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Immigration Reform for the American Worker

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Introduction

Among the myriad of problems facing the United States, immigration is the one that will determine the fate of the nation. Currently, there is a gap in the academic literature on immigration policy. The body of literature now depends on the assumption that the United States is an economic zone that requires the infinite free flow of migrants to continue sustained GDP growth. Few researchers study the long-term effects of immigration on native workers, their wages, and prosperity. The United States must consider its people first in all economic decisions, something it has not done regarding immigration policy.

Immigration policy in the United States has taken many different forms since the nation's inception. The Naturalization Act of 1790 allowed citizenship to white immigrants—of Western European descent—who lived in the new country for at least two years. It also granted citizenship to the children of citizens born abroad. This precedent remained for more than 150 years until the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965. Before the passage of that act, the United States system of immigration was restrictive in nature. Congress passed the act as part of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" policy program of the 1960s. The "Great Society" reforms introduced sweeping liberal reforms to the United States government and way of life. The justification for these reforms centered around the idea that America was changing and needed to lean into the liberal reforms of the government. Embracing its role as a global superpower in the new world that emerged after World War II, the United States changed from a domestically focused immigration system to a system that favors international migration and globalism.

United States immigration policy has been oriented towards making the nation a global force for equal economic opportunity. When the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act was passed, immigration policy was restrictive. The legislation modified the requirements for residency. This action had a profound impact on the trajectory of the United States, as it drastically altered the character of the nation. While mass immigration may have been helpful in an era where globalization seemed inevitable, the United States must re-evaluate its national economic goals in a time of political uncertainty.

Immigration has no simple solution. As polarization and income inequality increase in the United States, a palatable bipartisan reform seems ever more unlikely. Congress is disinterested in lowering immigration caps and halting the massive influx of immigrants into the U.S. each year. Since 2005, the United States has welcomed over a million people on average each year to live and work in the United States.¹ Additionally, an estimated 11.4 million illegal aliens reside within

¹ "Table 1. Persons Obtaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1820 to 2019," Department of Homeland Security, September 16, 2020, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/table1>.

United States Borders.² These numbers continue to grow, despite the seismic economic and political shift in the American economy because of the Covid-19 pandemic and related policies.

The current status quo for immigration is unsustainable. Immigration reform and specific measures should be enacted. Otherwise, the status quo could lead America towards irreversible social and economic conditions.

Regulatory History

In theory, the Hart-Cellar Act addressed racism in the immigration system. As noted in the introduction, the government was transforming society by mandating equality; thus, it was logical that the immigration system would also get reformed. Before Hart-Cellar, the immigration system operated off a country-of-origin quota. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 was instituted to limit immigration after the “Great Wave” at the beginning of the twentieth century. It directed nearly 70 percent of immigration slots to Northern Europeans, cut back on eastern and southern European immigration, and wholly excluded Africa and Asia. It left immigration open to the Western Hemisphere. That policy had a clear rationale and focus. Hart-Cellar did not. Its only aim was to promote universal, equal access to the American labor market, which set the stage for decades of disaster in immigration policy.

Hart-Cellar ended the quota-based immigration system and opened the United States system to the world. The only goal was to end the quota; however, there were no other goals or focus beyond this. President Johnson made vague rhetoric about uniting families and bringing new skills to America. He faced little opposition in Congress. His most vigorous opposition came from labor groups. Myra Hacker, a member of the New Jersey Coalition, gave a strong argument against the bill in a Senate hearing. She said,

In light of our 5 percent unemployment rate, our worries over the so-called population explosion, and our menacingly mounting welfare costs, are we prepared to embrace so great a horde of the world’s unfortunates? At the very least, the hidden mathematics of the bill should be made clear to the public so that they may tell their congressman how they feel about providing jobs, schools, homes, security against want, citizen education, and a brotherly welcome

² Bryan Baker, “Population Estimates Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in The,” 2021, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/Pop_Estimate/UnauthImmigrant/unauthorized_immigrant_population_estimates_2015_-_2018.pdf.

... for an indeterminately enormous number of aliens from underprivileged lands.³

The Democratic Party ignored these legitimate concerns and steamrolled the legislation through Congress. The Democratic Party perceived the policy as an extension of the Civil Rights Act. These are two fundamentally different issues. Equality of vote and opportunity for black Americans is an issue so far removed from the immigration system. Without proper consideration for native workers, particularly newly integrated black Americans, Congress passed a blanket bill that created our current immigration crisis.

Policy actions after Hart-Cellar sought to address the structural issues created by that bill. The subsequent large-scale government action on immigration was the Immigration and Control Act of 1986. This omnibus immigration bill tried to enhance enforcement while granting amnesty to illegal immigrants that had entered the country in the wake of the population boom in Latin America. Amnesty requirements were twofold. First, illegals had to have maintained a residence in the country since January 1982 or must have completed 90 days of agricultural work between May 1985 and May 1986. Around 3 million people were amnestied under the legislation.⁴ The cost that the American people bore was immense. David Simcox estimated that about 1.66 million legalized workers, 70 percent of whom were unskilled, displaced an average of 187,000 citizens, including many legal permanent residents, jobs each year.⁵

Immigration was still an issue to be solved by 1990. Many bills sought to rectify the problems caused Hart-Cellar and new issues that resulted from amnesty, while at the same time, measures were enacted to curtail illegal immigration. The 1990 Immigration Act increased the amount of new legal permanent residents to 700,000 per year, a forty percent increase, effectively doubling employment-based immigration. It also created the immigration lottery system, which allowed countries with lower immigration to the United States to immigrate here.

During Clinton's administration, Congress attempted large-scale action to curtail illegal immigration; however, these actions were largely ineffective. Legal and unlawful labor alike continued to flood the market. A Republican Congress and the Clinton administration created the NAFTA free trade agreement, costing many American citizens their jobs.⁶ As many industries were leaving the United States

³ U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Committee on the Judiciary, Washington, D.C., February 10, 1965, pp. 681-687

⁴ David Simcox and John L. Martin, "The Costs of Immigration," CIS.org, 2018, <https://cis.org/Report/Costs-Immigration>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert E. Scott, "The Effects of NAFTA on US Trade, Jobs, and Investment, 1993-2013," *Review of Keynesian Economics* 2, no. 4 (2014): 429-41, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/elg/rokejn/v2y2014i4p429-441.html>.

(and taking hundreds of thousands of jobs with them), hundreds of thousands of migrants were coming into the United States. This created the displacement of the American worker that is central to the current malaise facing the country.

In 1996, Congress passed The Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which boosted border security and hired more border patrol agents. It allowed state police officers to enforce immigration law within their jurisdiction. These policies were beneficial to the country; taking steps to secure the border always is. However, these did not deter high amounts of legal immigration. The United States set records for immigrant inflow in the 1990s.⁷ Growing dissatisfaction among native workers propelled men like Pat Buchanan, a Republican for President, to the center of the political world by highlighting the negative impact that increasing immigration levels would have on the American people.

