United States Immigration Policy: an analysis of current and prospective policy programs

November 2019
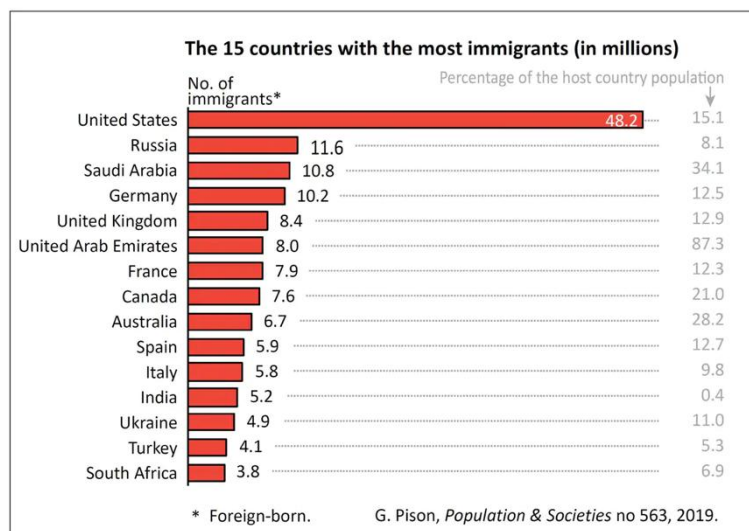
Introduction

The United States, historically defined as a land of immigrants, faces an ongoing debate about the effectiveness and morality of its migration procedures. Recent media coverage of harsh conditions at detention centers along the southern border and debates gearing up for the 2020 presidential election have drawn public scrutiny of issues of migration. Calling attention to potential violations of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, this paper emphasizes the urgency of addressing migration policy in the United States. It is not only advisable, but necessary to review the current state of migration policy in the United States, as well as potential alternatives and the likelihood of their adoption.

Many political scholars have analyzed United States immigration policy in the context of the federal budget or support from legislative bodies. However, this paper differs in that it addresses the ways in which the current president and candidates for election approach migration policy as it relates to public opinion and the beliefs of voters. Further, this paper contributes to the debate on whether or not the United States is fulfilling its duty to the international community to support migrants by examining the course of migration policy and practice. It will bring to light varying perspectives on particular areas of concern, including the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers at detention facilities, the habitual separation of children from their families, the structure and funding of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the potential renewal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Further, the rhetoric used to address the underlying causes of irregular migration will be discussed as they relate to candidates approaches to overall migration stocks and flows.

In this paper, the policies of President Donald J. Trump and his administration are compared to the programs proposed by leading candidates in the 2020 presidential election. Information in this paper will benefit American voters seeking to better understand issues of migration and policy options. In addition, international stakeholders aiming to support migrants' rights and dignity on a global scale will benefit from understanding the approaches to migration in the country with the world's most immigrants by count (Pison, 2019).

The 15 countries with the most immigrants (in millions)

Country	No. of immigrants*	Percentage of the host country population ↓
United States	48.2	15.1
Russia	11.6	8.1
Saudi Arabia	10.8	34.1
Germany	10.2	12.5
United Kingdom	8.4	12.9
United Arab Emirates	8.0	87.3
France	7.9	12.3
Canada	7.6	21.0
Australia	6.7	28.2
Spain	5.9	12.7
Italy	5.8	9.8
India	5.2	0.4
Ukraine	4.9	11.0
Turkey	4.1	5.3
South Africa	3.8	6.9

* Foreign-born.   G. Pison, *Population & Societies* no 563, 2019.

Gilles Pison, based on United Nations data

Methodology

The candidates selected for this comparative analysis were chosen based on polling results from the New York Times and reported campaign contributions. Campaign funding can be used as a proxy for measuring support from individuals, political groups, corporations, and other actors. At present, President Trump's campaign has the most funding of all the Democratic and Republican candidates (Ballotpedia, 2019). Historically, it is difficult for incumbents of the same party to de-seat a president running for reelection. For this reason, only the leading GOP incumbent, namely Senator Mark Sanford, was selected. In the opposing party, Joe Biden is leading in Democratic polls, with 26% of the projected vote, though analysts believe that his share of the vote is on a decreasing trend. Though Biden has the most support in terms of projected votes, he has the lowest individual contributions of the Democratic candidates. Senator Elizabeth Warren, by comparison, has 21% of the vote, but more funding. Finally, Senator Bernie Sanders, who has only 14% of the vote, has the most funding of the Democrats, mainly from grassroots campaigning (New York Times, 2019).

