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THE IMPACT OF US IMMIGRATION IN NATIONAL SECURITY, A THREAT TO “AMERICA FIRST”?

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The National Security Strategy (NSS) for the 45th federal administration of the United States places the Immigration Policy as one of the key tasks in order to protect The Homeland, its nationals and the “American way of life”. President Donald J. Trump has declared, constantly, that the presence of immigrants in US soil has eroded the security of the country, both historically and currently. That is why the president has raised, since the time of his campaign in 2016, the need to build a physical wall at the southern border and to reshape the Immigration Policy.

It is not new that the issue of migration is part of the diagnosis and tasks related to national security matters. However, what differentiates Donald Trump’s so called “An America First National Security Strategy” from previous administrations is that goes beyond undocumented immigration to include residents, students and refugees on the list of possible hazards. As a result, for example, the suspension of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the travel bans for citizens of particular nationalities and the temporary suspension on the admission of refugees.

Being a nation founded by and for immigrants, it results relevant to analyze the effects that immigration has in the United States. The aim is to identify the possible threats that they could represent for the integrity of the society, the culture, the economy and the national security. Since 9/11, there had been no policy as pragmatic and attached to realism as it is “America First”, both for domestic and foreign affairs. It entails implications on the relationship with its neighbors, on its role within the balance of power and the way in which the country is seen in the world. “America First” is everything but an isolated policy. Beyond, immigration is not a domestic issue, it is a tangible part of the tragedy of the commons.

US Immigration Policy in a post 9/11 era

The US Immigration policy can be split into 2 periods: the first, before 9/11, and the second, after 9/11. Before the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 in New York City and Washington DC, the United States’ immigration policy was primarily focused on limiting the number of both documented and undocumented people entering into the country (in first place), as well as to avoid the entrance of drugs traffickers (in second place). The immigration system was not as thorough and rigorous as it is nowadays. The visa screening process was limp, interviews were not mandatory and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) operated with the least technology among all federal agencies. Because of its main purpose,

communication between the INS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA), was practically nil.

After the terrorist attacks, the United States experienced the biggest federal reorganization in the history of the country. The INS was dissolved and more than 20 agencies were merged to create the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in order to group State efforts on immigration and terrorism. Within DHS, 3 agencies were created as well: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, and US Citizenship and Immigration Services. National Security became the main priority of the entire immigration system and, as a result, consular officers were almost doubled in less than ten years, interagency communication was enhanced, biometric information of VISA applicants started to be collected before arrivals, and a training program for consular officials (with a special focus on counter terrorism measures and VISA fraud) was created, among other measures. In a post 9/11 era, immigration is considered by the United States as a matter of national security.

“ (...) Evidence has proved that the presence of immigrants brings outstanding benefits to the US economy. ”

Nevertheless, immigration policy has not changed drastically, since this topic is one of the most controversial for both democrats and republicans. Therefore, it is really difficult to achieve consensus to legislate on this matter, even though that since 2001 there has been talks about the need for structural reform of the immigration system. For this reason, during his presidential campaign in 2016, Donald Trump alluded to the lack of legislation to control and limit immigra-

tion, arguing that the absence of control in this issue has diminished the economy, society, politics and, above all, national security of the United States. He took the immigration issue as one of the banners of his campaign, which was a key factor in his victory over Hillary Clinton.

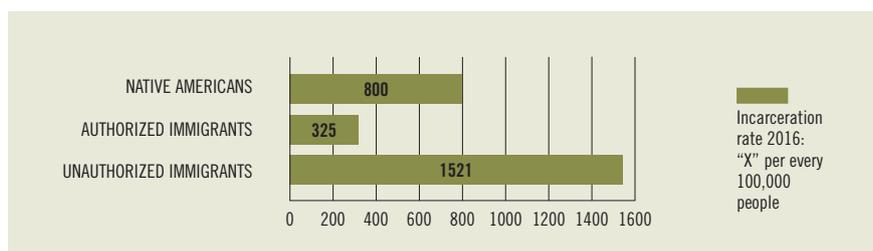
An “America First” National Security Strategy

The National Security Strategy of the Donald Trump’s administration is based, as well as the entire both domestic and foreign policy, on the premise (and promise) of “America First”. On his inaugural speech in January 2017, president Trump stated that, from that moment, every decision, of any kind, would be based on seeking the greatest benefit for American families. The “America First” Policy, thence, prioritizes the interests of the United States over any issue, decision, act and commitment.

An “America First” National Security Strategy sets the immigration issue as one of the main concerns of the country. Grounded on realism, it establishes the need to protect the borders and to reform the immigration system in order to secure the homeland. The specific actions to be pursuit for this purpose are: the construction of a border wall, the elimination of the “visa lottery”, the implementation of a merit-based admittance (to stop the chain migration founded on familiar ties), a review on the relevance of the different types of visas, the reinforcement of the vetting process, the removal of ad hoc programs such as DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the decrease of the ceiling on the admission of refugees, among others.

