

Regulating Illegal Immigration : Historical and Political Analysis

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Introduction

Nations at the crossroads of international borders are fundamental for reflecting the unique values and identities of a country. A possible desire for a change in lifestyle or encountering unforeseen circumstances can lead populations to relocate to the United States through these partitions. Regardless of the situation, according to the statistics provided by the Pew Research Center, a regarded unbiased research organization, immigration has been a resonating term for more than 1 million foreigners every year in the United States. But the permeability of these borders is in question due to the ongoing debate on immigration policies, specifically unauthorized immigration. Illegal immigration has been a focal issue in the United States, leading to many distinctive stances from various political parties, such as the Republican Party. The complete examination of this topic brings forth the following questions: What led to illegal immigration in the United States? What is the Republican political stance on regulating illegal immigration?

The Beginning of Immigration

Illegal immigration to the United States was first criminalized in the 20th century. Before that point, illegal immigration wasn't a conceived concept. To completely analyze the history of illegal immigration, it is essential to understand the background of immigration itself.

Immigration was initially promoted by several governmental actions in the late 1800's. One such action is the United States' first formal call for immigration, expressed in the Immigration Act of 1864. This act, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, aimed to encourage immigration to meet the needs of the United States. D'Vera Cohn, a Senior Pew Researcher with two decades of experience, writes an article on Pew Research Center expanding the reasoning behind this law: "To address labor shortages due to the Civil War, this act made contracts for immigrant labor

formed abroad enforceable by U.S. courts” (Cohn, 2015). On one hand, this might have helped the United States in the short term, as the passing of this law led many immigrants into the United States, supporting the necessary labor for the Civil war. However, the results of many such laws changed the course of immigration for the next three decades, forcing future regulations.

Regulations in Immigration

The Library of Congress, the official research arm of the US Congress, states, “Many came to the U.S. because it was perceived as the land of economic opportunity. Others came seeking personal freedom or relief from political and religious persecution, and nearly 12 million immigrants arrived in the United States between 1870 and 1900” (Library of Congress, 2023). The mass immigration in the three decades raised a problem that arose within the United States: Xenophobia, the dislike of immigrants from other specific countries. In this time period, xenophobia was expressed mainly towards Asian immigrants, southern European immigrants, and eastern European immigrants. According to an article published in the Journal of American Ethnic History by Dr. Charles Jarett, a professor at Georgia State University, “The most common complaint was that immigrants displaced American blacks from jobs. Italian, Greek, Mexican, Filipino, and Chinese immigrants were said to take jobs blacks once held in the railroad industry, on farms, in laundries, and as cooks, waiters, barbers, domestic workers, and restaurant operators” (Jarett, 1999). The citizens of the United States were apprehensive about their individual labor occupations. The rising tension between the immigrants and the citizens led to yet another governmental action. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 was the most impactful immigration regulation act passed intending to limit the number of immigrants based on race.

Cohn from Pew Research Center describes, “In response, laws were passed in 1921 and 1924 to try to restore earlier immigration patterns by capping total annual immigration and imposing numerical quotas based on immigrant nationality that favored northern and western European countries” (Cohn, 2015). Many such acts were passed in the same time period, aspiring to harshly modulate immigration flow from different countries. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a government agency known for its data collection, the change in the foreign-born population from 1930 to 1970 decreased by 4.6 million, which is a change of 6.9%, showing the mass decline in immigration.(Bureau, n.d.). Finally, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act was passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, reopening doors to immigration. The caveat to this act was it welcomes “those who can contribute the most” (President Johnson, 1965).

Rise of Illegal Immigration

The rise of Illegal Immigration was due to the constant regulation of legal immigration. It was also partially due to the competition built by the Immigration and Nationality act, as there is a question of an individual’s worth. These factors result in difficulty migrating legally for better opportunities. In a research article published by the American Immigration Council, an organization built for the betterment of Immigration in the United States, mentions that “The “regular channels” are largely not available to prospective immigrants who end up entering the country through unauthorized channels” (American Immigration Council, 2021). Entry into the United States has been gaining its competition, leading to future immigrants to avoid that pathway and migrate in an unauthorized manner. The trends of Illegal Immigration in the last 3 decades are quite unexpected. The Census Bureau shows the data of unauthorized immigration to be a linear rise from 1990 till about 2007 with an increase of 8.7 million in the unauthorized

population during this time period. (Bureau, n.d.) Interestingly, there is a sharp change in this trend mentioned in an article from the Pew Research Center by Jeffrey Passel and Jens Krogstad, senior researchers, and demographers. “Between 2007 and 2021, the unauthorized immigrant population decreased by 1.75 million, or 14%.” (Passel & Krogstad, 2023). Why is that so? The actions taken by the Government and Republican policies are responsible for this sudden change.

Republican Standpoint

The Republicans have had an active role in this ongoing debate on regulating Illegal Immigrants. A research report by Bettina Hammer and Craig Kafura, two expert researchers in the public opinion field, mentions key details about the Republican argument. “Republicans are also far more likely than Democrats to consider strict immigration policy measures effective, like carrying out more arrests and deportations (82%, compared to 29%) and separating immigrant children from parents when they are accused of entering the United States illegally (40%, compared to 10%). Likewise, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to view increasing border security (93%, compared to 55%) and imposing new fines on businesses that hire illegal immigrants (83%, compared to 54%) as effective policies” (Hammer & Kafura, 2019). By analyzing the statistics presented by the Republicans, it is clear that Republicans are completely against Illegal Immigration and are willing to take strict measures such as deportations and border control. Another analysis of the Republican stance can be measured by the effects of the Border Wall separating the US-Mexico border. The Border Wall was something that the Republicans always promoted. Various Republican presidents such as Donald Trump and George H. W. Bush. According to US Census Bureau Data, there was a decline in the same 2007 to 2021 time period of Illegal Immigration from Mexico by 2.8 million. (Bureau, n.d.). Passel and

Krogstad claim “A broader decline in migration from Mexico to the U.S” was a fundamental reason for this decline.”(Passel & Krogstad, 2023).

Conclusion

The history of Illegal Immigration started from the United States promoting immigration with laws such as the Immigration Act due to labor shortage. The mass immigration to the United States led to xenophobia, forcing the Government to publish major regulations such as the The Emergency Quota Act. The United States at last allowed Immigration, but to those who are the most worthy. During this time period of regulation and increased competition, Illegal Immigration came to a rise. Illegal Immigration was growing at a disapproving rate until the Government started to take actions. Specifically, the Republican Party reduced the amount of Illegal immigration by taking actions in border control and deportation. This reduced the rate of Illegal immigration and even slightly lowered the amount from 2007 to present. If there was a better approach to solving Illegal Immigration requires further political study, but something for sure is the actions of the Republican Party and the Government lowered Illegal Immigration rates increasing security of the country.

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