," historian Roger Daniels wrote in his 2004 book, *Guarding the Golden Door: American **Immigration** Policy and Immigrants Since 1882*. "During those years a federal bureaucracy was created to control **immigration** and immigrants, a bureaucracy whose initial

raison d'être was to keep out first Chinese and then others who were deemed to be inferior." Congress also passed a series of laws prohibiting people who were very poor, chronically ill, or possessed with disabilities from immigrating to the United States.

Despite the encoding of racial prejudice into U.S. **immigration** law, the Constitution still offered a level of protection for immigrants and their descendants. In 1898, for example, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that the Fourteenth Amendment applied to children of immigrants. Wong, who had been born in San Francisco to Chinese parents, had left the United States in 1894 to visit China, and upon returning home to America was denied reentry. Wong sued for his right to enter, and in 1898 the Supreme Court ruled in his favor. Under the Fourteenth Amendment, the Court affirmed, anyone born in the United States was a U.S. citizen, regardless of his or her race or nationality, and enjoyed the full constitutional rights that came with citizenship.

Wave of **Immigration** from Eastern and Southern Europe Prompts National Quota Laws

Another wave of **immigration** began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Unlike the wave of the mid-19th century, which had brought immigrants from Ireland and northern Europe, this wave brought many Jewish and Catholic immigrants from Russia, Poland, Italy, and other parts of eastern and southern Europe. As with the influx of Irish-Catholic immigrants in the mid-1800s, the arrival of eastern and southern Europeans stoked nativist sentiment in the United States. In 1894, for example, a group of Boston-area nativists formed the **Immigration** Restriction League, which lobbied Congress to impose limits on **immigration**.

Among other proposals, the group advocated requiring immigrants to pass a literacy test before entering the country. Manufacturing interests that depended on immigrants to fill low-skilled jobs, however, lobbied against such a condition. Congress passed a measure requiring a literacy test in 1897, but President Grover Cleveland (D, 1885–89; 1893–97) vetoed it as "un-American." Similar measures also failed to become law during the administration of President William McKinley (R, 1897–1901), even though during the 1896 presidential campaign McKinley had endorsed **immigration** laws that would "secure the United States from invasion by the debased and criminal classes of the Old World."

Though the literacy requirement initially failed, Congress did place ideological restrictions on immigrants. In 1901, Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist and descendant of Polish immigrants,

assassinated President McKinley. Two years later, Congress passed legislation prohibiting "anarchists, or persons who believe in or advocate the overthrow by force or violence of the Government of the United States," from entering the country.

Nativists, meanwhile, continued to advocate further restrictions, focusing in particular on immigrants from Japan, who had begun to settle in large numbers. Japan, however, wielded significant military power and influence in Asia, and the U.S. government was reluctant to offend the Japanese government by instituting a comprehensive ban akin to the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1907 and 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt (R, 1901–09) negotiated a series of pacts with Japanese diplomats known collectively as the Gentlemen's Agreement. Under this accord, the United States promised to allow Japanese immigrants already in the country to remain and Japan promised to withhold passports to Japanese laborers wishing to immigrate to the United States, with an exception for the relatives of Japanese immigrants already in the United States. This exception spurred many Japanese-American men to send for so-called picture brides, who were chosen by matchmakers in Japan and married by proxy before joining their husbands in the United States. As a result, the Japanese-American population in the United States continued to grow despite the Gentlemen's Agreement.



A Mexican national in Tijuana, Mexico, looks through a fence at the U.S.-Mexico border.

TOM PENNINGTON/KRT/Newscom

In 1907, Congress created the U.S. **Immigration** Commission to study the impact of **immigration** on the United States. Known as the Dillingham Commission after its chair, Senator William Dillingham (R, Vermont), it released a 41-volume report in 1911. The Dillingham Commission report differentiated between what it deemed the higher-quality "old" immigrants from northern and western Europe and the "new" immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, whom it considered genetically inferior. The report's emphasis on ethnicity and genetics reflected the growing popularity of eugenics, a pseudoscientific set of beliefs popular at the time that considered some races and ethnic groups superior to others and advocated "selective breeding" to improve the human race. The Dillingham Commission recommended revising U.S. **immigration** policy to restrict entry to people from southern and eastern Europe.

Immigration declined during World War I (1914–18), but legislators continued to debate the matter. In 1917, Congress passed the **Immigration** Act, requiring immigrants to be able to read. President Woodrow Wilson (D, 1913–21) vetoed the measure, but Congress overrode it, and the **Immigration** Act became law. The **Immigration** Act also established an "Asiatic barred zone," ranging from the Arabian Peninsula to southeast Asia, from which all **immigration** was prohibited, and lengthened the list of mental and physical deficiencies that authorities could use to deny immigrants entry.

After World War I ended in 1918, growing fears surrounding the global spread of communism and concern over rising unemployment in the United States spurred calls for further **immigration** restrictions. Using the findings of the Dillingham Commission that had urged reducing **immigration** from countries deemed less likely to produce desirable immigrants who would sufficiently assimilate into American society, Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act in 1921. This law placed hard limits for the first time on the number of immigrants allowed into the United States. The Emergency Quota Act capped the number of immigrants from a particular country at 3 percent of the population from that country already living in the United States as of the 1910 census. Because more people from northern and western Europe were already in the United States at that time, the quota system disadvantaged potential immigrants from countries like Italy and Poland. Congress tightened these quotas further with the National Origins Act of 1924. This law pushed the demographic benchmark back to the 1890 census, even further disadvantaging southern and eastern Europeans (who did not come to the United States in large numbers until after 1890), and lowered the quota to 2 percent. The National Origins Act, also known as the Quota Act, barred virtually all Asian immigrants, voiding the Gentlemen's Agreement between the United States and Japan.

Because many agricultural operations in the southern and western parts of the United States depended on immigrant workers from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, the quota systems enacted in the early 1920s exempted those born in most countries in the Western Hemisphere, with the exception of those in the Caribbean and Latin American countries still under European rule. As a result of these exemptions, immigrants from Mexico came to constitute a greater proportion of overall **immigration** to the United States. In the 1930s, however, a severe economic downturn known as the Great Depression sparked resentment against Mexican and Mexican-American workers for occupying scarce jobs and receiving government benefits. An estimated 400,000 of them—known as the *repatriados*—left the United States voluntarily, were coerced into leaving, or were deported.

Rising tensions in Europe in the late 1930s, including the growing influence of fascism and communism, sparked fears that dangerous radicals would attempt to immigrate to the United States and spread their ideologies. In 1940, Congress passed the Alien Registration Act, which criminalized activities that subverted the government, expanded the grounds on which the United States could deport aliens, and required all noncitizens to register with the government and be fingerprinted. The U.S. government used the Alien Registration Act to prosecute and imprison people propagating fascist and communist ideologies.

Suspicion of foreign infiltration increased after the outbreak of World War II (1939–45). On December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft bombed the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, prompting the United States to enter the war. By year's end, the United States had joined the Allied Powers, which included Britain and the Soviet Union, and was at war against both Japan and Nazi Germany. Worried that Japan would invade the United States from the West Coast and enlist people of Japanese ancestry to assist in its occupation, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (D, 1933–45) issued an executive order in 1942 leading to the internment of some 110,000 Japanese Americans in inland camps. The United States allied with China against Japan, and in 1943, at President Roosevelt's behest, Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act as a gesture of good faith in the U.S.-China alliance.



A monument at the Manzanar National Historic Site in Lone Pine, California, where more than 10,000 Japanese Americans were interned during World War II (1939-45).

Paul Kitagaki Jr./ZUMA Press/Newscom

More than half of the Japanese Americans interned during World War II were U.S. citizens who had committed no crime. In 1942, Fred Korematsu, a U.S. citizen born in Oakland, California, resisted internment and was arrested. With help from the American Civil Liberties Union, he challenged the constitutionality of the executive order. In 1944, however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against him in *Korematsu v. United States*, holding that courts must defer to the president's executive responsibility to protect the country during wartime.