Legislative efforts in the 2000s never sought to control the labor market properly. President Bush came into office with the intent of reforming the immigration system, but he'd spent all his political capital on the failed war in Iraq. Congress and the Executive branch created legislation that would attempt to secure the border, but unfortunately, the bill was another large-scale amnesty project. Pressure from constituents killed legislation like the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, which would have provided amnesty to millions of illegal aliens and flooded the labor market.

The 2000s saw the federal government take a more active role in regulating immigration. In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States created the Department of Homeland Security. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was created under this department. Some successes of the Bush-era immigration policy include the "Secure Communities" program and the expansion of 287(g). The Secure Communities program is targeted at identifying removable noncitizens from the United States.⁸ Secure Communities created a "virtual presence in every jail" – meaning that local law enforcement participates in the deportation of criminal illegal aliens – and allows federal immigration authorities to intervene in alien criminal cases.⁹ Johnson et al. write, "According to ICE, when the program ended in 2014 more than 283,000 noncitizens convicted of crimes had been removed through Secure Communities. Since its reactivation in 2017, ICE reports that "more than 43,300 convicted criminal aliens have been

⁷ "Table 1. Persons Obtaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1820 to 2019," Department of Homeland Security, September 16, 2020, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/table1>.

⁸ Kevin R Johnson et al., *Understanding Immigration Law* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2019), 204.

⁹ (Ibid., 204)

removed as a result of Secure Communities.”¹⁰ Likewise, section 287(g) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 is a program to curtail illegal immigration.¹¹ Johnson et. al write, “This provision authorizes the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to enter into agreements, known as Memorandum of Agreement (“MOA”), with state and local law enforcement agencies.”¹² The program authorizes state and local law enforcement to assume nearly all of ICE’s enforcement power.¹³

Action during the Obama Administration years accelerated the problem of immigration. President Barack Obama promised large-scale immigration reform during his 2008 presidential campaign. However, even with a supermajority in the Senate and a large majority in the House, he could not accomplish anything through legislation. He would eventually utilize prosecutorial discretion to halt the deportation of childhood arrivals through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In 2013, Republican and Democratic Senators took up a massive immigration overhaul. The “Gang of Eight”¹⁴ – a bipartisan group of eight US Senators from the Democratic and Republican Party – sought to provide amnesty to roughly 11 million illegal aliens who have taken up residence in the United States. The legislation also sought to increase legal migration into the U.S. Despite these negative aspects of the bill, the proposed enforcement measures were a major highlight.¹⁵

Obama-era immigration policy had significant effects on the direction of the country. He intended to enact historic immigration reform, something President Bush had been unable to get Congress to do. Unfortunately, his enforcement measures were too hawkish for liberals and not hawkish enough for conservatives. His immigration reform attempt failed and set the stage for the 2016 election.

Groups of American citizens felt that the immigration system needed to be changed, and they expressed that sentiment by electing an outsider to fix the problem. It is no wonder that President Donald Trump, who made immigration the centerpiece of his 2016 presidential campaign, won the election. The Trump administration made significant progress in securing the southern border, funding

¹⁰ (Ibid., 204-205).

¹¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(G) Immigration and Nationality Act,” www.ice.gov, 2022, <https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g>.

¹² Kevin R Johnson et al., *Understanding Immigration Law* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2019), 202.

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ The ‘Gang of Eight’ consists of four Republican Party Senators, and four Democratic Party Senators. Together, they wrote the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013.

¹⁵ These highlights are discussed in the “Introduction to the Alternatives Section” under “Option 1: Status quo with strict law enforcement.”

executive agencies tasked with enforcing immigration law, bolstering enforcement measures, and reducing the number of illegals staying in the country. Trump made significant progress in improving the broken immigration system¹⁶, but like each of his predecessors, he could not coax Congress to enact immigration reform.

Meaningful and sustainable immigration reform seems highly unlikely in the future, especially under the Biden administration. Since assuming power, the current regime has overseen a record number of border encounters. While legal immigration is surging, illegal immigration continues to be a dramatic problem for the United States. Southwest land border encounters numbered 1.7 million in 2021, up from 458,088 in 2020.¹⁷ Biden campaigned on a laissez-faire approach to border security. Potential economic migrants perceived that they would be allowed to enter the country under the Biden administration; they were right in this assumption. On their first full day in office, the Biden administration decided that they would no longer enforce deportations of migrants.¹⁸ Because of the Biden administration's reckless immigration rhetoric, the situation at the Southwest Border is out of control.

Immigration reform is necessary considering the regulatory history surrounding the immigration system. Congress has been unable to create a system that works for American citizens and potential migrants. A compromise between Republicans and Democrats has been impeded by the current policies relating to the border. Illegal immigration must be ceased, and law enforcement must be equipped to tackle the problem.

Policy Problem

Overview

The issue with the current status quo on immigration is the lack of clearly defined goals. Immigration is an issue that requires immediate attention. Comprehensive reform of the immigration system is unlikely, as most necessary measures will be

¹⁶ Ben Fox, "Trump Leaves Mark on Immigration Policy, Some of It Lasting," AP NEWS, December 30, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-donald-trump-politics-immigration-united-states-a5bfcbea280a468b431a02e82c15a150>.

¹⁷ Customs and Border Patrol, "Southwest Land Border Encounters," U.S. Customs and Border Protection, November 15, 2021, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.

¹⁸ Department of Homeland Security, "Review of and Interim Revision to Civil Immigration Enforcement and Removal Policies and Priorities," Department of Homeland Security, January 21, 2021, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/21_0120_enforcement-memo_signed.pdf.

politically infeasible; however, efforts to protect native workers should be palatable to both sides of the political aisle.

Labor-force participation among natives has been steadily declining for decades, while their wage growth has remained static since the 1970s. Immigration is not the direct cause of income inequality, but it is a contributing factor. Overall, native workers – defined as citizens and legal permanent residents in the United States, which includes all major demographic groups – are seeing a reduction in quality of life, while the immigrant share of the population and labor force is steadily rising.