Immigrant population in the United States

In 2016, nearly 44 million immigrants were living in the United States, representing the 13.5% of the total population (Hipsman, 2016). According to data from the Pew Research Center, the Department of Homeland Security and Border Protection, and the Migration Policy Institute, some of the main characteristics of the immigrant population in the US are:



Incarceration Rate, US 2016

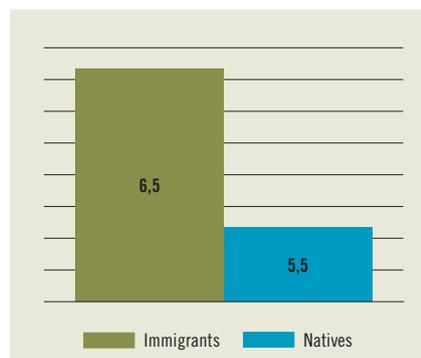
Own elaboration based on: Landgrave, M. et al (2018). Incarcerated Immigrants in 2016: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin. CATO Institute. Available at: <https://www.cato.org/publications/immigration-research-policy-brief/their-numbers-demographics-countries-origin>

- 11 million are unauthorized immigrants, with half of them living in California, Florida, New York and Texas. The remaining 33 million correspond to lawful permanent residents (every person who owns a green card), visa holders and refugees.
- Immigrants represent the 17% of the total civilian labor force, 28 from 162 million (with almost 8 million being unauthorized).
- One third of the immigrants who participate in the civilian labor force work in management occupations, while the rest in services and sales, construction, maintenance and transportation.
- Mexicans are, by far, the largest immigrant group, representing 26% of the total. Indians rank second, with 6%.
- Immigrants rank below natives in rates related to income, poverty, access to education and, of course, english proficiency.
- Indians lead the list of newly arrived immigrants, both authorized and unauthorized, in 2016. Chinese rank second and Mexicans third.

Immigration and its impact on National Security

In the National Security Strategy, it is stated that “Illegal immigration [...] burdens the economy, hurts American workers, presents public safety risks, and enriches smugglers and other criminals” (NSS, 2017, p. 19). Are there grounds for that assertion?

The assertion that immigrants have a negative impact on the unemployment rate for natives is not new. In both government and society, there are sectors that call for limiting immigration to protect American jobs. It is true that the unemployment rate is higher for natives than for immigrants (6.5% vs. 5.5%); however, they do not compete for the same category of jobs. Currently, 71% of native born are in the labor force vs. 73.5% of foreign born people. There is an income gap between the two groups, with immigrants being less paid in all age and gender categories. Evidence has proved that the presence of immigrants brings outstanding benefits to the US economy. Approximately, 25 million immigrants worked in the United States in 2017 and 10.5% of them owned a business (vs. 9.3 of natives). Moreover, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “one-third of the companies that



Unemployment Rate, US 2015

Own elaboration based on: Krogstad, J. et al (2018). Key facts about US immigration policies and proposed changes. Pew Research Center. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/26/key-facts-about-u-s-immigration-policies-and-proposed-changes/>

went public between 2006 and 2012 had at least one immigrant founder. Of the 87 privately held companies currently valued at over \$1 billion, 51 percent had immigrant founders” (Ivanova, 2017), impacting in the country’s income and in the generation of jobs. A study from the CATO Institute shows that immigration produces substantial gains, such as “an economic boon to US natives of between \$35 billion and \$230 billion annually [...]. Immigrants, on average, pay between \$92,000 and \$173,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits in net present value over their lifetime” (Bier, 2018).

Regarding the second assertion, that immigrants “presents public safety risks, and enriches smugglers and other criminals”, it should be noted that there is no correlation between the presence of (mainly unauthorized) immigrants and the criminality rates. Immigrants move to the US to find better opportunities and to provide a better quality of life for their families. For instance, they have the incentive of staying away from trouble in order to avoid deportation, among other measures, so they can continue sending remittances to their home countries.

There is evidence that shows that crime rates have drop in cities that had experienced a boost of immigration; such is the case of Los Angeles and New York. Another CATO study, “Incarcerated Immigrants in 2016: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin” proved that immigrants are less prone to be incarcerated than a native: “Illegal immigrants are 47 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives. Legal immigrants are 78 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives” (Landgrave, 2018). Furthermore, the research shows that the possibility of being murdered by an unauthorized immigrant is 1 in 10.9 billion, per year.

Authors like George J. Borjas and Paul Collier argue that immigration produce a negative impact since they import the “bad” institutions and cultural features from their home countries, and that those factors bring out undesirable outcomes like corruption and poverty. In spite the fact that the highest levels of poverty, lack of insurance and less access to education are embodied by immigrants, especially Hispanic, as matter of fact, the effects of the presence of immigrants are outstandingly more positive. They do not depend on public benefits and, on the contrary, their presence increase, despite modestly, the general income of natives. In addition, they are prominent workers and taxpayers, contribute to the spread of economic freedom in the country and enhance the total wage of households.

Perception of Immigration, a key factor to move forward

The perception of immigration within American society has changed positively in recent years, as polling houses like Gallup have shown. In addition, every day the contribution that immigrants make to the economy and society of the United States grows, which it is being recognized by several sectors. Nevertheless, the administration

agenda of Donald Trump is still strongly oriented to limit immigration and to reconsider the conditions of permanence of those who already reside in the country. It is true that the country’s priority must be national security; but, if immigrants do not represent a threat to “America First”, should not the government drive unity to evolve into a more prosperous and inclusive nation? ■

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