The United States' strict **immigration** laws of the time also barred the entry of many Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany. On the eve of the war in 1939, Congress rejected a proposal to accept 20,000 German Jewish child refugees, and U.S. authorities blocked the *St. Louis*, a ship carrying hundreds of Jewish refugees, from docking in the United States. By the end of the war in 1945, an estimated 6 million Jews had been murdered in the Holocaust.

Wartime labor shortages, meanwhile, led the U.S. and Mexican governments to establish the Bracero Program in 1942, which allowed millions of Mexicans over the next two decades to temporarily immigrate to the United States as guest workers. Some Mexicans entered or remained in the United States illegally, however, and after the war, U.S. farmworkers protested the presence of undocumented immigrant laborers. In 1954, the **Immigration** and Naturalization Service (INS) implemented Operation Wetback, forcibly deporting thousands of Mexicans. ("Wetback" is a derogatory term for Mexicans who illegally cross the U.S.-Mexico border, sometimes by wading through the Rio Grande, the river that separates the two countries.) Some U.S. citizens of Mexican descent were swept up in the deportations. The Bracero Program did not formally end until 1964, by which time approximately 4.6 million Mexicans had visited the United States as guest workers.

Mid-Twentieth-Century Laws Liberalize **Immigration Policies**

As a result of the restrictions adopted by Congress in the 1920s and the impact of both the Great Depression and World War II, **immigration** had waned considerably by the mid-20th century. Over the 40 years from 1931 to 1971, only 7.3 million people immigrated to the United States, compared to 8.8 million who came in just the first decade of the 1900s. Nevertheless, debates over **immigration** policy came to occupy a central place in U.S. politics. After World War II ended, the capitalist, democratic United States competed with the communist, authoritarian Soviet Union for global influence in a decades-long conflict known as the Cold War. American leaders sought to portray the United States as a worldwide defender of freedom, self-determination, and equality, and some saw the country's restrictive **immigration** policies as contrary to this mission.

One of the most pressing **immigration**-related issues following the war was U.S. policy toward refugees. The war had devastated Europe, leaving millions of people dead and millions of others across the continent homeless. Racial bias and bigotry played a role in attitudes toward refugees. After Allied forces liberated concentration camps in territories formerly occupied by Germany, they transferred many of the Jewish survivors to "displaced persons" camps. Following complaints about the poor conditions in these camps, General George Patton, one of the nation's top military leaders, wrote in his diary that it was a mistake to "believe that the Displaced Person is a human being, which he is not, and this applies particularly to the Jews who are lower than animals." Opinion polls following the end of the war found that only 5 percent of Americans wanted the United States to admit more Europeans than it did before the war.

Nevertheless, President Harry Truman (D, 1945–53) argued that the United States had a moral responsibility to help people displaced by the war, particularly Jewish Europeans. "I urge the Congress to turn its attention to this world problem, in an effort to find ways whereby we can fulfill our responsibilities to these thousands of homeless and suffering refugees of all faiths," he said in a message to Congress in 1947. "These victims of war and oppression look hopefully to the democratic countries to help them rebuild their lives and provide for the future of their children. We must not destroy their hope. The only civilized course is to enable these people to take new roots in friendly soil."

Heeding President Truman's call, Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act in 1948, which allowed for the admission of 200,000 Europeans. Congress extended the act two years later, and in total approximately 450,000 people were admitted to the United States under this program.

Around the same time, Congress began a broader debate about **immigration** policy. In 1952, legislators passed the **Immigration** and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, after its sponsors, Senator Pat McCarran (D, Nevada) and Representative Francis Walter (D, Pennsylvania). The McCarran-Walter Act continued the national origins system for European immigrants using 1920 census data, resulting in a majority of **immigration** slots going to countries in northern and western Europe, particularly Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland. In a dramatic change in policy, however, the law lifted the ban on **immigration** from the "Asiatic barred zone" and eliminated any race-based disqualifications for naturalization, allowing Asian immigrants and Asian Americans to become U.S. citizens. The new system continued to favor relatives of people already living in the United States and highly skilled immigrants, and exempted from quota restrictions immigrants from most countries in the Western Hemisphere and the spouses and children of U.S. citizens.

The McCarran-Walter Act also granted the president significant powers over **immigration**:

Whenever the President finds that the entry of any aliens or of any class of aliens into the United States would be detrimental to the interests of the United States, he may by proclamation, and for such period as he shall deem necessary, suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or nonimmigrants, or impose on the entry of aliens any restrictions he may deem to be appropriate.

Objecting to the continuation of national origins quotas in the law, President Truman vetoed the McCarran-Walter Act. The quota system was outdated, he argued, and he insisted that the United States could expand its global influence by adopting a more liberal approach to the issue.

"Our **immigration** policy is...important to the conduct of our foreign relations," he wrote in his veto message, "and to our responsibilities of moral leadership in the struggle for world peace." Congress overrode his veto, however, and the McCarran-Walter Act became law. Later that year, Truman created a Commission on **Immigration** and Naturalization, which released a report, *Whom We Shall Welcome*, in 1953. The report recommended discarding the national origins quota system and removing any reference to race or national origin from **immigration** law. [See [President Truman Vetoes McCarran-Walter **Immigration** Bill](#) (primary source)]

Congress did not pursue these recommendations until the 1960s, when President John F. Kennedy (D, 1961–63) urged legislators to eliminate discrimination from the **immigration** system. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, and his successor, President Lyndon Johnson (D, 1963–69), took up Kennedy's mission to liberalize **immigration** policy. "A nation that was built by the immigrants of all lands can ask those who now seek admission, 'What can you do for our country?'" President Johnson said in his State of the Union address to Congress in 1964. "But we should not be asking, 'In what country were you born?'"

The politics of the Cold War also funneled momentum toward **immigration** reform. The idea "that the US was not fundamentally racist was a difficult fiction to maintain while the quota system existed," Nicole Hemmer, a professor at the University of Virginia, wrote in *Vox* in March 2018. "The combined pressures of the civil rights movement at home, which elevated the cause of racial equality, and the Cold War, which heightened the need for at least the outward appearance of equality, inspired a massive rewrite of **immigration** law."

Many legislators resisted calls for revising **immigration** policy, however, arguing that the quota system was necessary to promote assimilation and the preservation of American values. "The people of Ethiopia have the same right to come to the United States under this bill as the people from England, the people of France, the people of Germany, [and] the people of Holland," Senator Sam Ervin (D, North Carolina) remarked after a measure abolishing national origins quotas was introduced in Congress. "With all due respect to Ethiopia, I don't know of any contributions that Ethiopia has made to the making of America."