Status quo immigration policy currently negatively impacts both low-skilled and high-skilled native workers. We must define the primary policy necessity in this area. The current system is being exploited. U.S. Code has clear restrictions on when aliens can enter the United States. 8 USC 1182: Inadmissible aliens stipulates when workers are allowed in the United States. The text states:

(5) Labor certification and qualifications for certain immigrants:

(A) Labor certification

(i) In general

Any alien who seeks to enter the United States for the purpose of performing skilled or unskilled labor is inadmissible, unless the Secretary of Labor has determined and certified to the Secretary of State and the Attorney General that-

(I) there are not sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified (or equally qualified in the case of an alien described in clause (ii)) and available at the time of application for a visa and admission to the United States and at the place where the alien is to perform such skilled or unskilled labor, and

(II) the employment of such alien will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed.¹⁹

Currently, the United States is experiencing an extreme labor shortage due to the recent pandemic policies. However, more than 5 million American citizens are jobless and seeking work.²⁰ While there is a labor shortage, many Americans are

¹⁹ “8 U.S. Code § 1182 - Inadmissible Aliens,” LII / Legal Information Institute, n.d., <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1182>.

²⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The Employment Situation - January 2022,” *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Bureau Of Labor Statistics, February 4, 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf>.

out of the labor force. Should policymakers rectify the deficiency by bringing in more foreign workers? Or tapping into an increasingly dissatisfied labor force?

Further, if the U.S. wants to address the labor shortage through immigration, it must only do so in specific industries requiring high-skilled labor. The status quo system prioritizing family-based migration – a remnant of the Hart-Cellar act – and low-skilled labor does a disservice to the national economy. Current policy does not adequately address the economic problems that America is facing.

In illegal immigration, the problem seems to be law enforcement. Unlawful entry into the United States is evident in the law; the problem is that law enforcement is too ill-equipped to enforce those laws. The United States immigration system is heavily regulated. Currently, the regulations surrounding hiring illegal aliens are strict but not enforced. This is due to apathy from the government and private firms willingly breaking the law. The government has essentially declared that it will not crack down on visa overstays and fix the loopholes in the amnesty system because the system is overwhelmed. Immigration Detention and deportation are costly.

Further, there are not enough resources within the immigration courts system to handle the nearly two million pending immigration cases.²¹ The Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency, which operates as part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and enforces immigration law, needs more funding to do its job effectively. The Trump administration obtained recured funding for ICE operations, securing over \$1.5 billion more per fiscal year for the agency than under the Obama administration.²² The Biden administration, despite campaigning on a soft immigration policy, has maintained Trump-era funding for ICE.²³ Policymakers should expect the ICE budget to increase in the future to ensure that immigration law enforcement can do their jobs effectively.

Additionally, law enforcement has a social stigma, particularly at the U.S.-Mexico border. ICE is routinely criticized as the “American Gestapo,” tasked with throwing out families and locking children in cages. Officials should not have to worry about funding or perception when performing their jobs, which is occurring.

Market Failure in Immigration

Economic theory suggests that individuals and firms alike will act to maximize their profit. Because of the lapse in law enforcement described above, private firms that operate via low-skilled, low-educated labor are incentivized to employ illegal

²¹ Syracuse University, “TRAC Immigration - Comprehensive, Independent, and Nonpartisan Information about Immigration Enforcement,” Syr.edu, 2019, <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/>.

²² Speaking Security, “Biden Wants More Money for ICE than Trump,” Speaking Security, June 1, 2021, <https://stephensemle.substack.com/p/biden-wants-more-money-for-ice-than?s=r>.

²³ Ibid.,

aliens. Firms that require a higher educated workforce are also incentivized to hire immigrants due to their ability to pay them lower wages.²⁴ Firms simply respond to labor market conditions, allowing them to pay immigrant employees less than their native counterparts with similar education levels. Economic policy in the United States revolves around making firms profitable. We should care about the long-term viability of businesses and celebrate them making a profit. Economic policy should also facilitate a healthy labor market for this country's people.

The Rationale for Public Policy

Although immigration may have some net positive effect on GDP and economic output,²⁵ the economic landscape is shifting in three ways. First, wages have stagnated for several decades.²⁶ Secondly, the economy has almost completely transformed from a manufacturing economy to a service economy.²⁷ Employment opportunities are shifting from permanent to temporary employment. Katz and Krueger published a study in 2018 and discovered that a shocking 94% of the jobs added from 2005 to 2015 were from alternative work arrangements (temporary or secondary jobs).²⁸ Thirdly, the Covid-19 pandemic radically disrupted the global supply chain and domestic production. Millions of Americans are unemployed, and millions more have decided to stop looking for work.²⁹ The greater the quantity supplied of labor, mainly an amount provided that can be afforded at a lower price, the greater the propensity for labor shocks to occur. This adversely affects wages and labor force participation. Now is the time to attempt healthy regulation of immigration.

²⁴ Ron Hira, "New Data Show How Firms like Infosys and Tata Abuse the H-1B Program," Economic Policy Institute, February 19, 2015, <https://www.epi.org/blog/new-data-infosys-tata-abuse-h-1b-program/>.

²⁵ George J. Borjas, "Immigration and Economic Growth," www.nber.org, May 13, 2019, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25836>.

²⁶ John Schmitt, Elise Gould, and Josh Bivens, "America's Slow-Motion Wage Crisis: Four Decades of Slow and Unequal Growth," Economic Policy Institute, 2018, <https://www.epi.org/publication/americas-slow-motion-wage-crisis-four-decades-of-slow-and-unequal-growth-2/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Lawrence F. Katz and Alan B. Krueger, "The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995–2015," *ILR Review* 72, no. 2 (December 19, 2018): 382–416, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793918820008>.

²⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation - January 2022," *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Bureau Of Labor Statistics, February 4, 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf>.

Immigrants make up a sizable share of the current labor market. As of 2022, there are 46.6 million immigrants, legal and illegal, living in the United States.³⁰ The immigrant share of the population is 14.2%, the highest level in 112 years.³¹ According to some economists, the rise in immigration is directly tied to the drop in real wages that the United States has experienced. Harvard Economist, George Borjas, conducted a study that found immigration reduced the annual earnings of native-born men by an estimated \$1700, or 4 percent.³² Among high school dropouts, the poorest part of the workforce, a 7.4% reduction in wages was measured.³³ Native-born college graduates, a group generally thought to be safe from the effects of immigration, have experienced a 3.6% drop in income due to competition with immigrants.³⁴ The same study found that the mere presence of immigrants, regardless of legal status, reduced the wages of natives.³⁵ Groups most adversely affected by private hiring practices are low-skilled natives, particularly of black and Hispanic origin. The study also concluded that without Mexican immigration during the 1980s and 1990s, the wage decrease for lower educated workers would have been significantly reduced.³⁶ Low-skilled workers have mainly been displaced from the labor market because of immigration.

