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Texas A&M University

Policy Proposal

“Around the World in 80 Waves: Addressing the Nation’s Immigration Crisis”

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TO: Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security

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SUBJECT: Provide a long-term and comprehensive solution for undocumented immigrants to integrate into American society through training

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Introduction

Immigration has a paramount effect on the size, distribution, composition, and cultural aspects of the United States. Policymakers implemented several programs, such as the Bracero program, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), and have increased border security to address migration issues. While these programs were merely short term solutions, we focused on possibilities that can address this issue in a long-term and comprehensive setting. The MIGRANT (Migrant Integration Generating Reform And New Trends) policy focuses on the objective to integrate undocumented immigrants into American society.

Background

The importance of international migration to current and future policy can hardly be overstated. Immigration is shaping critical policy questions pertaining to the changing demographic landscape of the country. Historically, the US had several different periods of immigration policies.¹ The 1780–1875 time frame was characterized by its lack of a centralized government policy. The 1875–1920 period prohibited the admission of immigrants from specific countries. Since 1921, the US has experienced several changes to immigration laws. The 1942–1968 Bracero program and the 1986 IRCA shed some light on the unintended consequences of immigration policies, as well as provided insight for the implementation of future policies.

The Bracero program was a temporary labor program that admitted short term foreign workers into the US. The program began on August 4, 1942, when the American and Mexican governments signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement.² However, American farm owners exploited immigrant labor with low wages.³ In 1964, Congress voted to end the program and terminated it in 1968. The program's end and the enactment of a cap on the number of

¹ Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley, "Immigration: Shaping and Reshaping America," *Population Bulletin* 61, no. 4 (December 2006); Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley, "Immigration in America 2010," *Population Bulletin Update*, June 2010.

² History.com Editors, "U.S. and Mexico Sign the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement," History.com (A&E Television Networks, October 7, 2019), <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/us-mexico-sign-mexican-farm-labor-agreement-bracero-program>.

³ Douglas S. Massey and Karen A. Pren, "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America," *Population and Development Review* 38, no.1 (March 2012):3.

permanent worker visas provided no legal way to accommodate the inflow of migrants that was established during the Bracero Program's history.⁴

On November 6, 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the IRCA. The primary goal of IRCA was to increase border security in response to the increase of undocumented immigration after the Bracero Program's termination. The IRCA offered legal status to millions of undocumented migrants, who before 1965 had moved back and forth across the border and contributed to the annual count of apprehensions.

Problem Analysis

Undocumented immigration rose after 1965 due to the end of the Bracero Program (Figure 1). Permanent resident visas were not enough to cover the demand of those who would have applied for temporary work.⁵ The IRCA implementation reduced the number of undocumented immigrants by providing citizenship to a great portion of these individuals. Furthermore, the surge in border enforcement changed trends of immigrant flows. Prior to this policy, there was a circular flow of male workers to three states (California, Texas, and Illinois). After the policy, undocumented immigrants were encouraged to enter the country with their entire families, not return to their home country, and reside throughout the whole nation. As a result, levels of undocumented immigrants have been stable in recent years.

FIGURE 1 Mexican immigration to the United States in three categories, 1955–95

Source: Massey, Pren 2012.

In 2018, the US was home to around 44.8 million foreign-born people,⁶ including an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants.⁷ Of these individuals, 42% (4.6 million) are

⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵ Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Karen A. Pren. "Why border enforcement backfired." *American Journal of Sociology* 121, no. 5 (March 2016): 1557–1600.

⁶ Budiman A, "Key findings about U.S. immigrants," *Pew Research Center, FactTank News in the Numbers* (August 20, 2020) (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>).

⁷ Mary C. Waters and Marisa Gerstein Pineau, *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (Washington D.C.: Natl Academy Press, 2015).

visa overstayers and 58% (6.4 million) entered without inspection.⁸ In recent years, most undocumented immigrants did not enter the country through the southern border. In 2017, border enforcement apprehended 310,000 individuals crossing the border undocumented and around 700,000 individuals overstaying their visas.⁹ Immigrants coming to the US are also positively selected, which means they are younger, healthier, better educated, and have better skills, compared to the overall population in their home countries.

One way to prevent overstayed visas is to implement training in the current system for work visas. Immigrants in good standing with the US would be trained and work for a designated number of years, similar to the Fort Worth program for the homeless. This provides skills and temporary jobs until workers find higher-paying jobs, which are available in the country. For instance, in Texas, there are around 500,000 unfilled jobs that need to be filled by trained workers.¹⁰ This policy could be implemented similarly to the Bracero program. Immigrants could reside in the US working for three years and would go back to their home country for a year until they are able to apply for citizenship.