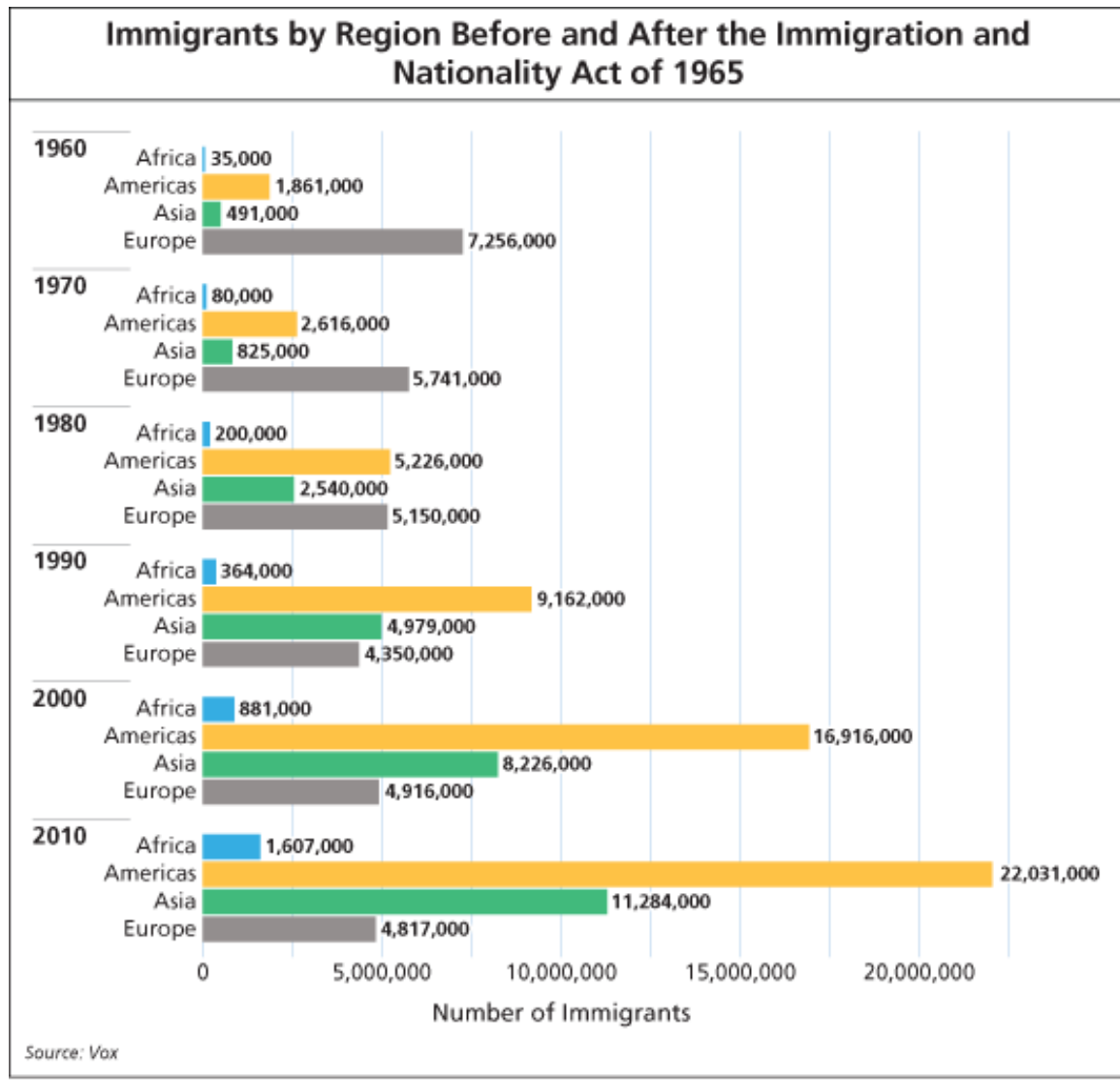


President Lyndon Johnson (D, 1963–69) signs the **Immigration** and Nationality Act in 1965 at the base of the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island, New York.

Handout/MCT/Newscom

Proponents of **immigration** reform prevailed, however, and in 1965, Congress passed the **Immigration** and Nationality Act, which transformed the U.S. **immigration** system and **immigration** trends for the next 50 years. The law prohibited discrimination against visa applicants because of their race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence and replaced the national origins quota system with numerical limits on each hemisphere. The law prioritized visas for relatives of U.S. citizens and residents and stipulated that 6 percent of visas issued annually should be given to refugees of repressive, communist regimes. Signing the bill into law, President Johnson hailed the **Immigration** and Nationality Act for eradicating "the twin barriers of prejudice and privilege" in favor of a "principle that rewards each man on the basis of his merit as a man." [See [President Lyndon Johnson Signs the **Immigration** and Nationality Act of 1965](#) (primary source)]

The **Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965** dramatically reshaped the demographics of **immigration** to the United States. In addition to the abolition of national quotas, which had favored European **immigration**, the decolonization and instability in Africa, Asia, and Latin America led to an increase of non-European, non-white immigrants to the United States. Relative prosperity in western Europe reduced **immigration** from that region, and a lack of freedom of mobility similarly prevented significant **immigration** from eastern, Soviet-controlled Europe. In the last decades of the 20th century, for the first time in U.S. history, most immigrants came from outside Europe.



Economic and Security Concerns Dominate Turn-of-the-Century **Immigration** Debates

In the years following the passage of the **Immigration** and Nationality Act, Congress began to turn its attention to the growing problem of unauthorized **immigration**. After the Bracero Program ended in 1964, many Mexicans overstayed their visas or crossed the border into the United States unlawfully. Many illegal immigrants from other countries also stayed and started families, and by the 1980s, millions of undocumented immigrants were living in the United States, many of whom had children who were, by virtue of having been born in the country, U.S. citizens.

During his presidency, Ronald Reagan (R, 1981–89) urged lawmakers to address the problem of undocumented **immigration**. In 1986, Congress passed the **Immigration** Reform and Control Act (IRCA). "Future generations of Americans will be thankful for our efforts to humanely regain control of our borders," President Reagan said, "and thereby preserve the value of one of the most sacred possessions of our people: American citizenship." The law took a two-pronged approach toward unauthorized **immigration**. To discourage such **immigration** in the future, it tightened border security, particularly along the U.S.-Mexico border, and made it a crime for U.S. businesses to knowingly hire illegal immigrants. Second, it allowed undocumented immigrants who had lived in the United States since 1982 to apply for legal status. Approximately 2.7 million undocumented immigrants gained legal status through this provision. And yet, despite the IRCA, illegal **immigration** continued to grow.

In 1990, under President George H. W. Bush (R, 1989–93), Congress revised the **Immigration** and Nationality Act of 1965. Raising the annual cap on **immigration** to 675,000 starting in 1995, the **Immigration** Act of 1990 allocated 480,000 of those visas to family-sponsored immigrants, 140,000 to immigrants who were coming to work for a U.S. employer, and 55,000 to winners of a newly established Diversity Visa Lottery. This lottery, which aimed to increase the nation's diversity by randomly selecting winners from underrepresented countries, allowed applicants who did not have a family or employer sponsor to apply to win a chance for a green card, the document allowing residence in the United States. Lottery winners still had to undergo the regular vetting process faced by all immigrants. The **Immigration** Act of 1990 also created the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program, which authorized the U.S. attorney general to allow people from countries suffering from natural disasters or war to enter the United States without fear of deportation. The TPS program has enabled people fleeing armed

conflict in El Salvador, devastating earthquakes in Haiti, civil war in South Sudan, and several other crises to temporarily stay in the United States.



A veteran of the Bracero guest worker program picks peaches at a farm in Linda, California.

Jose Luis Villegas/ZUMA Press/Newscom

Changes to the nation's **immigration** system coincided with a revolution in global trade. Since World War II, the United States and other industrialized countries have increasingly embraced free trade policies that encourage the unencumbered flow of goods and services across borders and discourage so-called protectionist policies, such as the imposition of tariffs on imports to protect domestic businesses from competition. In 1995, an agreement signed by 123 nations established the World Trade Organization, an international body that promotes free trade and settles trade disputes. A series of multilateral trade deals—including the North American Free Trade Agreement among Canada, Mexico, and the United States, which took effect in 1994, and the Central American Free Trade Agreement, among Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the United States, which took effect in 2005—

further lowered trade barriers. As a result of these deals, many companies that formerly made their products in the United States outsourced production to countries where labor was cheaper and then imported those products to sell in the United States without facing steep tariffs.

In addition to free trade deals, advances in technology, communication, and transportation have led to an increasingly globalized and interdependent world economy, as well as the automation of certain jobs. These changes, along with outsourcing, made unskilled jobs—those that do not require a college degree or otherwise specifically learned skill— increasingly scarce in the United States.