Patrick S. Turner, in his 2018 publication “Three Essays on Migration and Public Policy,” discovered that wages within high-skilled, high-educated labor markets are adversely affected by immigration. That study found that STEM graduates experienced a 4 to 12 percent decrease in wages relative to non-STEM workers because of immigrant labor. This adversely affects native-born and even immigrant salaries and participation in the labor market, which the Covid-19 pandemic has further damaged.³⁷ In 2020, native-born workers with a bachelor’s degree and higher earned *less* than their foreign-born counterparts with the same education level. Natives earned a weekly median income of \$1,409, while immigrant workers earned \$1,492.³⁸

³⁰ Steven Camarota and Karen Zeigler, “Foreign-Born Population Hits Record 46.6 Million in January 2022,” CIS.org, February 23, 2022, <https://cis.org/Camarota/ForeignBorn-Population-Hits-Record-466-Million-January-2022>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² George Borjas, “Center for Immigration Studies Increasing the Supply of Labor through Immigration Measuring the Impact on Native-Born Workers,” 2004, <https://cis.org/sites/cis.org/files/articles/2004/back504.pdf>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Patrick McHugh, “The Employment Situation of Immigrants and Natives in May 2021,” CIS.org, July 19, 2021, <https://cis.org/Report/Employment-Situation-Immigrants-and-Natives-May-2021>.

³⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “FOREIGN-BORN WORKERS: LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS,” 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>.

To be sure, there is justification for high-skilled immigrants out-earning natives. We must not place an undue burden on high-skilled migrants: they undoubtedly add value to industry and economic growth. Policymakers need to remember that they serve the people of the United States, and that policy should be *to their benefit*. US citizens' well-being must be accounted for within immigration policy. Our policy goals should balance high-skilled labor and American workers' rights.

Additionally, the United States should be concerned with how low-skilled migrants are treated. Their labor is exploited, and they have no bargaining power. They enter a market and are forced to work for less to compete for existing positions. Their lives are filled with fear that legal or illegal status could be arbitrarily revoked. Should we continue utilizing foreign labor? Should they be subject to a poorer quality of life? What types of immigrants do we want in the country? Should we prioritize merit-based immigration over family-based immigration? These are legitimate concerns that must be addressed.

In summation, immigration must be limited due to its effect on native-born workers. The economic situation is deteriorating rapidly for many Americans. The immigration system does not adequately care for the welfare of immigrants either. Many high-skilled workers face tremendous challenges in assimilating into society. Low-skilled workers are subject to a poorer quality of life than their legalized counterparts. Immigration policy must reflect these realities and adapt to the moment.

Role of the State and Marketplace

Responsibility for protecting labor markets does not solely fall upon private firms, but they should be acting in favor of the native-born population. Labor market access, a rivalrous good, must be restricted to native-born Americans and legal immigrants – although that number should be a small minority of the market. Ideally, the market would rectify this issue by simply refusing to hire labor from other countries. However, private firms still seek out immigrant labor,³⁹ indicating that firms will not change their practices unless incentivized. De-regulation is not an option in this instance, as we would expect firms to solely gravitate towards cheaper labor and completely alienate entire populations from the market.

Essentially, the market is not allowing American workers to have control over the labor market. This negatively affects native workers, particularly low-skilled workers. As part of the legal citizenry, they should have preferential access

³⁹ This is an inferential assumption. If no one was hiring immigrants, we would assume to see a massive decrease in immigration almost instantly. The fact that there is a steady flow of migrants continuously indicates that firms have not changed their practices. Therefore, firms are just as responsible as the government for failure in this area.

to the labor market, including competitive wages that encourage a decent standard of living.

The market cannot generally be blamed for the current immigration problem. As stated above, firms respond to phenomena in the same way individuals react to changes in different sectors. The market must be incentivized or coerced by the government to act differently; otherwise, they will continue to outsource their labor. It is ultimately the government's responsibility to facilitate specific changes in the labor market. The author agrees that the government must take an active regulatory and distributive role; however, the solution requires participation from the private sector.

Towards a Private and Public Solution

Therefore, what is required is an attitude shift towards the immigration crisis from the public and private sectors. The legislation will be restrictive but must not be framed as if the United States is exclusionary and nativistic. Instead, it should be framed as helping native workers achieve their rightful share of power in this country. This requires participation from private firms. For the economy to work for American citizens, there must be a reduction in foreign labor competing against domestic workers. Workers must be given competitive and fair wages. The marketplace will undoubtedly have a significant role to play.

Policy Framing

There are three common justifications for sustained immigration levels. The first is that immigrants perform jobs that Americans will not perform. Prominent politicians and think tanks highlight this as a defense of mass immigration. In a 2017 piece attacking President Trump's immigration policies, the Brookings Institution ran an article defending mass immigration. Brennan Hoban, a policy analyst for Brookings, claimed that immigrants perform jobs that Americans are unwilling to do because they are manual labor jobs.⁴⁰ This is a common misconception about the labor market that is frequently cited as justification for sustaining current immigration levels. If it were the case that immigrants make up a larger share of manual labor jobs, we would be able to identify sectors of the economy that rely predominantly on immigrant labor; however, there is no clear indication that this is the case.

⁴⁰ Brennan Hoban, "Do Immigrants 'Steal' Jobs from American Workers?," Brookings (Brookings, August 24, 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2017/08/24/do-immigrants-steal-jobs-from-american-workers/>.

Camarota, Richwine, and Ziegler point out that of the 474 civilian occupations in the United States, only six are majority immigrants.⁴¹ The six occupations in which immigrant labor is a majority account for only 1 percent of the total U.S. workforce. The six occupations are housekeepers and maids, taxi drivers/chauffeurs, butchers and meat processors, grounds maintenance workers, construction laborers, and janitors. Native workers account for 46 percent of workers in these occupations.⁴² This misconception about the American worker has potentially damaging impacts on how specific industries are viewed in the U.S. Further, it treats immigrants as objects and not as people. The idea that jobs are beneath American citizens and that these roles should be filled by immigrants who presumably do not care about their dignity is not in line with the founding principles of our country. Our immigration policy must reflect that we value the satisfaction of our citizens, that we love hard work and industry, and that we do not view migrants as a tool to be exploited.

The second justification for sustained immigration is that it can solve declining fertility rates in the United States. The CDC reports, “In 2020, 3,613,647 births were registered in the United States, down 4% from 2019. The number of births has declined by 2% per year since 2014. Before that year, the number of births declined steadily from 2007 to 2013. The number of births in 2020 is the lowest since 1980.”⁴³ Decreasing fertility rates are indicative of more significant problems within the United States that are outside the purview of this work. Fertility rates are highlighted to show lawmakers that the welfare of the American people must be taken care of before we support a completely open-door immigration policy again.

