

How Does Power and Globalization Impact the Equality and Ease of Immigration?

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents research on immigration and the international theory surrounding it. The legal versus illegal immigration and the different schools of thought are delved into and explored. An investigation with a local organization was conducted to measure the immediate impacts of immigration laws on the local community and how economic factors impact the success of immigrants on the path to citizenship.

Introduction

Immigration is a heavily stigmatized and extremely controversial topic. First world countries seem to be divided upon two solutions to illegal immigration, the first being harsher punishment while the second is easier access to legal immigration. Many argue that, in order to limit the amount of people entering the country unlawfully, harsher punishments must be put into place and more measures should be taken to prevent said entries. One of the main ways to do this is through border enforcements. There has been a big push to build a wall, detain people at the border, deport non-citizen immigrants, and separate children from their families. On the other hand, others believe that the key to ending illegal immigration is through easing the process in which immigration occurs legally. If legal immigration is increased, illegal immigration would thus decrease. Additionally, an interesting point is brought up about the racial discrimination in the immigration process. Immigrants are constantly faced with many hardships in society, but it is important to note that those faced with the majority of these hardships are immigrants of color.

Being the child of two (legal) immigrants (with completely different origins, ethnic, and racial backgrounds) in the US, I find the subject extremely personal and important to me. It is such a unique experience but oftentimes a difficult one. I am constantly surrounded by other immigrants and I see the difficulties they face simply just coming to this country. I witness the losses they endure separated from their homeland and loved ones. And still, they are met with so much anger in the U.S. People often leave their country because they have to, not because they want to. But in this country, as well as most first world countries, it's not easy to enter, forcing many to use alternative and illegal methods to enter. I decided to become involved with learning about this process as well as how it's being implemented so I chose to interview a leader of Mission Citizen, a local group dedicated to helping people obtain citizenship.

Mission Citizen and Local Immigration

I met with the Director of Communications in Mission Citizen, Zen, who primarily works in the Beaverton library, a notably hispanic community. He talked to me about what the Mission Citizen program is and what he does working with them. Mission Citizen is a local, Portland Metro area (Oregon) based, non-profit started by

Lincoln High School students in 2009. Mission Citizen offers classes to people attempting to obtain US citizenship, teaching them how to pass the citizenship test. For all the members that pass the final mock-exam of a naturalization test, Mission Citizen offers a scholarship that covers part of the price of the expensive exam process. The program offers their classes in a number of local public libraries across the city area. The goal of Mission Citizen is to make obtaining citizenship possible for people who have no or limited resources.

During the interview, Zen stated that one of the biggest challenges to obtaining citizenship, through observing his students, was the language barrier. After asking about his demographics, he shared that most of his students are LatinX as well as Spanish speaking, who oftentimes do not speak any or very little English. He additionally mentioned that most of his students were in fact families. However, he did mention that his demographics may be skewed as they do cater their advertising to LatinX individuals and on Spanish speaking radios. He went on to discuss that even though Mission Citizen can prepare them for all the content and information of the test, they can't help them too much to overcome this massive obstacle. He explained to me how the test not only covered content and information about the US but required the test taker to be able to write and speak English. Zen also mentioned how during the immigration process, those that struggle with these language barriers are often those from Latin American countries, whereas people from Canada or England face no struggle. Additionally, for other European countries, accessing the tools to learn English is much easier than in Latin American countries. Zen explained that Mission Citizen, as a result, offers special worksheets and all of their available course materials translated into multiple languages in order to help students understand the actual test content.

I asked Zen to help me better understand how financial resources impact people's ability to get their citizenship, and also attend Mission Citizen. He explained to me that all their classes are free and in public areas, but access to transportation can be limiting for some. Some of his students rely exclusively on public transportation and if they miss their bus, they're missing the class, as there is no other way for them to get there. He mentioned that despite their dedication, their lack of resources impedes their learning. Another hindering aspect is the 750\$ fee to take the test, that many cannot afford to pay, even with the 350\$ scholarship offered by the program. When I asked Zen about other factors that stopped immigrants from getting citizenship, he explained that in the last few years, a lot of changes were constantly being made to the test to make it more difficult. Both the amount of questions needed to be answered on the test and the cost of the test were increasing. He shared that, "when it costs more, when it's harder to do, when it takes more of your time, all of these things make it harder to get your citizenship." He also pointed out that Mission Citizen is local and he was unsure how many resources people outside of Portland were getting. He ended the interview by explaining that even after citizenship is obtained, it's still a struggle to get jobs, to be accepted, and even learn how to do all the things that your citizenship allows you to do, but it at least gives people a sense of mental security.