Partially as a result of these changes, unskilled immigrants in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have faced uncertain employment prospects. "Contemporary immigrants come to an increasingly de-industrialized America, where there are fewer well-paying, secure factory jobs in mass production industries of the sort that once helped propel past immigrants into the middle class," historian David Gerber wrote in his 2011 book *American Immigration*. "In contrast to the earlier century of immigration when America was a rising economic giant, the U.S. economy is being severely challenged to maintain its competitive advantage by the European Union and such emerging industrial giants as China, India, and Brazil." At the same time, some native-born Americans have grown resentful that immigrants were filling the unskilled jobs remaining in the United States.

Amid mounting economic anxiety surrounding globalization, terrorist attacks on the United States added new urgency to debates on immigration. On September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists associated with Al Qaeda, an international Islamic militant group, hijacked airplanes and targeted several locations in the United States, including the World Trade Center in New York City. The attacks left nearly 3,000 people dead.

The hijackers had entered the United States through a variety of channels, including student and tourist visas, and concern over security loopholes in the immigration system prompted a bevy of policy changes and heightened enforcement under the administration of President George W. Bush (R, 2001–09). The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detained hundreds of immigrants for questioning and temporarily required men from 25 countries—24 of which were majority-Muslim—to check in with immigration officials while in the country. The Homeland Security Act, passed in 2002, placed the INS within the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Four years later, in 2006, Congress passed the Secure Fence Act, which authorized the construction of 652 miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border.

President Barack Obama (D, 2009–17) continued to modify **immigration** policies in response to terrorist threats. In 2011, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) foiled a plan by two Iraqi refugees living in Bowling Green, Kentucky, to send weapons and money to Al Qaeda operatives in Iraq. Many expressed concern that the vetting process had failed to uncover the refugees' militant ties, and President Obama ordered a reexamination of 57,000 Iraqis who had recently entered the United States.

In 2013, the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an even more militant offshoot of Al Qaeda, prompted additional national security concerns. In December 2015, Tashfeen Malik, a Pakistani immigrant radicalized by ISIS, killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California, with the help of her husband, a U.S.-born citizen. Later that month, Congress passed the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act. The law modified the Visa Waiver Program, which allows people from certain countries, mostly in Europe, to temporarily visit the United States without obtaining a visa. In addition, the law required anyone from Iran, Iraq, Sudan, or Syria—even if they held dual citizenship with a country, such as England, that was in the Visa Waiver Program—to go through the visa application process if they wanted to visit the United States. The changes also required anyone who had recently visited those countries to obtain a visa. The following year, the DHS added Libya, Somalia, and Yemen to the list.

Despite such efforts to regulate legal **immigration**, illegal **immigration** dominated the **immigration** debate during the Obama administration. **Immigration** authorities deported more than 2.5 million people under Obama, but the president also sought protections for otherwise law-abiding undocumented immigrants who had set down roots in the United States. In particular, President Obama urged Congress to pass legislation protecting from deportation immigrants who had been brought to the country illegally as children. The bill passed the House but faltered in the face of opposition from Senate Republicans who argued that granting "amnesty" would encourage more illegal **immigration**.

Frustrated by congressional inaction, President Obama used executive authority in 2012 to establish the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allowed undocumented immigrants who met certain requirements to apply for two-year work permits and protection from deportation. DACA recipients had to be under the age of 31, have come to the United States before the age of 16, have resided in the United States continuously since 2007, be in school or have graduated from high school, and have no significant criminal record. Republicans protested that the program exceeded the boundaries of the president's executive

authority. Their criticism grew louder when, in summer 2014, thousands of children from violence-ridden Central American countries arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border, overwhelming **immigration** officials. Conservatives blamed the border crisis on immigrants attempting to take advantage of DACA, though the program did not actually prevent those children from being deported.

During the final years of Obama's presidency, the international community struggled with an unprecedented mass migration of refugees into Europe. Civil war in Syria, which had erupted in 2011, and political and economic instability in countries including Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, and Somalia had displaced millions of people, many of whom underwent risky journeys on flimsy boats across the Mediterranean Sea with the hope of reaching European soil and gaining asylum in a country willing to take them.

President Obama argued that the United States had a moral duty to alleviate the refugee crisis troubling Europe, but he faced criticism from those who suspected that terrorists with ill intent toward the United States would take advantage of the crisis by camouflaging themselves as displaced people. Supporters of admitting some of them, however, pointed out that applicants for refugee status are screened by the United Nations, the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI, and the U.S. Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security. Between October 1, 2015, and September 30, 2016, the United States accepted nearly 85,000 refugees, the highest amount during Obama's presidency. About 46 percent of these refugees were Muslim, marking the largest number of Muslim refugees the country had admitted in any 12-month period. Debates over terrorism, the refugee crisis, and **immigration** policy would play central roles in the 2016 presidential election.

President Trump Makes New **Immigration Policy a Central Goal of Administration**

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Republican candidate Donald Trump stirred controversy through his advocacy of hardline **immigration** policies. He criticized in particular undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries. "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best," he said while announcing his candidacy in June 2015. "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." Trump pledged to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border to keep out undocumented immigrants.

Trump also argued that **immigration** had a negative effect on workers' pay and job opportunities for native-born Americans. "Decades of record **immigration** have produced lower wages and higher unemployment for our citizens," he said while accepting the presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention in July 2016. "We are going to have an **immigration** system that works, but one that works for the American people."

[See [Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump Criticizes **Immigration** Policies](#)(primary source)]

Voicing security concerns, Trump proposed barring **immigration** from countries with predominantly Muslim populations. After the San Bernardino shooting in December 2015, he called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on." After a separate terrorist attack in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016 that killed 49 people, he again called for blocking **immigration** from any country with a history of terrorism against the United States and its allies. He also urged authorities to look more closely at the Muslim community in the United States. "We have to go and we have to maybe check, respectfully, the mosques," he said in a speech that month. "And we have to check other places. Because this is a problem that, if we don't solve it, it's going to eat our country alive." In August 2016, he advocated instituting a new system of "extreme vetting" to ensure that terrorists did not gain entry into the United States. Former secretary of state and Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton derided Trump's proposals as extreme, un-American, and a potential violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects the freedom of religion.

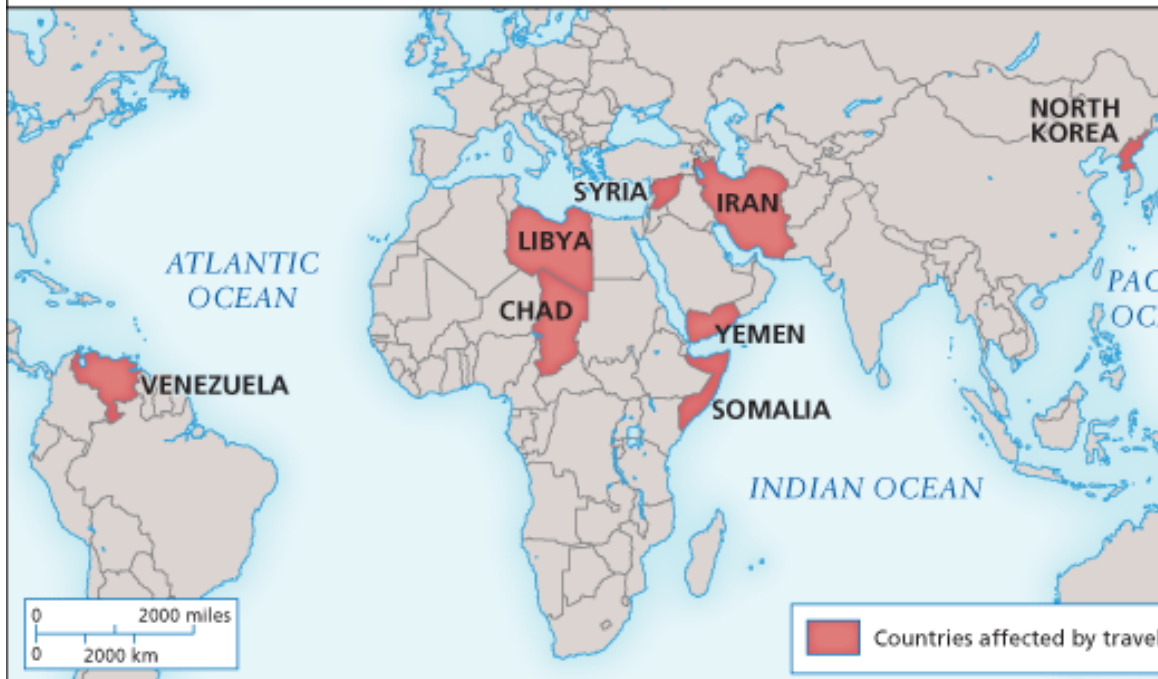
Trump was elected president on November 8, 2016, and inaugurated on January 20, 2017. President Trump acted quickly to implement a version of his proposed **immigration** ban. In late January, he signed an executive order temporarily banning the admission of refugees and barring travelers and immigrants from seven countries with majority-Muslim populations: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. "The United States," the order stated, "must be vigilant during the visa-issuance process to ensure that those approved for admission do not intend to harm Americans and that they have no ties to terrorism."