Immigration is commonly cited as a remedy for the country's current issues. For example, Giovanni Peri of the International Monetary Fund argued that immigration would solve the twofold problem of fertility and economic stagnation.⁴⁴ Peri rightly recognizes that fertility is a significant problem for the global North. He writes, “From a demographic point of view, therefore, an increase in immigration flows, especially of young people, to advanced economies in the North seems desirable. It would reduce population decline, keep the size of the labor force from shrinking, improve age dependency ratios, and produce positive fiscal gains. From a policy standpoint, this means increasing the number of immigrants

⁴¹ (Steven Camarota, Jason Richwine, and Karen Zeigler, “There Are No Jobs Americans Won’t Do,” CIS.org, 2018, <https://cis.org/Report/There-Are-No-Jobs-Americans-Wont-Do>).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Michelle Osterman et al., “Births: Final Data for 2020 Number of Births (Millions) Rate Number,” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 70, no. 17 (2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr70/nvsr70-17.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Giovanni Peri, “Can Immigration Solve the Demographic Dilemma? – IMF F&D,” www.imf.org, March 2020, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/03/can-immigration-solve-the-demographic-dilemma-peri.htm>.

allowed, reducing other constraints on immigration, and planning for future inflows.”⁴⁵ It must be stressed that in the short term, this is true. Immigrants offer economic benefits and seemingly ease the problems caused by an aging society.

However, the decline in fertility rate and desire to participate in the labor force indicate significant social problems facing the United States. These problems naturally emerge as societies change in form and decline. We see within these crises that people have given up on self-continuation. Why? They see no purpose in it. The West is in terminal decline. People are unhealthy, hopeless, unhappy, addicted to various substances, and without aim or purpose. Deaths of despair – deaths by suicide and overdose – are higher than ever.^{46,47} There is no reason to assume that future immigrants will not face these same problems. It must be stressed that immigration does not solve the underlying issues that caused declining birth rates amongst citizens; it may exacerbate the problem.⁴⁸

The third justification for sustained immigration is that immigration benefits American citizens. Borjas somewhat confirmed this in his *Immigration and Economic Growth* paper in 2019. Borjas suggests that immigration has little effect on the native population in the short run; however, the literature does not account for the long-term earnings and welfare of natives. In 2020, foreign-born full-time and salary workers' median wages were \$885 per week. Alien workers earned 88.5 percent of the making of native workers, who made a median income of \$1,000 per week.⁴⁹ As noted above, migrants with a bachelor's or higher earn more than their native counterparts.⁵⁰ Immigrants can expect to acquire far more in the United States than in their home countries. Who is benefitting from this system? Businesses that utilize low-skilled labor are certainly benefitting. In low-skilled sectors, they can hire cheaper labor to maximize profits. What about industries that utilize high-skilled labor? Migrants make more than natives in those sectors. Businesses and immigrants are the primary beneficiaries of the current immigration policy, not the American worker. American citizens lose in the long run under the status quo immigration policy.

⁴⁵ (Ibid.)

⁴⁶ CDC, “Drug Overdose Deaths Remain High,” www.cdc.gov, June 1, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>.

⁴⁷ CDC, “FastStats - Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>.

⁴⁸ George J. Borjas, “Yes, Immigration Hurts American Workers,” *POLITICO Magazine*, October 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/09/trump-clinton-immigration-economy-unemployment-jobs-214216/>.

⁴⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “FOREIGN-BORN WORKERS: LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS,” 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “FOREIGN-BORN WORKERS: LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS,” 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>.

Over the last few decades, domestic industries have been ruthlessly pilfered by globalization. Manufacturing industries, and the jobs that came with it, have been shipped overseas, while the wealth generated by the production of manufactured goods stays in the country. The American way of life has been permanently altered. This paper highlights this issue not encouraging an anachronistic return to, for example, producing massive amounts of steel in the United States, although that should occur in some industries. Offshoring is not an inherently evil thing. The problem is that once the industries left the United States, nothing replaced them. Americans have lost the ability to contribute to their economy. It behooves us to ask, what good does it do for Americans to bring more immigrants into the United States while economic opportunity becomes increasingly scarce? This question should drive our immigration policy.

Therefore, we must encourage our people to become industrious and prosperous. We can do several things within policy to promote this – such as utilizing the university education system to train people to adapt to the modern economy, deporting illegal aliens to make unskilled work attractive to the unskilled labor force, reindustrializing the Midwest again, etc. An economy that works for its people and produces its goods and services should be of much higher value than sustained GDP growth. During the COVID crisis, the flaws within our economic structure became apparent. Continuing status quo immigration policy will exacerbate these problems, as it has in the last few decades.

A new framing of immigration policy requires consideration of the needs of the American people. Too much of the debate revolves around the benefit given to immigrants and businesses. Policymakers must consider the needs of the American worker first, as they do not have a say in how immigration policy is enacted. Under a new framing, goals will be clearly defined, and there will have to be a direct benefit given to native workers first. Our goals must revolve around enhancing the quality of life of the American people. The United States' economic goals revolve around sustainability and prosperity. Stopping mass migration will undoubtedly contribute to a sustainable economy and assure that the American people obtain a larger share of U.S. prosperity.

Policy Goals

Overview

A contemporary immigration policy must be built around added value to the native population. Population growth, economic welfare, and social cohesion must be evaluated when crafting immigration policy. Rather than importing people, the country needs stable population growth based on “America first” principles. A

healthy economy with competitive wages allows families to thrive, and a shared culture creates a high-trust society. These principles have not been considered under current policy. They have been ignored for decades. The goal of the high-skilled labor market must be to ensure that high-skilled native workers are hired first and that Americans are equipped to work in the modern economy. Only after the American labor supply is exhausted should immigration be considered an alternative. Visas should be allocated on a merit basis, predicated on potential value added to the United States economy. Current policy dictates that family reunification be the primary factor in legal status allocation. Though noble in theory, the concept does little to add value to the American way of life and keeps potentially beneficial immigration from coming to the United States. In summation, the goal of our immigration policy should be to serve native workers first.

Goals

With this in mind, we must ask what type of policies should govern immigration? There must be specific metrics that govern our approach in the future. As described in the overview of this section, the current policy does not have clearly defined goals. There is no value-added measurement to the United States other than economic output. Economic output is significant, but it is not the only metric. Further, there are different ways of measuring economic output and efficiency.

Therefore, our first goal will be to measure the welfare of the American worker. This goal will be the *benefit to natives*. To preserve the prosperity of the United States, the labor market must protect native workers and their livelihood. If we bring in new workers, we must bring them based on their value-added to the U.S. This is the most critical measure of a sound immigration policy. We define *benefit to natives* as the most beneficial policy to the American worker.

Second, after evaluating the treatment of native workers, we will then focus on *economic output*. The United States, despite the flaws in the economic system, is still a powerful financial machine. A sound immigration policy will consider and advocate for a policy that sustains American prosperity.

Third, the *fiscal effects* of immigration will be analyzed. Importing new people to the country puts an undue burden on the American taxpayer. Should they shoulder the costs incurred from allowing new people into the country? A robust analysis should include a cost analysis of immigrants on the taxpayer.