Current State of the Race

Qualified for the November debate*	▼ NATIONAL POLLING AVERAGE	▼ INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS†	▼ WEEKLY NEWS COVERAGE
Joseph R. Biden Jr. ✓	26% ↓	$37.6m	#1
Elizabeth Warren ✓	21% ↓	$49.8m	#2
Bernie Sanders ✓	14% ↓	$61.5m	#3

Information regarding candidates' policy perspectives was taken directly from official campaign

websites. In addition, information on policy choices implemented under President Trump's administration were supplemented by news articles that covered developments in migration issues.

Finally, data on public opinion was supplied by the National Immigration Forum, which synthesized surveys and polls from various sources, including, predominantly, Gallup. Statistical information on the number of refugees, age of immigrants, and other demographic data relating to immigration in the United States was sourced from publications of the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Progression of Immigration Policy

In order to evaluate the implications of present and proposed policy, it is necessary to understand the trends and flows of migration in the United States, historically and at present. Immigration is not a "new" phenomenon for the United States; overall immigration flows have been increasing

Figure 1. Size and Share of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1850-2017
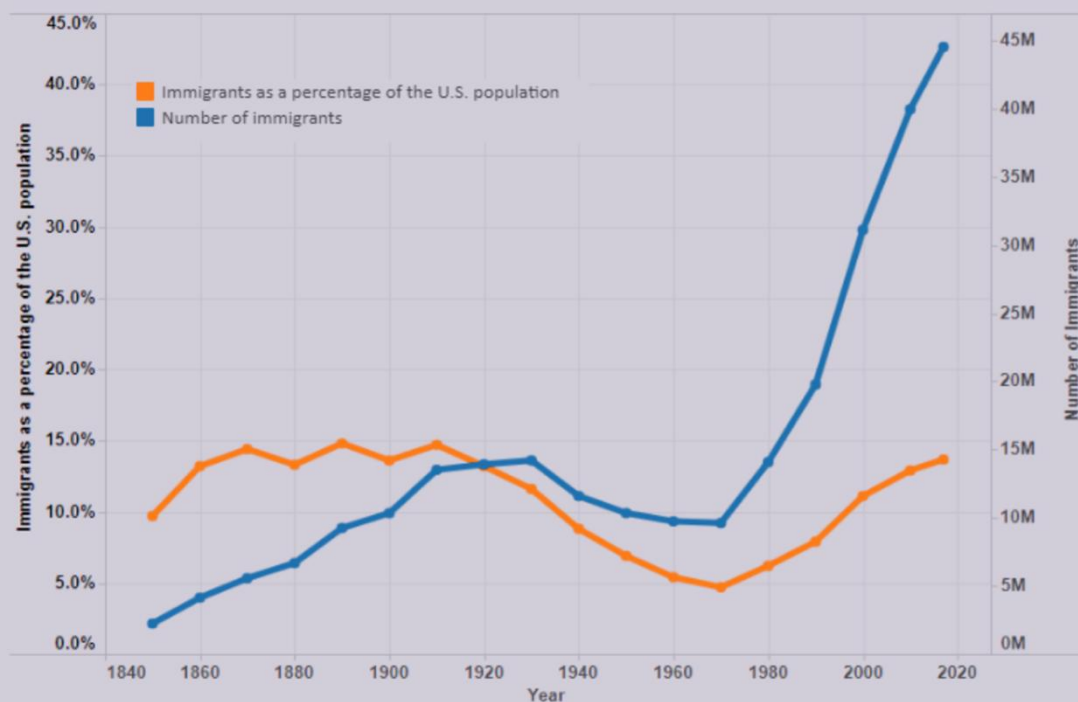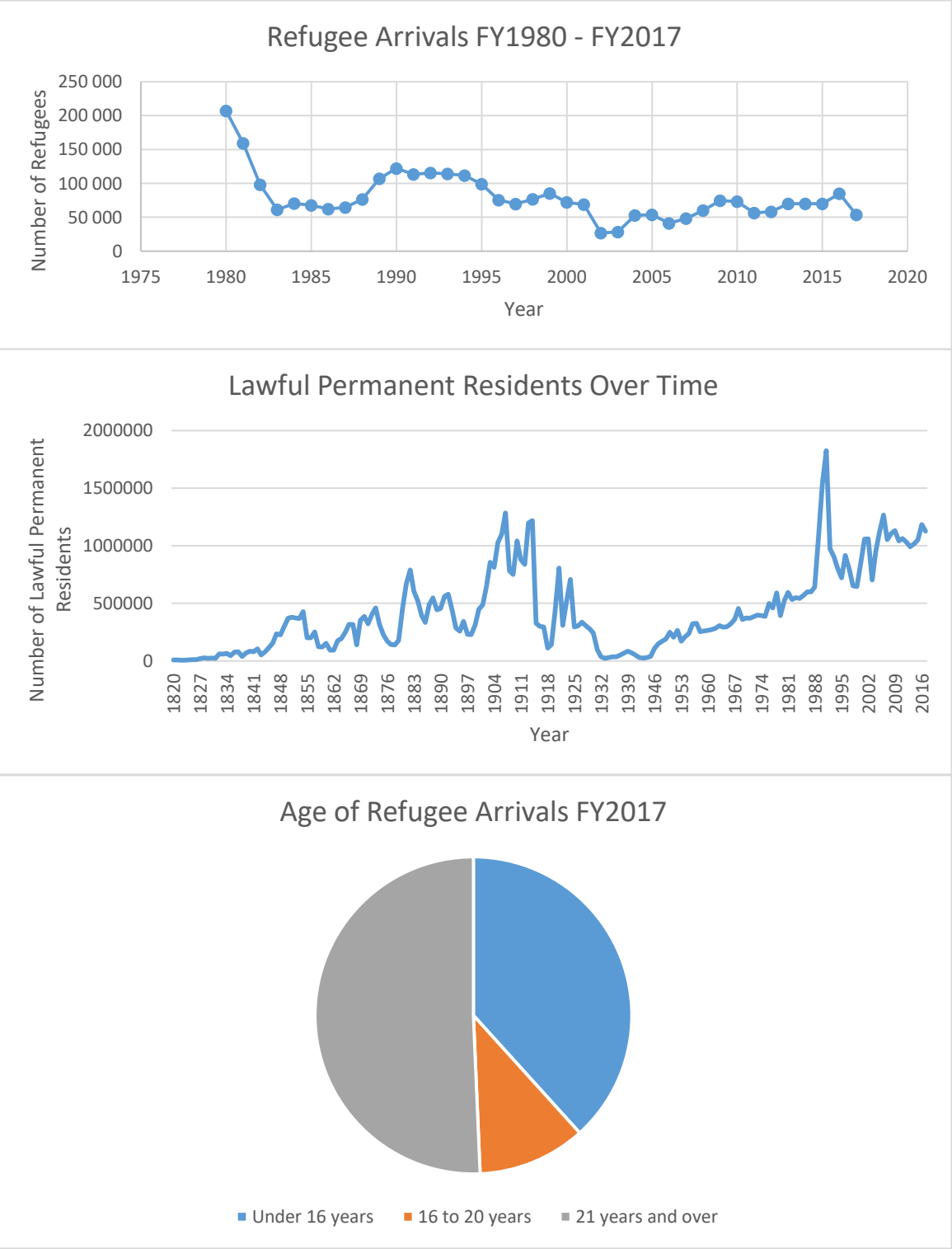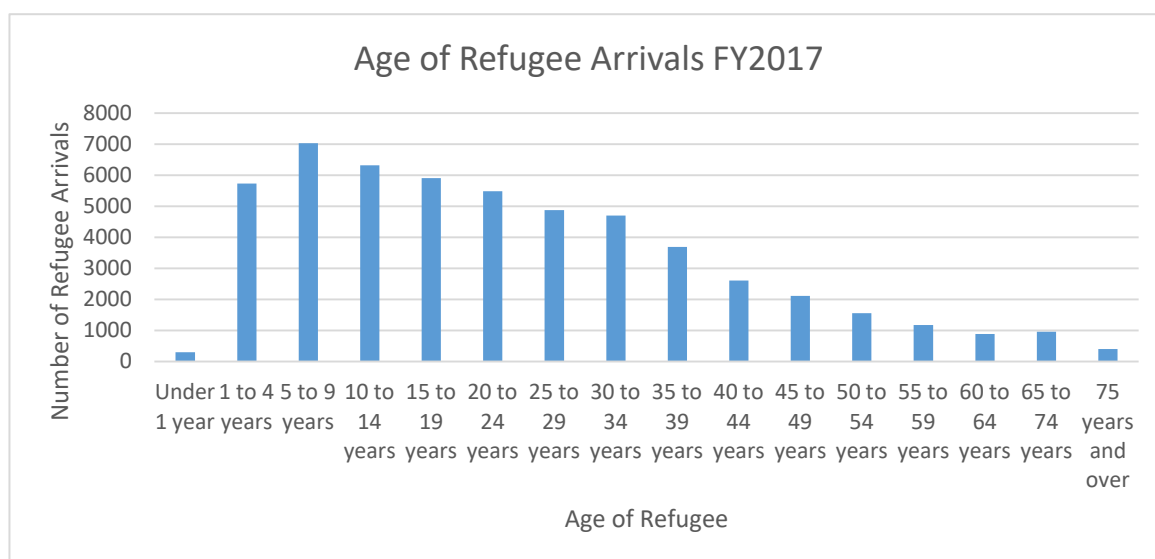