The executive order sparked confusion at airports, mass protests, and legal challenges by immigrants, states, and civil rights groups. Calling it a "Muslim ban," detractors accused the government of violating the First Amendment by targeting majority-Muslim countries and of violating the 1965 **Immigration** and Nationality Act's prohibition on using religion, race, or national origin as prohibitive factors in **immigration** decisions. Critics also noted that several

countries that had been the source of dangerous terrorists, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, were not on the list. Many were particularly outraged that Iraqis, some of whom had risked deadly retribution from militants by providing assistance to American troops after a U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq to topple dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, would not be able to escape to the safety of the United States. Supporters of the Trump administration decried the characterization of the order as a "Muslim ban," claiming instead that it was a reasonable prohibition of immigrants who might pose a higher risk of terrorism, and was essential to national security. Defenders also pointed to the president's significant **immigration** powers established by the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952.

Days later, two federal judges blocked portions of the executive order while the cases proceeded, ruling that, because Trump had previously stated that he intended to block Muslims from entering the United States, the ban potentially violated the First Amendment. In March, President Trump issued a revised executive order, but federal courts again blocked it. In September, the government issued a third revised ban, indefinitely banning immigrants and travelers from Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen from entering the United States, and placing some restrictions on travel from Venezuela, which was undergoing a period of food shortages and political instability. Both North Korea and Venezuela have populations that are mostly non-Muslim, while roughly half of Chad's population is Muslim.

Countries Affected by Travel Ban and Why



Chad:

"Several terrorist groups are active within Chad or in the surrounding region, including elements of Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa, and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb."

Iran:

"Iran regularly fails to cooperate with the U.S. government in identifying security risks,...is the source of significant terrorist threats, and...[is] a state sponsor of terrorism."

Libya:

"The substantial terrorist presence within Libya's territory amplifies the risks posed by the entry into the United States of its nationals."

North Korea:

"North Korea does not cooperate with the United States Government in any respect and fails to satisfy all information-sharing requirements."

Somalia:

"Somalia [is] a terrorist safe haven. Somalia stands apart from other countries in the degree to which its government lacks command and control over its territory."

Syria:

"Syria regularly fails to cooperate...in identifying security risks, is the source of significant terrorist threats, and has been designated...a state sponsor of terrorism."

Venezuela:

"Government fails to share public-safety and terrorism-related information adequately."

Yemen:

"Yemen...faces significant identity-management challenges, which are amplified by the not insignificant terrorist presence within its territory."

Source: Presidential Proclamation 9645, issued on September 24, 2017

In June 2018, the Supreme Court ruled 5–4 in *Trump v. Hawaii* to uphold the executive order. "The sole prerequisite set forth in [U.S. immigration law] is that the President 'find' that the entry of the covered aliens 'would be detrimental to the interests of the United States,'" Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in the majority opinion. "The President has undoubtedly fulfilled that requirement here."

Refugee admissions, meanwhile, fell about 70 percent during President Trump's first year in office. The Trump administration also ended Temporary Protected Status programs for refugees from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Sudan, leaving people who had legally lived in the United States for many years vulnerable to deportation.

In addition to these moves, the Trump administration began cracking down on undocumented immigrants. In September 2017, U.S. attorney general Jeff Sessions announced that the U.S. government would not be renewing DACA, leaving hundreds of thousands of recipients vulnerable to deportation. Trump indicated that he was willing to offer a DACA extension in exchange for funding for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, but negotiations in Congress repeatedly stalled.

In January 2018, the *Washington Post* reported that President Trump, during a meeting on **immigration** with a bipartisan group of legislators, had inquired why the United States accepted so many immigrants from "shithole countries," like El Salvador, Haiti, and nations in Africa. According to the article, Trump advocated accepting more immigrants from countries like Norway, a predominantly white European nation. Many critics denounced Trump's comments as racist, noting that the political stability or economic stature of an individual's country of birth did not predetermine his or her ability to contribute to the United States. Trump denied having used the vulgar term, but he defended the general sentiment on Twitter. Under a proposed bipartisan **immigration** deal, he wrote, the United States "would be forced to take large numbers of people from high crime...countries which are doing badly. I want a merit based system of **immigration** and people who will help take our country to the next level."

The uproar over President Trump's alleged comments reflected an ongoing discussion about how the demographics of the United States have changed since the passage of the **Immigration** and Nationality Act of 1965. "Just prior to passage of the 1965 law, residents of only three countries—Ireland, Germany and the United Kingdom—were entitled to nearly 70% of the quota visas available to enter the U.S.," a Pew Research Center report explained in 2015.

"Today, **immigration** to the U.S. is dominated by people born in Asia and Latin America, with immigrants from all of Europe accounting for only 10% of recent arrivals." According to a report released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2015, demographic trends indicate that white Americans could become a minority by 2044.

Some who have called for stricter limits on **immigration** have expressed anxiety about these changes and the impact they might have on the culture of the United States. In March 2017, for

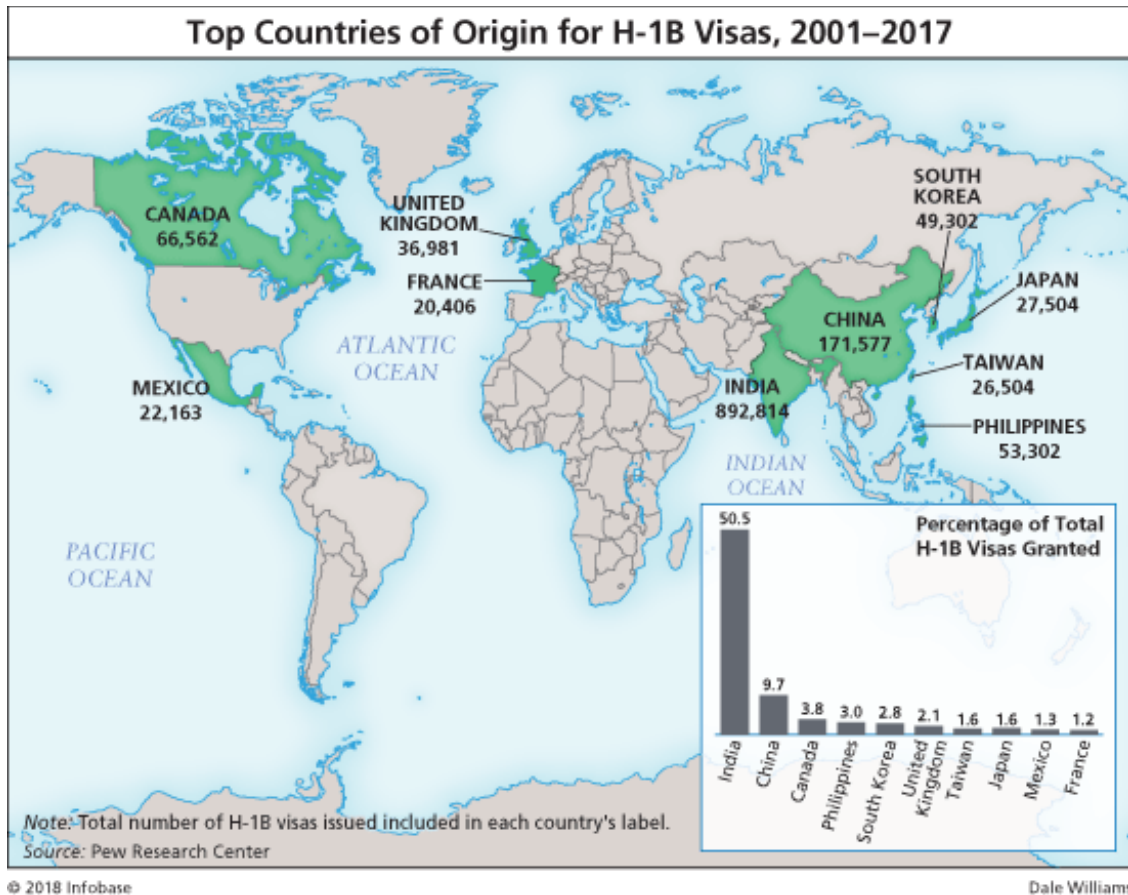
example, Representative Steve King (R, Iowa) controversially tweeted, "[C]ulture and demographics are our destiny. We can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies." King rejected accusations that his comment was racist, saying on CNN: "You've got to keep your birth rate up, and...you need to teach your children your values. In doing so, you can grow your population, you can strengthen your culture, and you can strengthen your way of life."