Additionally, immigrants overstay their visas due to a lack of a system to monitor entering and exiting the US. To address this issue, we suggest the implementation of the biometric entry/exit system¹¹ in airports for international travelers, verifying the citizenship status of immigrants. This system was created and approved under the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002.¹² However, this system has not been fully implemented.¹³ We propose instituting it on a national level in airports. This will allow for the identification of undocumented persons as well as prevent illegal travel between countries.

Furthermore, crime rates of first-generation immigrants are significantly lower overall in comparison to both second generation and native-born people.¹⁴ Immigrants can be considered complements to American workers. Around eight million¹⁵ undocumented

⁸ Dudley L. Poston and Peter A. Morrison, "A Border Wall Won't Stop People from Coming Here Illegally," The Eagle, March 19, 2019, https://theeagle.com/opinion/columnists/a-border-wall-won-t-stop-people-from-coming-here/article_5b5e7216-4551-582c-9e82-0f5adf37896d.html.

⁹ Dean Dichiaro, "Border Wall Debate Ignores Biggest Source of Illegal Immigration: Visa Overstays," Roll Call, February 1, 2019, <https://www.rollcall.com/2019/02/01/border-wall-debate-ignores-biggest-source-of-illegal-immigration-visa-overstays/>.

¹⁰ Madeline Ottillie, "Nearly 500,000 Jobs Available in Texas; New State Tool Helps You Find Them," KVIA, April 22, 2020, <https://kvia.com/news/business-technology/2020/04/22/nearly-500000-jobs-available-in-texas-new-state-tool-helps-you-find-them/>.

¹¹ "Biometric Exit Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)," U.S. Customs and Border Protection, May 15, 2020, <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/biometrics/biometric-exit-faqs>.

¹² "Safety & Security of U.S. Borders: Biometrics." U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State. Accessed February 13, 2021. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/other-visa-categories/safety.html>.

¹³ Poston, Dudley L. "Here's why Trump's border wall won't work." San Antonio Express-News, January 5, 2019. <https://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/commentary/article/Here-s-why-Trump-s-border-wall-won-t-work-13509623.php>.

¹⁴ Rich Morin, "Crime Rises among Second-Generation Immigrants as They Assimilate" (Pew Research Center, July 27, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/15/crime-rises-among-second-generation-immigrants-as-they-assimilate/>.

¹⁵ Miriam Jordan, "8 Million People Are Working Illegally in the U.S. Here's Why That's Unlikely to Change.," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 11, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/11/us/undocumented-immigrant-workers.html>.

immigrants are working on lower-paying jobs, offering native-born Americans more skilled job opportunities.¹⁶

Under the MIGRANT policy, immigrants would be guaranteed jobs, increasing incentives to utilize it.¹⁷ The program would require immigrants to attend training schools, which would provide them better job opportunities later on. This training would be similar to vocational schools that cost \$4,400 for two years.¹⁸ After immigrants attend school, they would be required to pay monthly installments for four years to cover the cost of training. The government would contract private businesses to provide training to immigrants. Contractors would be paid with bank loans. Banks would be paid afterwards by workers, costing the government nothing.

Recommendations

The United States' current immigration policy does not address the issue of migration into the nation; it simply forces undocumented immigrants out. This new policy will be a comprehensive conglomeration of former policies with the improvement of a biometric entry/exit system to address the undocumented immigrants that are already present in the country. This policy would adopt temporary visas similar to the Bracero program, the legal status of immigrants from the 1986 IRCA, and training-to-job courses as the program in Fort Worth, Texas.¹⁹ Incorporating these strategies from each program gives undocumented immigrants the opportunity to gain temporary visas and eventually citizenship in the US. The MIGRANT policy can be reevaluated and monitored every three years with one year off to reinforce and correct any discrepancies.

Conclusion

There is no definitive solution to immigration policy. The proposed legislation would offer a potential pathway to citizenship for immigrants who are currently undocumented in the United States. Immigrants would receive job training, which would increase the productivity of the labor force. It would also offer a method of visa enforcement that would keep immigrants accountable and prevent visa overstayers. The MIGRANT policy provides a long-term comprehensive solution to integrate undocumented immigrants into American society.

¹⁶ Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak, "Does Immigration Create Jobs?," Yale Insights, March 30, 2017, <https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/does-immigration-create-jobs>.

¹⁷ Sadikshya Nepal, "To Pay or Not to Pay: Cost Distribution of the U.S. Employer-Based Sponsorship Model," Bipartisan Policy Center, October 15, 2020, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/to-pay-or-not-to-pay-cost-distribution-of-the-u-s-employer-based-sponsorship-model/>.

¹⁸ Staff Writers, "Vocational Trade Schools in Texas," Accredited Schools Online: Find Top-Rated Accredited Programs Online, December 10, 2020, <https://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/vocational-trade-school/texas/>.

¹⁹ Domingo Ramirez, "'I Just Wanted a Better Job,' Says Homeless Mother in New Tarrant County Jobs Program," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 9, 2019, <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/article233610762.html>.

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