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-17 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29., U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

steadily since the 1970s (Zong et al., 2019).

The number of non-asylum-seeking migrants arriving and obtaining legal permanent resident status has steadily increased in the United States (Department of Homeland Security, 2019). This is due, in part, to overall population growth. Data from the Migration Policy Institute and the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the size of the foreign-born population in the United States is sharply increasing, but the percentage share is increasing at a much slower rate. Further, while the share of foreign-born population in the United States has reached a nearly century-high, it is not historically unprecedented. The share of foreign-born population was higher than present rates in the 1870s, 1890s, and early 1900s (Zong et al., 2019).

While the number of lawful permanent residents has steadily increased, the number of refugee arrivals remained fairly constant until the last decade (Department of Homeland Security, 2019). In 2016, the number of refugee arrivals in the United States reached its highest point since 1995, with nearly 85,000 refugees entering the country. Following the election of President Trump, the number of refugee arrivals decreased in 2017 to just over 53,000 people with nearly half, or 21,000 under age 16.

Refugee Arrivals FY1980 - FY2017

Lawful Permanent Residents Over Time

Age of Refugee Arrivals FY2017

■ Under 16 years ■ 16 to 20 years ■ 21 years and over

Age of Refugee Arrivals FY2017

Further, an examination of the countries of origin from which refugees are coming paints a picture of international events that impact human rights. In fiscal year 1997, the earliest year for which the Department of Homeland Security has published their refugee data, the admission ceiling of 78,000 refugees was divided amongst geographical regions, with the greatest number of admissions available to those seeking asylum from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In 1997, the most refugees arrived from Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Soviet Union. Other refugees came from Vietnam and Cuba. During this time, the United States tended to accept refugees from communist or previously communist nations. Below, a table shows the refugee status applications filed and approved for the fiscal year 1997 (Annual Report, 1999):

Nationality	Refugee applications filed	Refugee applications approved	Refugee arrivals
Total	**122,741**	**77,600**	**69,276**
Bosnia-Herzegovina	38,381	27,840	21,357
Soviet Union, former	35,329	27,632	27,072
Vietnam	19,552	6,522	6,660
Cuba	9,102	1,860	2,911
Somalia	6,510	5,599	4,974
Iraq	4,573	3,289	2,679
Congo, Democratic Republic [1]	2,664	651	45
Iran	2,244	1,234	1,305
Liberia	1,620	893	231
Croatia	1,170	884	-
Sudan	602	393	277
Other	984	797	1,762

[1] On May 30, 1997, Zaire was formally recognized as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The landscape of refugee nations of origin has changed significantly since the late 1990s. In a report released by the Department of Homeland Security, the aggregate number of refugees arriving from various countries between 2000 and 2017 was summarized. While the late 1990s brought refugees from the Eastern bloc, the 21st century data shows an influx of refugees from the Middle East (Mossad, 2019).