Critics of King's comments insisted that there was no reason to fear a more integrated, multiracial society. "We are a nation of immigrants," Iowa Republican Party Chairman Jeff Kaufman said in a statement, "and diversity is the strength of any nation and any community."

Paths of Immigration and Immigration Bills in Congress

There are several paths through which foreign-born people can immigrate to the United States. Many foreigners first obtain temporary visas that allow them to visit, work, or study in the country. The H-2A visa, for example, allows agricultural workers to come to the United States on a temporary or seasonal basis. Another commonly used temporary work visa, the H-1B visa, allows U.S. companies to bring over foreign workers with specialized knowledge or skills. Companies in the technology sector, for example, often sponsor foreign workers with advanced computer and engineering skills. H-2B visas, similarly, are intended for so-called low-skilled immigrants who will be working in the country only temporarily.

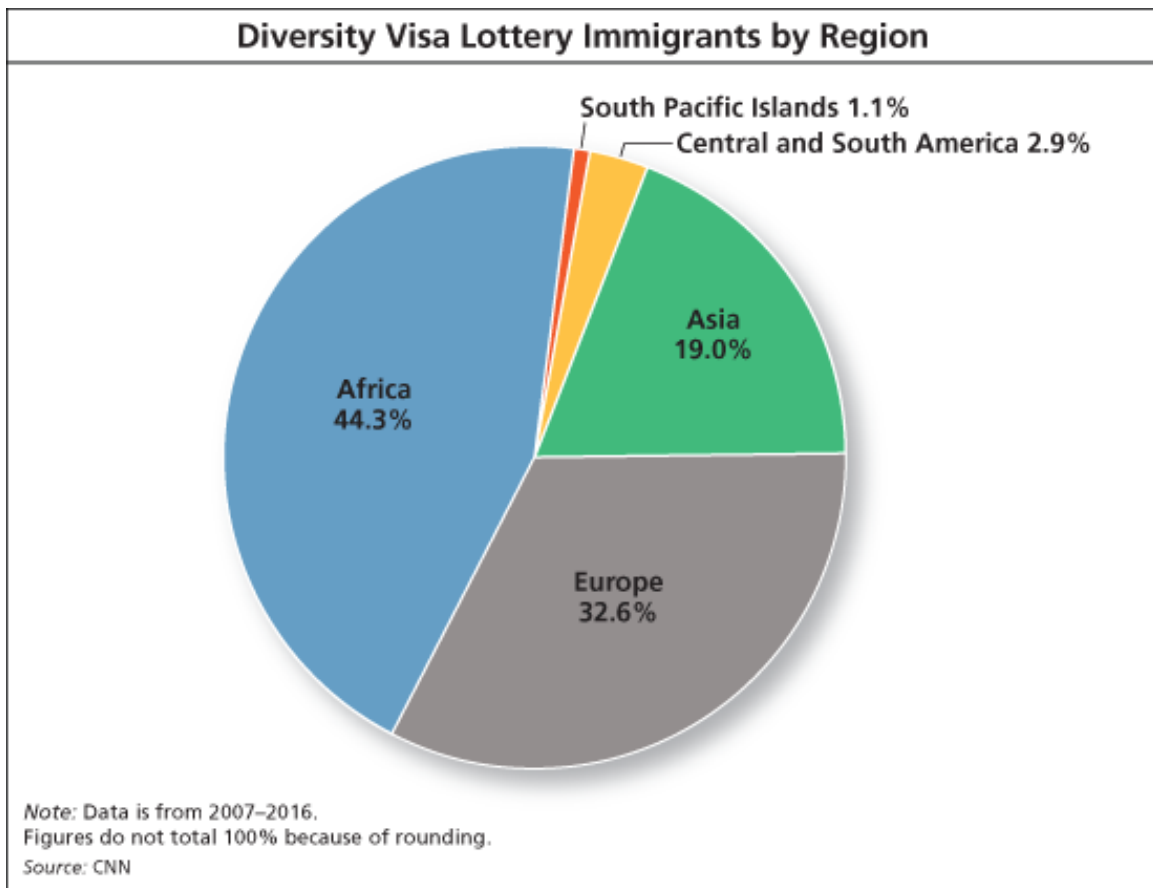
Such work visas are contingent on immigrants maintaining employment with that sponsoring company, but if they lose their job or quit they may try to find another employer or apply for a change of visa status. Employment-based visas often allow a path to apply for legal permanent status, though some temporary visa categories—such as for foreign student visas—do not. The United States caps the number of H-1B and H-2B visas it issues every year.



Other potential immigrants apply for permanent residency status while still living outside the United States. U.S. **immigration** policy favors applicants related to people who already have permanent residency in the United States. Under this family-based program, legal residents can sponsor their spouses and unmarried children. Citizens can sponsor spouses, parents, siblings, and children. Millions are on waiting lists for family-sponsored visas, and the application process—which includes background checks, medical screenings, and face-to-face interviews with **immigration** officials—can take years or even decades.

The United States issued about 800,000 family-sponsored lawful permanent resident statuses in 2016, the Department of Homeland Security reported, accounting for about 68 percent of the 1.2 million green cards issued that year. About 13 percent were issued for refugees and asylum-seekers (160,000), 12 percent (140,000) for employment-based reasons, and 4 percent through the Diversity Visa Lottery (50,000). Green card holders can legally live and work in the United States, but cannot vote or run for office. If they commit a crime, move outside the United States, fail to pay income taxes, or stay in another country for more than one year, **immigration** authorities can revoke their residency status.

A much smaller pool of immigrants than those receiving family- and employment-sponsored visas comes to the United States after winning the Diversity Visa Lottery. Only residents of countries that have relatively low levels of **immigration** to the United States are eligible for the lottery, and lottery winners must meet education, work, and background check requirements before securing the visas. Fifty thousand diversity visas are available annually. From 2007 to 2016, 44.3 percent of these visas went to Africans, 32.6 percent to Europeans, and 19 percent to Asians. In 2016, the most highly represented countries among diversity lottery winners were Algeria, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Benin, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Liberia, Belarus, and Togo. Though U.S. **immigration** law no longer contains the national origins quotas of the early 20th century, it does cap the number of permanent residency cards the government can give to immigrants from any one country at 7 percent of the total number of immigrants each year. Along with the diversity lottery, this stipulation is intended to ensure that no single region dominates **immigration** trends.