Finally, we will measure *political feasibility*. Immigration policy is enacted by Congress and enforced by the Executive branch. Politically speaking, the status quo appears very safe. A hyperpolarized Congress and a left-leaning DHS will not be very inclined to change their ways. There will be a theme of low immediate political feasibility within these proposals, with variance based upon the strictness

of the immigration policy. These goals provide a valuable framework for assessing the effectiveness of potential policy choices.

Having created plans for our policy, we will introduce our analysis of the status quo and recommendations for possible change.

Introduction to the Alternatives

Option 1: Status Quo with Strict Law Enforcement

American immigration law is clear. Illegal immigration is criminal, and exploiting the legal system is punishable by deportation. In many ways, the policy is already settled. Despite this, the political influence on federal institutions and state law enforcement agencies has prevented law enforcement from effectively performing their jobs. Law enforcement should not be afraid of backlash for enforcing the law. A nation without borders is not a nation. If there is to be a compromise on visa quotas, which will be needed in reforming the immigration system, there must be increased support for immigration law enforcement.

A study by the National Research Council estimated that the average immigrant household receives \$13,325 per year in federal spending while paying \$10,644 in federal taxes – a deficit of \$2,700 per household.⁵¹ The data includes benefits paid to U.S.-born children living in households headed by immigrants. Education level has a significant effect on the fiscal burden that immigrants impose. If an immigrant drops out of high school, their net budgetary drain (calculated as taxes paid minus services used) is around \$89,000 for their lifetime; for those that finish High School, their net drain was \$31,000.⁵²

The fiscal effects of illegal immigration on taxpayers are massive. Steven A. Camarota studied the costs that illicit migrants pose on taxpayers. Based upon fiscal estimates of immigrants by education level from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS), the findings concluded that there is a net fiscal drain of \$65,292 per illegal-excluding any costs for their children. The report calculated a total lifetime fiscal drain of \$746.3 billion from illegal immigration. That figure is based on the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants estimated to be in the country at the time of the report being published.⁵³ These estimates were based upon “net present value” (NPV), which the NAS used in their research. The report states,

⁵¹ National Research Council, “The New Americans, Table 6.4, Page 283.,” 1997.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Steven Camarota, “Deportation vs. the Cost of Letting Illegal Immigrants Stay,” CIS.org, August 3, 2017, <https://cis.org/Report/Deportation-vs-Cost-Letting-Illegal-Immigrants-Stay#2>.

This approach (NPV) has the effect of reducing the size of the net fiscal drain that unskilled immigrants create because costs or benefits years from now are valued less relative to more direct costs. If the NPV concept is not used, the actual net lifetime fiscal cost of illegal immigrants is likely \$120,000 to \$130,000 per illegal alien, or between \$1.4 and \$1.5 trillion for the entire illegal alien population, excluding descendants.⁵⁴

More vigorous enforcement would essentially follow President Trump's immigration policy proposal. Measures include strengthening physical border security, hiring more personnel to deal with the border and interior enforcement, strengthening programs such as "Secure Communities" and 287(g) that allow for the government to enforce the law on immigration, and increasing funding to executive agencies to perform their duty to implement the direction of the United States. These policies should have bipartisan support in Congress.

The problem of visa overstays is growing. Immigrants must be held accountable for breaking the law, and immigration courts must be made more efficient to deal with the growing number of immigration cases. Tied to decreasing visa issuance would be increased funding for immigration law enforcement and immigration courts to curb visa overstay.

Part of the strategy for law enforcement, which will also be part of policy option two, will be to expand funding for law enforcement. SB. 744 of 2013, the "Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act" sought to appropriate \$46.3 billion for expenses related to the security of the southern U.S. border.⁵⁵ This portion of the bill would increase law enforcement personnel by 19,200, increase biometric security measures, strengthen physical security between ports of entry, and increase interior enforcement measures.⁵⁷ Taking away the amnesty portion of the bill, which would hurt taxpayers,⁵⁸ and utilizing its security enforcement measures would benefit society. It would ultimately be a worth investment for taxpayers.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Douglas Elmendorf and Congressional Budget Office, "CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE," 2013, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/113th-congress-2013-2014/costestimate/s744aspassed.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Charles E. Schumer, "Text - S.744 - 113th Congress (2013-2014): Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act," www.congress.gov, December 10, 2014, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/744/text>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.,

⁵⁸ Jason Richwine Ph.D, "The Fiscal Cost of Unlawful Immigrants and Amnesty to the U.S. Taxpayer," The Heritage Foundation, 2013, https://www.heritage.org/immigration/report/the-fiscal-cost-unlawful-immigrants-and-amnesty-the-us-taxpayer?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Heritage%2BHotSheet.

***Option 2: Immigration Reform: Prioritizing Merit-Based Immigration,
Decreasing Visa Issuance and Family-Based Migration, and Increased Native
Investment***

The second alternative policy would entail enhanced border enforcement, a yearly decrease in work visas issued, a focused approach on merit-based immigration, and increased educational and vocational opportunities for natives. This policy aims to gain control of the immigration problem by phasing out American dependency on foreign labor, which is the cornerstone of this analysis. American companies should utilize the native supply of work according to the law and the goals stated above.

The first policy point it would address is retooling America's immigration system to favor merit-based immigration. If we as a nation believe that immigration is beneficial for the economy, we must prioritize importing a highly trained labor force. The current system favors family reunification, which is not in line with our goal to provide the most overall benefit to natives. To sustain our status as a global superpower, we must bring in people who can contribute to American prosperity—the entrepreneur, the scientist, the engineer, the student, etc. If we prioritize skills-based immigration, we will not place an undue burden on American citizens and continue to achieve technological and scientific advancement in the United States.

Reforming America's immigration system will not shut off foreign labor supply completely, which would disrupt economic output in the short run. Instead, it would slowly unshackle the American economy from dependence on foreign labor. Businesses will still utilize foreign labor in the long run, but there would be a cap on the number of aliens allowed to work in the United States. It would begin with a generous issuance of 500,000 temporary work visas for the first full fiscal year under the policy, with a decrease of 50,000 per annum until a yearly issuance of 65,000 permits per annum is achieved. The initial work visa issuance would go to all visa groups – H-1B, H-2A, H-2B, etc. – and then exclusively give visas to the H-1B category of high-skilled foreign professionals. The visa-issuance would be focused on bringing in high-skilled labor that can provide a net benefit to society. The net benefit would come from new taxpayers, technological innovation, and economic investment.

Additionally, this reform proposal would enact strict wage requirements that companies must adhere to. The plan would make it illegal to pay foreign workers less than their native counterparts. This would increase immigrant wages and curtail the displacement of native workers. Ensuring that employers pay a competitive salary to all employees will deter imported labor and decrease the likelihood of exploitation of immigrant workers.