Refugee Arrivals by Top Country of Nationality: FY 2000 to 2017
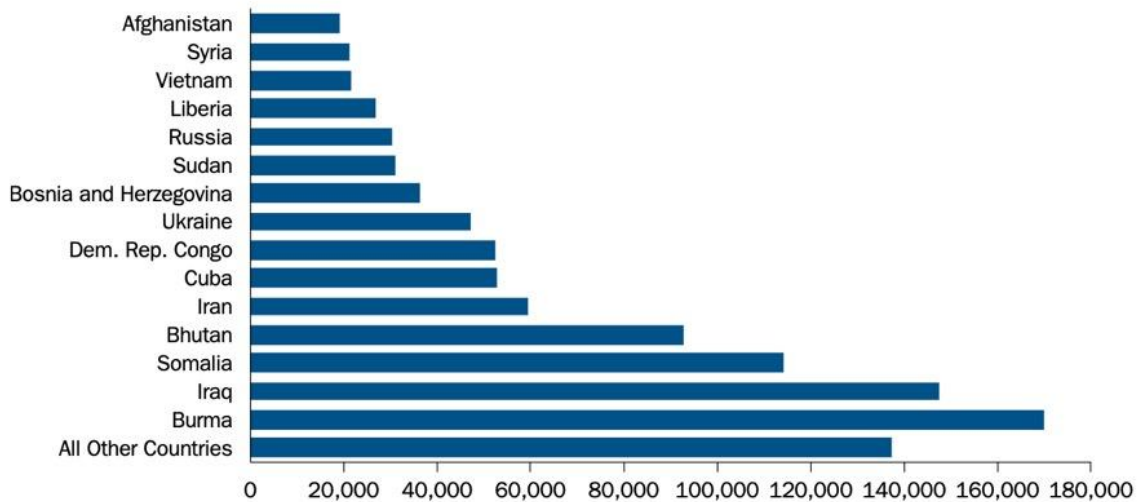
Source: U.S. Department of State.

However, even more recent data, which is specific to 2015 to 2017, shows an increase of immigrants from the South, including states such as Venezuela, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Affirmative Asylum Cases Filed with USCIS by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017
(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.	139,801	100.0	115,433	100.0	83,032	100.0
Venezuela.	27,579	19.7	14,792	12.8	5,664	6.8
China, People's Republic	16,792	12.0	16,508	14.3	13,877	16.7
Guatemala	12,175	8.7	10,720	9.3	8,277	10.0
Mexico	11,941	8.5	14,660	12.7	8,820	10.6
El Salvador	11,913	8.5	9,444	8.2	7,133	8.6
Honduras	6,978	5.0	5,698	4.9	5,147	6.2
India	4,057	2.9	3,230	2.8	2,276	2.7
Haiti.	3,860	2.8	3,004	2.6	1,918	2.3
Colombia	2,650	1.9	1,395	1.2	820	1.0
Russia	2,649	1.9	1,909	1.7	1,447	1.7
All other countries, including unknown. .	39,207	28.0	34,073	29.5	27,653	33.3

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The number of migrant arrivals should be compared to the number of migrant returns and removals in order to gain insights on migration trends. A return is defined as a voluntary movement of a migrant back to their home country. Contrastingly, a removal is classified as compulsory, and often an act taken out of concern for national security. A key difference between returns and removals lies in the fact that an alien who is removed will face administrative and or criminal consequences if they should reenter the country. While returns have sharply decreased since the early 2000s, removals increased substantially before beginning to dip in 2013 (Department of Homeland Security, 2019).