Those with permanent residency cards may, if they wish, apply for citizenship. Applicants for citizenship must have lived in the United States with permanent residency status for at least five years, be able to read, write, and speak English well, pass a test on U.S. history and government, and demonstrate that they are a "person of good moral character, attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and well-disposed to the good order and happiness of the United States." The "good moral character" standard is somewhat nebulous, but actions that might disqualify or delay a person's citizenship application, the U.S. Citizenship and **Immigration** Services states, include a history of drug abuse, incarceration, polygamy, or failure to support dependents.

Refugees and asylum seekers apply for residency through different paths. According to a United Nations definition, a refugee is any person who is unable to return to his or her home country because of a "well-founded fear of persecution." Every year, the president determines how many refugees, and from where, the United States should admit. Unlike refugee status, which people often apply for while staying in a transitional country, people fleeing persecution can apply for asylum after arriving at a port of entry to the United States, and they are often allowed to stay in the United States while their application is being processed. Both refugees and asylum seekers are allowed to pursue legal permanent resident status after entering the United States.

President Trump has been critical of many of these **immigration** procedures. He has objected to the Diversity Visa Lottery and called the prevalence of family-sponsored visas "chain migration," a term some object to as misleading and dehumanizing. In November 2017, an Uzbek immigrant who had been admitted through the diversity lottery killed eight people by driving his truck into a bike lane in Manhattan. Inaccurately claiming that the attacker had used his legal status to sponsor more than 20 relatives, Trump used the incident to call for reducing admittance by the diversity lottery and instead allocating a greater percentage of visas to employment-based, or "merit," visas. The following month, another immigrant who had entered the United States via the diversity lottery detonated a bomb in the New York City subway system. Trump again called for eliminating the program in favor of a "merit-based" visa system.

Many others have criticized the Diversity Visa Lottery. "For years, proposals have sought to shift the nation's **immigration** system away from its current emphasis on family reunification and employment-based migration, and toward a points-based system that prioritizes the admission of immigrants with certain education and employment qualifications," Jens Manuel Krogstad and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, analysts for the Pew Research Center, wrote in February 2018. "These proposals have received renewed attention under the Trump administration."

President Trump released his own four-pillar **immigration** proposal during his State of the Union address in January 2018. The plan called for creating a path to citizenship for DACA recipients, devoting \$25 billion to building a border wall, ending the Diversity Visa Lottery program, and limiting family-sponsored **immigration** in favor of a "merit-based" system. Trump referred to the visa lottery as "a program that randomly hands out green cards without any regard for skill, merit, or the safety of our people." Instead, he said, "It is time to begin moving towards a merit-based **immigration** system—one that admits people who are skilled, who want to work, who will contribute to our society, and who will love and respect our country."

According to an analysis by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, the **immigration** reforms proposed by the White House would reduce authorized **immigration** by about 44 percent, which would mark the "largest policy-driven legal **immigration** cut since the 1920s." Some Republicans, though supportive of President Trump's efforts to crack down on illegal **immigration**, have voiced skepticism about his plan to drastically limit legal **immigration**. "The idea of cutting legal **immigration** in half," Senator Lindsey Graham (R, South Carolina) told *Politico* in January 2018, "is bad for the economy." Analysts estimate that another much-debated proposal, the Reforming American **Immigration** for a Strong Economy (RAISE) Act, introduced by Senators Tom Cotton (R, Arkansas) and David Perdue (R, Georgia) in 2017, would also nearly halve legal **immigration** levels. The RAISE Act would implement a point system to vet potential immigrants, awarding applicants points based on their age, education, fluency in English, and other characteristics, including whether the applicant has won an Olympic medal or Nobel Peace Prize. [See [Republican Senators Introduce Plan to Reduce Legal **Immigration**](#) (primary source)]



President Donald Trump (R) and Senators Tom Cotton (R, Arkansas) and David Perdue (R, Georgia) hold a press conference on the Reforming American **immigration** for a Strong Economy (RAISE) Act at the White House in August 2017.

Andrea Hanks/ZUMA Press/Newscom

The economic impact of various **immigration** reform proposals—and of **immigration** on the economy as a whole—has been the subject of broad debate. While opponents have argued for years that immigrants suppress wages and take jobs from native-born Americans, defenders argue that **immigration** bolsters the economy by providing a supply of laborers who are willing to perform difficult jobs—such as farm work and other manual labor—that many Americans are unwilling to do, and at lower cost. Indeed, a multitude of businesses support policies that would increase the number of immigrants allowed to work in the United States.

A report released in September 2016 by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, a private think tank, found that **immigration** had a mixed impact on the U.S. economy. The effects of **immigration** on American workers between 1994 and 2014 were "very small," a summary of the report stated, and were most likely to hurt "prior immigrants or native-born workers who have not completed high school." However, the report summary continued, **immigration** had "an overall positive impact on long-run economic growth." The study also found that immigrants were more costly than U.S.-born residents to state and local governments, but that the children of first-generation immigrants generally contributed more in taxes as adults than native-born residents. Researchers also found that **immigration** had little

effect on employment levels, and that immigrant labor reduced prices for consumers in sectors like child care and food preparation. [See [Economist Testifies on Impact of High-Skilled Immigrants on U.S. Economy](#) (primary source); [Think Tank Director Argues Low-Skilled Immigrants Hurt Prospects for American Workers](#) (primary source)]

Supporters Argue: U.S. Should Substantially Reduce Its Restrictions on Legal Immigration

Supporters of substantially reducing restrictions on legal immigration argue that immigration has long been central to the history and character of the nation. "The United States is a country created and built by immigrants from all over the world," Carlos Gutierrez, U.S. secretary of commerce under President George W. Bush, wrote in *Catalyst* in 2017. "Throughout our history, immigrants seeking a better life have flocked to our shores—reinvigorating our labor force, enriching our cultural fabric, and making our democracy stronger."

Proponents maintain that the United States, as a beacon of freedom, democracy, and progress, has a duty to take in immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from all regions of the globe. Considering the matter "in purely moral terms rather than largely economic ones," journalist Masha Gessen wrote in the *New Yorker* in February 2018,

...may address American responsibility in a world in which tens of millions of people have been displaced by war, famine, and violence.... It may address the future of a planet that is slowly becoming unsuitable for human habitation, and the American responsibility to those who lose their homes as a result. It may even question the premise that the dumb luck of having been born in the United States gives a group of people the right to decide who may enter the premises.

Recent proposals to drastically reduce immigration, advocates of immigration contend, echo some of the most racist, discriminatory laws of the nation's past. "In the entire history of the United States, the only policy-driven cuts in legal immigration that rival the effects of these bills were the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Quota Act [National Origins Act] of 1924, which cut the number of legal immigrants by 496,000 in 1922 and 413,000 in 1925, respectively," David Bier and Stuart Anderson of the Cato Institute wrote in January 2018.

"Congress enacted these laws to keep out Italians and Eastern Europeans, specifically Jews, and [they] were used throughout the 1930s to prevent the entry of German Jews."

Immigration benefits the U.S. economy, proponents maintain, and provides a valuable source of labor, particularly as baby boomers—members of the sizable generation born after World War II—begin to retire. "Immigrants boost the nation's economic growth rate in two important ways: by increasing the total number of workers employed, and by raising the overall productivity of workers, both immigrant and native born alike," Daniel Griswold, co-director of the Program on the American Economy and Globalization at George Mason University, wrote in *U.S. News & World Report* in July 2017. "Without a healthy inflow of immigrants, the U.S. labor force would soon begin to decline, imposing a drag on growth while adding to the strain on our retirement programs."



An Iranian attending college in the United States holds a sign outside the U.S. Supreme Court after the Court upheld an executive order in June 2018 barring most travel from Iran to the United States.

