
Illegal Immigration and Its Effects on American Society

Although the concept of illegal immigration has always been a hot topic amongst citizens, it has never been viewed under such a scope as it has been since the most recent presidential election. There is no doubt that illegal immigration has numerous harmful effects on American society, the economy, and crime rates in areas densely populated by illegal aliens, but many argue that the contributions and diversity that these people bring outweigh the negatives of these harmful practices. While the country seems to remain divided on the issue, many look to those in leadership positions to decide how illegal immigration should be handled by the government.

The terms “illegal immigrants,” “illegal alien,” and “undocumented immigrant/migrant” can be used interchangeably. Illegal immigration, quite simply, is when one relocates to another country with the intention of staying, and not going through the proper channels to do so legally. This can be done in a variety of ways. Some people immigrate to the United States on a tourist or study visa, but then overstay their visa without applying for an extension or alerting the government. For some, the decision to remain in the United States illegally is made after already arriving. Others apply for these visas fraudulently, with the full intent to overstay them before they even arrive. In addition to visa fraud, there are many other ways that people plan to illegally become a resident of the United States. For example, it’s quite common for non-citizens living in border towns of the United States to cross the U.S. border to give birth to their babies in America. Some people even fly in from other countries to do so – this is especially common in Asian countries. When the non-citizen’s child is born in the U.S., that child automatically becomes a U.S. citizen, and the parents then become eligible for U.S. citizenship through their child. Obtaining citizenship through these routes, although morally fraudulent, is technically legal once the birth occurs. If caught prior to the birth and one’s intentions are realized, this would be considered illegal and deportation and prosecution would occur.

Many American citizens who support illegal immigration into the United States tend to be uneducated about the matter and how it negatively impacts American society. Those with more conservative political views tend to oppose illegal immigration in all forms, and support tougher immigration laws and deportation efforts. Those with more moderate or liberal political views tend to favor immigration in all forms, arguing that immigrants make many positive contributions through their diversity to the melting pot that is America (Gravelle). America was built on the labors and diversity of immigrants, and it is important that we don’t forget the history of this. However, immigration as a concept is not the problem. Those who emigrate here legally from other countries make positive, impactful contributions to our society through cultural influence, diverse businesses, and economy-boosting activities such as starting said businesses and

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paying taxes. Rather, the issue lies that certain immigrants opt not to go through legal routes to immigrate, and end up causing more of a burden on society than we can currently handle as the government cannot even properly support all of its' legal citizens in the present climate.

It is well known that many immigrants underestimate the struggles of American life, including a high cost of living in most parts of the country. Outside of the United States, the U.S. is portrayed as a "land of wealth and opportunity," of that it is. However, even American citizens who have lived and worked here their entire life struggle to make ends meet. Those who come here from less developed and poorer countries often don't realize the capital it takes to afford things like housing, utilities, gas and groceries. In many cases, these immigrants also do not speak English well, and without a basic command of the English language and legal documents to become employed, they are left to lower-paying work, such as migrant farm work and unskilled labor. In some cases, they resort to crime and selling drugs to make enough to support their families. In other cases, in addition to or in lieu of their wages, they rely on government welfare obtained with fraudulent social security numbers and identification to sustain themselves, which becomes a problem for the economy. If a potential immigrant does not have any family or friends in the United States, many will obtain credit from human smuggling organizations in order to afford to come to the U.S. illegally. They work to pay off this debt, or risk being outed to the government (Djajic).

Another main issue is the crime that comes along with illegal immigration. As mentioned previously, some undocumented immigrants resort to selling drugs, joining gangs, and other crimes, such as money laundering, in order to financially survive. Recently, a woman named Jeanette Vizguerra, a Mexican citizen who came to the United States illegally with the intention of remaining as an illegal alien. She was featured in the New York Times this past February, telling her story about how she refuses to leave the United States despite the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) refusing to extend her stay of deportation. She has committed multiple misdemeanor crimes during her twenty or so years in the United States, including driving with expired vehicle registration, forging false social security documents, and crossing the border into the U.S. illegally – twice. She also gave birth to multiple children during her time here as an undocumented immigrant, and these children are now American citizens, although Jeanette's partner, the children's father, is also a non-citizen. Jeanette is being sheltered in a church basement to avoid deportation after she skipped her routine check-in with I.C.E. and received a warrant for her arrest and deportation (North). Many are arguing that her "small" crimes do not fit the punishment of tearing apart an American family – however, she should not have been hiding out in the country illegally in the first place. A crime is a crime, and although her crimes could be considered quite minor in comparison to some of the brutal small and large-scale domestic terrorist acts committed by other illegal aliens, the government's priority is to deport those who are here illegally with criminal records.

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So, with such a broad spectrum of opinions, what is the solution to ending illegal immigration in the United States? There are more undocumented immigrants in the United States from Mexico than from any other country. Although the number of illegal immigrants from Mexico in the U.S. has declined by more than one million since 2007, Mexicans still make up about half of America's illegal immigrants (Gonzales-Barrera & Krogstad). It is suspected that this is due to weaker borders along the southwest United States, plus the ability to travel to the U.S. from Mexico by foot. Recent polls indicate that 53% of Americans polled favor police questioning immigration status at routine traffic stops, and 86% of Americans polled desire comprehensive immigration reform (Matthews, Robertson & Martin). Many people argue that requirements for immigrants to come to America legally are too lengthy and tedious, and that the end justifies the means. One must ask in response to this – is this the attitude we want our country's citizens, and our children and future generations, to uphold?

There's no questioning the immense cultural, educational and economic opportunities that exist in the United States as a result of the last several hundred years of immigration. It is important to remember that immigration is not the problem in America. Rather, Americans must come together in support of our government and our Constitution and find a way to ensure that immigration is productive, healthy, and a positive addition to our economy and society. We must remove people from the country who are causing harm to their communities by committing crimes and welfare fraud, and reward legal immigration with incentives for completing the process in this manner.

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