Expansion of high-skilled education would occur under this program. Companies, such as Tesla, are already offering programs that pay for high-skilled

education and training for individuals looking to contribute to the companies' mission. Ideally, the private sector and educational institutions would facilitate equipping Americans with high-skilled labor. There are things the government can do. For instance, give the market incentives to train Americans to work. For example, Work Opportunity Tax Credits – a tax credit for employers who hire from targeted demographics, particularly individuals who need to be integrated into the employment market – could be expanded and better funded to enable employers to employ native workers.

Additionally, funding for states would be introduced to expand education opportunities for their citizens. The increased native investment would require subsidization of state education. Camarota argued that expanding Earned Income Tax Credit, which supports low-income working individuals/families, could offset some of the adverse effects of immigration on wages.⁵⁹ It would come with some cost, as even a modest ten percent increase in the program would cost about 6 billion dollars. Congress would have to allocate a large fund for this specific initiative.

It is unclear what such a measure would cost taxpayers, and an analysis of the costs of these proposals will be necessary. Part of the problem with immigration policy is that Washington tends to throw money at a problem, thinking it will be solved. The measures introduced here will have a high price tag and should be thoroughly reviewed before being adopted. However, addressing these policy points will create an immigration system that is fair to the American worker. To address issues ranging from income inequality, labor force participation, and wages, immigration policy must change. This proposal is a step in that direction.

Option 3: Indefinite Immigration Moratorium

The final alternative is to completely shut down immigration for an indefinite period to adequately address the problems caused by immigration. This policy alternative will be controversial, as polls indicate that the American public still supports immigration. Despite the controversy, the United States must take time to address issues within its borders before extending benefits of citizenship to immigrants. Immigration should not be the nation's solution to economic malaise and population stagnation. These issues are indicators of more significant macro problems that immigration cannot solve.

America is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. Labor force participation is currently at 62%. Additionally, around 6 million Americans are not

⁵⁹ (Steven Camarota, "The Wages of Immigration," CIS.org, 1998, <https://cis.org/Report/Wages-Immigration>).

working but are looking for a job.⁶⁰ As the country debates its dependence on foreign labor and production, there must be action to deter the long-term effects of immigration. A moratorium serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it allows the United States to affirm its commitment to American citizens. Secondly, it gives Congress time to enact meaningful reform within the immigration system, with the end of assessing potential value-added to the nation from immigration. When the economic situation improves – which would be measured by an increase in overall American welfare – the United States could once again open its borders to those seeking to contribute to the advancement of society. Our nation is only as strong as its citizens, and our immigration policy must reflect that.

Therefore, the issuance of legal permanent residence would be reduced to 65,000 per annum immediately. The 65,000 would be allocated exclusively to foreign professionals and their families. This would still allow employers to bring in the best and brightest from foreign countries without undue burden on the economy or the taxpayer.

This policy proposal would entail the same illegal immigration protections as options 1 and 2, but it would also immediately shut off the supply of foreign labor. This would have significant economic impacts in the short term, but it would be of long-term benefit to the American people. Economists and legislators oppose the measure, and it would be hard to convince the public to begin participating in low-skilled industries again immediately.

A moratorium is already supported by several members of Congress but would have significant hurdles. The position is still outside of the political mainstream of both political parties. It would require several elections to make it politically feasible. Congress would have to become significantly more conservative, and the Executive would have to restaff much of its agencies to have like-minded individuals enforcing the policy. Although it is the least politically feasible alternative, introducing a moratorium as an option begins a conversation on the long-term sustainability of dependence on foreign labor.

Comparison of the Alternatives

Current Policy: Laissez-Faire Approach to Immigration

The benefit to natives: Current immigration policy offers little help to the American people. With each added migrant, legal and illegal, the native share of the labor market decreases. The government's willful ignorance toward the cost of

⁶⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation - January 2022," *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 4, 2022), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empstat.pdf>.

immigration to native workers is alarming. The status quo does not offer an overall benefit to the native population.

Economic output: As mentioned above, the status quo framing is that higher population growth equals a higher GDP. In the context of the immediate outcomes of sustained immigration levels, we would most likely see an increase in GDP in the next few years. However, this would be layered with the effects that mass migration has on the welfare of the native working population. The question that policymakers and implementers must answer is whether the status quo benefits outweigh the costs. If we believe that the increase in economic growth from immigration is worth the adverse effects that it will have on the native population, then the policy must be pursued. Policymakers must exercise caution with this position, as most negative effects will be irreversible.

Fiscal effects: Federal, state, and local governments are all negatively impacted by the status quo immigration policy. The fiscal impacts of the status quo policy are sizeable. Maintaining current policy will hurt taxpayers and their children.

Political feasibility: Status quo policy is the most politically feasible alternative. Lawmakers and policy implementors are content with maintaining the status quo, as it prevents them from making tough political decisions that could be career-ending in some Congressional districts. Activists in the legislature and media are content with painting policymakers negatively if they highlight the negative impacts of immigration on the public. The Republican party establishment, though becoming increasingly hawkish on immigration, is satisfied with the status quo. These factors indicate that although there are many negative consequences to the current immigration policy, it will likely stay intact due to the unwillingness of the legislature to take up a meaningful reform.

Status Quo with Strict Law Enforcement

The benefit to natives: Strictly enforcing the law on illegal immigration will significantly benefit low-skilled workers, who are most affected overall by the current immigration system. It will ease the burden that illegal immigrants put on the taxpayer and allow new economic opportunities for the low-skilled labor demographic.

Economic output: This plan would maintain the financial benefit provided by legal immigrants while eliminating the fiscal drain of illegal immigrants. Businesses would still be able to utilize high skilled workers, which contributes to economic growth and opportunity. The plan does not disrupt the current American dependence on foreign labor, but it will aid in dealing with the problems caused by illegal immigration, which are massive. Curtailing unlawful immigration while

maintaining current immigration quotas will benefit society overall, specifically the low-skilled labor force most impacted by immigration policy.

Fiscal effects: Enforcing the law on illegal immigration will benefit taxpayers. Camarota notes: “In April 2017, ICE estimated that the average cost per deportation was \$10,854 in FY 2016. The figure includes ‘all costs necessary to identify, apprehend, detain, process through immigration court, and remove an alien.’” If the estimated 12 million illegals in the country are an accurate figure, it would cost approximately \$130.2 billion⁶¹ to completely rid the United States of illegal aliens. This is not an insignificant figure. It is proportional to 1/7 of the defense budget for FY2021. Compared to the \$746.3 billion that illegals cost long-term, the one-time investment would be an overall benefit to taxpayers.⁶² This policy proposal provides the most significant benefit to the economy and the taxpayer.