Aliens Removed and Returned FY1892 - FY2017
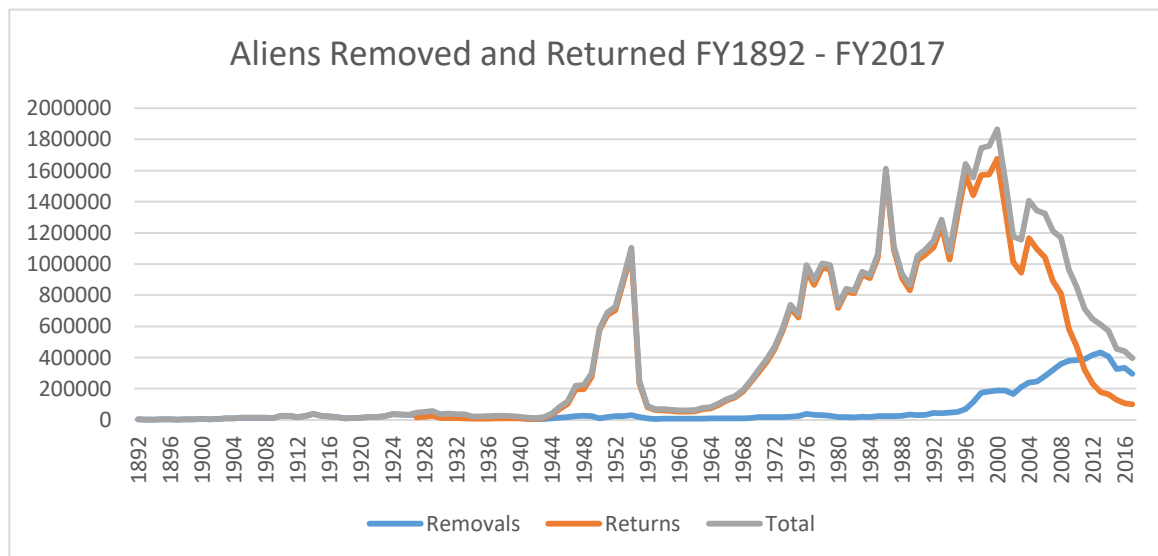
It is important to take these statistics into account when drawing conclusions about migration flows. Contrary to isolationist political rhetoric, migration cannot be stopped. However, governments have various instruments to manage migration flows. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the United States began to increase its border control in response to surges of immigration from Latin America (Massey & Pren, 2012). This change was correlated with a change in the types of migration- legal and irregular- experienced by the United States. Prior to the reforms, the immigrant population coming from Mexico was fairly transient, and most frequently male. Heads of households came to the United States for work and crossed the border to return to their families with remittances. Following the increase in border controls, males began to immigrate with their families, establishing a permanent settlement rather than crossing back and forth (Lind, 2018).

There was no legal path to citizenship for persons who had crossed the border and resided in the United States illegally and determining the residency status of children of illegal or irregular migrants became a particular challenge. The children, who often arrived without identification papers, or with parents who failed to complete the formal and tedious legal immigration process, were often illegally present. Congress introduced the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act in 2001 to address this issue. Over the last 18 years, more than 10 versions of the DREAM Act have been presented to Congress, each providing irregular child immigrants with a formalized path to legal status. The most recent version of the DREAM Act provides conditional permanent residence (CPR) for up to 10 years. Those with CPR that are legally employed are then eligible to attain legal permanent resident (LPR) status. Finally, after maintaining LPR for five years, individuals who were once "DREAMers" can apply for citizenship (American Immigration Council, 2019). However, the DREAM Act has stalled in Congress, and is yet to be codified into law (Lind, 2018).

In an attempt to address the policy gap left by the unfinalized DREAM Act, a notable reform effort was made by President Barak Obama's administration in June 2012 with the introduction of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The act aimed at providing children of immigrants illegally residing in the United States the ability to postpone federal action towards their deportation. In order to apply for DACA, a person had to be (1) no older than 15 years at the time of their arrival and (2) arrive in the United States prior to 2007. Further restrictions on applicants included the stipulations that the applicant must be currently enrolled in or graduated from secondary school and have a clean criminal record. The provisions set forth by DACA did not grant childhood arrivals legal permanent resident status, as is the case with the DREAM Act

(American Immigration Council, 2019). However, DACA did allow childhood immigrants to be "legally present" in the country, without a threat of deportation. In addition, it made provisions like a driver's license and a worker's permit accessible. Those who were provided protection under DACA frequently experienced higher income levels, jobs more suited to their abilities, and greater social and economic mobility.