US Immigration

In the U.S, immigrants account for 13.7% of the population and represent about 1/5th of the number of immigrants across the world and illegal immigrants account for a small fraction of that. Immigration has been increasing every year since the 1970s, yet it is becoming increasingly more stigmatized. Those in charge have utilized their power to intensify inequality and negative ideas against immigration. In recent years, the most targeted group of immigrants have been Latino immigrants. They faced scrutiny in order to promote nationalism while white immigrants were never criticized in the same manner. The access to tools for immigration are specifically deprived from immigrants of color. Immigrants were blamed for the lack of economic success in the country through claims that jobs were being stolen from Americans. Yet, there has been a growing labor shortage in the country, while "many businesses that employ both low and high-skilled workers argue the labor shortage could be addressed through issuing work authorizations and paths to citizenship as well as expanding programs for immigrants to come work in the United States" (The New York Times). While more locally in

Portland, Oregon, in an attempt to overcome the frequent targeting that immigrants faced in the justice system, “Multnomah County Deputy District Attorneys will now consider immigration consequences when charging, making plea bargains, and sentencing noncitizens in an effort to avoid deportation when possible” (Portland Mercury). The goal of these new decisions was to aid local immigrant communities who were already suffering due to the disproportionate impacts of judicial laws on immigrants. Those who commit minor offenses, such as speeding, and live in constant fear of deportation are saved from excessive punishment. Immigration will continue to increase as globalization becomes more and more prevalent in the world. Countries will become more and more reliant on one another to provide resources for their populations. However, those in power of international governments do not tend to agree on how the matters should be handled. While some are all for immigration through legal methods, other’s are completely against it. The two mainstream schools of thought, *Realism* and *Liberalism*, take opposing standpoints.

International Theory

Looking at Immigration from a Realist perspective, immigration would be considered irrational, unless a state had ulterior motives. Realists make the assumption that “anarchy is the overarching constraint of world politics” (Drezner). Through this assumption, one could argue that to accept an individual or a group of individuals to a country would be against the country’s best interest because to provide a foreigner with education and financial opportunities could be assisting an opposing country, putting the state at risk. Through the Realist ideology, a state would be giving immigrants resources, such as jobs, residency, education, and many others, at the expense of its own native citizens, who may struggle to access these opportunities with the growing population. A country’s duty is only to itself and its people, hence, it cannot even risk putting a strain on its own economy for the sake of a foreigner and by extent their native country. Additionally, a Realist would argue that a country could never accept an immigrant of which it is enemies. This could lead to added inequality to the already unequal immigration policies. French Presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen, ran on this very same premise. While on France 2, Le Pen said her campaign, “would propose strict criteria for entering French territory and for acquiring French nationality, as well as giving French citizens priority access to social housing, jobs and social security benefits” (Reuters). It is her belief that globalization should be more strictly regulated and immigration should be limited for the sake of protecting nationalism and inhibiting external influences into the country. She states that she, “defends the nation, which remains the best structure to defend our identity, security, freedom and prosperity” (Reuters).

On the other hand, a Liberal would argue that in a world where cooperation is vital and the success of a country is dependent on it, immigration would thus be beneficial. Accepting immigrants from a struggling country and providing them with an education and jobs would help the immigrant, and by extent their country of origin, and in turn the immigrant would help their new country. A conflict or struggle in one country doesn’t simply impact said country but also, it’s relations with all surrounding and dependent countries. This would in turn incite surrounding countries to assist through immigration and allow countries to restabilize themselves. In a globalized world, immigration would allow the spread of skills and talents across the world. Providing young immigrants with opportunities their country of origin could never offer them and equipping them with valuable knowledge and skills, allows them to thrive and eventually possibly return to their country and contribute to its advancement. A liberal would argue that both low-skilled and high-skilled jobs are always in need of being filled and are in a constant shortage. Highly specialized jobs often bring exceptional talent that are constantly sought after everywhere in the world. While on the lower scale side, they frequently fill the positions suffering from labor shortages. Immigrants only fill the vacuums. Both job levels, high and low, lead to the betterment and success of the state overall and immigration therefore can only truly benefit a country.

Conclusion

Across the world, immigration remains one of the biggest and most complex issues of the 21st century. It is an issue of inequality and power. In the U.S and other large countries in which immigration is prevalent, the issue is divided by the two main parties in power. However, “any hope for immigration reform (...) will likely hinge on compromise, something that has eluded lawmakers for decades” (The New York Times). Immigration is crucial to people and it is up to those who have control to make immigration accessible and equal to all. Rather than making the already difficult situation more of a struggle, resources must be provided and in turn relationships between countries and the overall cooperation and success will increase across the board.

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