Political feasibility: It would be difficult to convince the Democratic party to support increased enforcement measures without tying it to amnesty. Amnesty was the main reason that SB. 744 of 2013 failed. The current Republican party orthodoxy is pro-legal immigration and anti-illegal immigration. President Trump’s America First border policy platform is a significant reason for his election and massive turnout in 2020. It seems highly likely that Congress will have a Republican majority after the November midterm elections. President Biden, who currently expresses no intention of reforming the illegal immigration system, now garners low approval numbers.⁶³ Polls suggest that Republicans will retake the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2022.⁶⁴ It is not immediately politically feasible, as Democrats have no desire to change the status quo, but it may be more politically feasible after the next two elections.

Immigration Reform: Prioritizing Merit-Based Immigration, Decreasing Visa Issuance and Family-Based Migration, and Increased Native Investment

The benefit to natives: An increasing economic opportunity for natives while slowly eliminating foreign competition will benefit society. Of the policy alternatives, this one offers the most significant avenue for orienting the national economy toward helping Americans first while avoiding the complete elimination of dependence on

⁶¹ Steven Camarota, “Deportation vs. the Cost of Letting Illegal Immigrants Stay,” CIS.org, August 3, 2017, <https://cis.org/Report/Deportation-vs-Cost-Letting-Illegal-Immigrants-Stay#2>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Monique Beals, “Biden Approval Rating Falls to New Low: Poll,” The Hill, March 23, 2022, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/599350-biden-approval-rating-falls-to-new-low-survey/>.

⁶⁴ Race to the White House, “2022 House Election Predictions - Chance of Democrats and Republicans Winning,” Race to the WH, 2022, <https://www.racetothewh.com/house>.

foreign labor. There is a legitimate concern about the abilities of American workers and their ability to adapt to the modern economy. Because immigrants siphon wages and opportunities for natives, it would be better for the nation's long-term welfare to equip the American workforce to integrate into the modern economy. Phasing out dependence on foreign labor while training Americans to fill those roles through educational and vocational training will increase national prosperity, raise wages, and decrease income inequality.

Economic output: The long-term effects of removing migrant labor have not been thoroughly studied. We would assume that educating American workers to replace this dependence will offset any long-term instability that this measure would cause. Further, this policy alternative does not seek to destabilize the current economic system overnight. Businesses could lose profit due to increased revenue allocation to wages, which might affect the overall availability of profitable work. The assumption is that replacing migrant labor with native labor will be an overall benefit to society. More research is needed in this area.

Fiscal effects: Migrants who complete more than a High School education provide a net fiscal benefit of \$105,000 to society.⁶⁵ The federal government might see a decrease in future tax revenue due to removing highly skilled migrants from the system. At the same time, immigrants pay proportionately less state and local taxes than federal taxes while benefiting from the services those taxes fund – especially social services and public education. Overall, immigration increases public spending on infrastructure and social services due to the increased population burden.

Political feasibility: The political feasibility of this initiative is currently low due to the same reasons noted above. There is simply not enough support to take up a measure like this under the current regime. Further, there is no evidence that the GOP, historically the fiscally conservative party, would support an initiative that would require significant public spending. It would require several elections over a long time and would undoubtedly be a controversial piece of legislation. This proposal would immensely impact the next century and be a large-scale systemic reform. In an era of hyper-polarization and political instability, such initiatives might be too ambitious to have a tangible impact. The political feasibility of this measure is medium to low.

Indefinite Immigration Moratorium

The benefit to natives: An immigration moratorium would be of extreme help to American workers. As our nation comes out of the pandemic, it must realize

⁶⁵ National Research Council, “The New Americans, P. 334, Table 7.5.,” 1997.

that its reliance on foreign labor and manufacturing is not sustainable. A moratorium is needed to achieve a sustainable long-term economy that benefits natives. Natives would be immediately thrust into filling roles that immigrants were projected to fill. It is unclear if the country is ready for such an initiative. But, at a certain point, the government must decide when the nation has had enough immigration or if it will continue to bring new workers *ad infinitum*. We must affirm that we cannot give American prosperity to the world and that the national economy must benefit natives first. A moratorium is the best way to accomplish this.

Economic output: A moratorium would no doubt have significant economic impacts. It would decrease the number of high-skilled and low-skilled foreign workers that immediately contribute to the national economic output, affecting labor supply in many economic sectors. It would be an immediate phasing out of immigration but would not immediately remove migrant workers from the economy. The policy would allow migrants to finish the duration of their visas and would not seek to remove current Legal Permanent Residents. It would reduce the ever-increasing income inequality and allow working citizens of all demographic groups to reap the benefits of the national economy once again.

Fiscal effects: As noted above, halting immigration would reduce the strain on public services and provide relief to the taxpayers that fund the systems. It would allow the country to orient itself towards caring for the people already here and contribute to their overall prosperity. The costs of immigration are high; halting immigration would ease the burden on the American taxpayer and public services.

Political feasibility: For the foreseeable future, this policy is a non-starter politically. It has little to no support in the national legislature and would be highly controversial. The political feasibility of the measure is low.

Assessment and Recommendation

This analysis recommends that doing something about immigration is better than doing nothing. It recognizes the political infeasibility of comprehensive immigration reform or an immigration moratorium. Maintaining current immigration levels while strictly enforcing the law on illegal immigration would reduce income inequality and boost wages for natives. However, this will not go far enough to address the problems caused by immigration. The era of mass migration must end. Based on the priorities laid out in this paper, terminating American dependence on foreign labor should be of the highest importance. This ideal will have to be long-term, as it is not politically feasible. The issues discussed in this analysis section are summarized in the appendix below.

Appendix A

Summary Comparison of Policy Alternatives for Addressing Immigration

	Current Policy	Maintain Current Quotas with Strict Law Enforcement	<i>Prioritizing Merit-Based Immigration, Decreasing Visa Issuance and Family-Based Migration, and Increased Native Investment</i>	Indefinite Immigration Moratorium
Benefit to Natives	Low benefit to natives	Eases negative effects on low skilled workers	Increases opportunities and outcomes for natives in all sectors	Immediately eliminates competition from foreign labor
Economic Output	Good for economic output	Would harm certain industries that are dependent on low skilled labor	Would hurt industries dependent on low-skilled labor. Would, in theory, boost GDP by prioritizing high-skilled immigrants.	Would have significant short-term economic impact, but would be beneficial in the long run
Fiscal Effects	Costly to taxpayers and the government	Would remove \$746.3 billion fiscal drain that illegals put on the system	Would significantly ease the fiscal burden that migrants put on federal, state, and local governments	Would ease the burden that immigrants place on social systems. Would potentially lower tax revenues that account for future immigrant inflow.
Political Feasibility	High	Moderate-High	Moderate-Low	Low

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