LEAH MILLIS/REUTERS/Newscom

Supporters refute claims that **immigration** drives down the pay of workers born in the United States. "**Immigration**'s long-run relative wage impact on native-born American workers is close to zero," Alex Nowrasteh, an **immigration** policy analyst at the Cato Institute, wrote in August

2017. "Restricting **immigration** doesn't raise wages and, even if it did for those Americans who directly compete with immigrants, it would lower wages for the roughly 91 percent of Americans who do not."

On the contrary, advocates insist, **immigration** actually improves employment opportunities for most Americans. "**Immigration** creates jobs by generating new economic activity," Jacqueline Varas, director of **immigration** and trade policy analysis at American Action Forum, a center-right think tank, wrote in the *Hill* in March 2018. "Estimates suggest that every 100 new H-1B workers, or temporary high-skilled immigrants, result in an additional 183 jobs for U.S. natives, and every 100 new H-2B workers, or temporary low-skilled immigrants, generate an additional 464 jobs for U.S. natives."

Supporters of legal **immigration** argue that attempts to restrict family-sponsored visas, or "chain migration," as President Trump has labeled it, are mistaken. "Families are essential to the well-being of immigrants, to immigrant integration, and to the U.S. labor force," Donald Kerwin, executive director of the Center for Migration Studies, wrote in February 2018. "[R]esearch shows that the U.S. **immigration** system produces the same ratio of *skilled* workers as that of the native population. In short, it produces necessary workers at all skill levels."

Indeed, advocates maintain, the idea of out-of-control "chain migration" is a myth, as are the supposed risks family-sponsored visas pose to the nation's security. "In practice, bringing over a family member takes years—which makes it very hard to build a chain," journalist Dara Lind wrote in *Vox* in January 2018. "Trump's National Security Strategy claims that 'chain migration' is a problem for national security, but there's nothing inherent to the way someone is allowed to immigrate to the US that makes it harder for the US to catch would-be terrorists."

Congress, proponents contend, should also keep the Diversity Visa Lottery, which, by welcoming newcomers from every part of the globe, offers hope to millions and promotes the nation's image as a land of liberty and opportunity. "My family's story wouldn't be possible without the 'diversity lottery' program," Machmud Makhmudov, an Uzbek immigrant, wrote in the *New York Times* in November 2017.

[S]uch a craven move would mean America loses a chance to fight extremism across the world by defining its values on its own terms rather than letting its enemies do so.... At a time when groups ranging from state-sponsored media to terrorist organizations denounce the United States as "the Great Satan," America can't afford to turn its back on an opportunity to portray itself as an open, tolerant and diverse nation.

Immigration broadly benefits the United States, supporters argue, and critics have distorted the issue by framing their proposals as shifts toward "merit-based" **immigration**. "U.S. immigrants who primarily enter under the family sponsorship and diversity categories are the most highly educated in American history," Bier and Anderson wrote. "True 'merit-based' **immigration** reform would give these immigrants *more* opportunities to immigrate, not fewer. In any case, America needs workers at both ends of the skills spectrum to grow job opportunities for all Americans. There is simply no economic justification for banning so many legal immigrants."

Opponents Argue: U.S. Should Not Substantially Reduce Its Restrictions on Legal **Immigration**

Opponents of substantially reducing restrictions on legal **immigration** argue that it is essential to cut **immigration** levels immediately. "If no **immigration** curbs are enacted, the Census Bureau estimates that another 14 million immigrants will come to the United States between now and 2025," Jeff Sessions, former Republican senator from Alabama and currently the U.S. attorney general, wrote in the Washington Post in 2015.

*The percentage of the country that is foreign-born is on track to rapidly eclipse any previous historical peak and to continue rising. Imagine the pressure this will put on wages, as well as schools, hospitals and many other community resources. It is not mainstream, but extreme, to continue surging **immigration** beyond any historical precedent and to do so at a time when almost 1 in 4 Americans age 25 to 54 does not have a job.*

The millions of immigrants who have entered the United States since the passage of the **Immigration** and Nationality Act of 1965, critics contend, have hurt the economy and undermined the security of average Americans. "In the 1960s, Congress lifted **immigration** caps and... [the] foreign-born population more than quadrupled, to more than 40 million today," Sessions continued. "This ongoing wave coincides with a period of middle-class contraction.... Yet each year, the United States adds another million mostly low-wage permanent legal immigrants who can work, draw benefits and become voting citizens."

Indeed, even though **immigration** might benefit some sectors of the U.S. economy, opponents argue, it threatens the most vulnerable workers who are struggling to make ends meet. "For many Americans, the influx of immigrants hurts their prospects significantly," George Borjas, an economist at Harvard University, wrote in *Politico* in September 2016. "When the supply of

workers goes up, the price that firms have to pay to hire workers goes down.... [B]ecause a disproportionate percentage of immigrants have few skills, it is low-skilled American workers, including many blacks and Hispanics, who have suffered most from this wage dip."

Newcomers strain government resources, critics charge, saddling local communities with more expenses. "Immigrants receive government assistance at higher rates than natives," Borjas explained. "The higher cost of all the services provided to immigrants and the lower taxes they pay (because they have lower earnings) inevitably implies that on a year-to-year basis **immigration** creates a fiscal hole of at least \$50 billion—a burden that falls on the native population."



Members of the New York City Police Department antiterrorism task force stand guard in December 2017 after a terrorist who entered the United States through the Diversity Visa Lottery set off a homemade pipe bomb in the subway, wounding three.

Anthony Behar/Sipa USA/Newscom

The Diversity Visa Lottery must be eliminated, opponents contend, and replaced with a program that judges people by their skills rather than where they come from. "The United States should evaluate immigrants as individuals and what they will bring to the country," David Inserra, a policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, wrote in January 2018. "The U.S. should not categorize people in terms of identity, such as by national origin. Yet, the current diversity lottery treats people not as individuals, but as the means to artificially create representation from various countries."

The lottery, critics further maintain, also poses a threat to national security. "The diversity visa lottery seems ideally suited for terrorists, as it randomly distributes visas to people who often have no family or other ties to the United States," Steven Camarota, a research director at the Center for **Immigration** Studies, wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* in November 2017. "Many recipients come from countries with significant terrorist problems and where fake documents and fraud are widespread. The lottery serves no rational purpose and Congress should end it as soon as possible."

Chain migration, opponents argue, is similarly problematic. "As more and more immigrants are admitted to the United States, the population eligible to sponsor their relatives for green cards increases exponentially," the Federation for American **Immigration** Reform, a group that advocates for reduced **immigration**, claims on its website. "This means that every time one immigrant is admitted, the door is opened to many more."

Instead of giving family-sponsored visas priority, critics assert, the current **immigration** system should focus more on what skills and attributes applicants will bring to the United States. "One plausible estimate holds that just 6.5 percent of U.S. immigrants are given their green cards on the basis of economic merit," Robert Verbruggen, an editor at *National Review*, wrote in August 2017. Potential immigrants should be scored, he added, endorsing the RAISE Act introduced by Senators Tom Cotton (R, Arkansas) and David Perdue (R, Georgia), on a point system evaluating "their level of education, their English fluency, [and] their age."

The United States, opponents argue, must honor its duty to U.S. citizens before any imagined responsibility to immigrants. "For some people, they may think that [the current **immigration** system] is a symbol of America's virtue and generosity," Senator Cotton told reporters in August 2017. "I think it's a symbol we're not committed to working-class Americans. We need to change that."

Immigration Debate Continues

Immigration has continued to be a focal point of the Trump administration. In June 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court strengthened the president's power to place restrictions on who may enter the United States with its decision in *Trump v. Hawaii*. Later that month, following a national outcry, President Trump signed an executive order ending the administration's policy of forcibly separating minors from guardians who illegally crossed at the U.S.-Mexico border. Questions over **immigration** policy, the country's moral responsibility to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and how **immigration** is continuing to shape the country's culture and economy are likely to last well past the Trump administration.

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