However, in 2017, President Trump announced the gradual termination of DACA. Under his plan, no new DACA applications were accepted, and those with legally present status under DACA would lose their permits in phases (Lind, 2018). In his justification of this action, President Trump cited constitutional law as a means of appealing to the republican values of law, order, and respect for authority. Because DACA was instituted by President Barak Obama through an executive order rather than through Congressional approval, President Trump explained that DACA was an unconstitutional use of presidential authority. President Trump also cited a Supreme Court decision which ruled against a similar policy providing benefits for parents of DREAMers. The Supreme Court will hear challenges to President Trump's termination decision in November 2019, eventually ruling on whether or not he was justified in doing so (Shear, 2019). President Trump's decision to do away with DACA has stirred great controversy and is one of the many issues up for discussion in the 2020 migration debate.

Other current areas of concern in United States immigration policy include the treatment of refugees at detention facilities. More specifically, many candidates in the 2020 election have come out against the United States' use of private, for-profit migrant detention facilities, which host migrants in camps during the immigration process. Further, a highly contested issue has been the separation of children and families at such detention centers. According to a report from Human Rights watch, over 2,500 families were forcibly separated at the US border. This number includes families with disabled children. In one notable case, a 10-year-old-girl with Down Syndrome was separated from her mother, so that her mother could be tried in criminal courts for illegal border crossing. Public outcry and mental health professionals' warnings about the trauma induced by forced family separation led President Trump to issue an executive order formally ending the practice. Yet, reports of family separations and isolated parent deportations continued throughout 2019. Human Rights Watch notes that some of these parental deportations were arbitrary or linked to minor suspicions or offenses, thus violating human rights (UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9) (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Families staying at detention centers did not fare much better. In a statement released on 8 July 2019, Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that she was "appalled" at the conditions that the refugees and migrants were experiencing in the US. According to Bachelet, the conditions in which refugees- particularly children- were being held, may qualify as cruel and inhuman treatment under international law (UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 4). Specifically, Bachelet pointed to excessive use of force amongst ICE agents, continued family separations, and denial of human services (UN News, 2019). After 15 deaths were reported in immigration detention centers between December 2015 and April 2017, an independent medical review was conducted by Human Rights Watch. The report concluded that poor medical treatment was the cause of more than half of the deaths. Of the cases, 23-year-old Moises Tino-Lopez' shows clear neglect. Tino-Lopez had two seizures in nine days, was not brought to a hospital after his first seizure, and not until four hours after his second. He never regained consciousness. Silky Shah, executive director of Detention Watch Network, notes; "The death toll amassed by ICE is unacceptable and has proven that they cannot be trusted to care for immigrants in their custody" (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The report suggests that rather than continuing to fund policies that are clearly failing in terms of protecting and providing for migrants, funding should be redirected to improve the health and safety of detention centers.

The Trump administration has dismissed human rights criticisms through denying the gravity of the situation and placing the blame on migrants for choosing to enter the United States in such a

way. In July 2019, Trump made statements on Twitter congratulating border patrol for the actions they were taking; "Great job by Border Patrol, above and beyond. Many of these illegals [sic] aliens are living far better now than where they... came from, and in safer conditions". While he celebrated the actions of border patrol, he contradicted himself by acknowledging that many were "unhappy" with the potential human rights violations cited by Human Rights Watch; "If Illegal Immigrants are unhappy with the conditions in the quickly built or refitted detentions [sic] centers, just tell them not to come. All problems solved!" (Brice, 2019). In sum, the administration has responded to the problem, albeit via Twitter, through denial and victim blaming.

Public Opinion

The policies which have shaped immigration in the United States over the last few years have stirred a fair amount of controversy. Congress' failure to codify the DREAM act from the 2000s demonstrates the stalemate that issues of migration have caused. In 2016, one of the central points in President Trump's campaign was the guaranteed reduction of immigrants. While this was certainly a rallying point for many of his supporters, recent surveys reveal that pro-immigrant sentiment in the United States exists in certain contexts. According to Gallup polling, the percentage of Americans who believe immigration levels should be increased has been rising steadily from 1995, and today hovers at around 30% of the population. Similarly, the number of Americans who want to decrease the level of immigration has declined, also hovering around 30%.
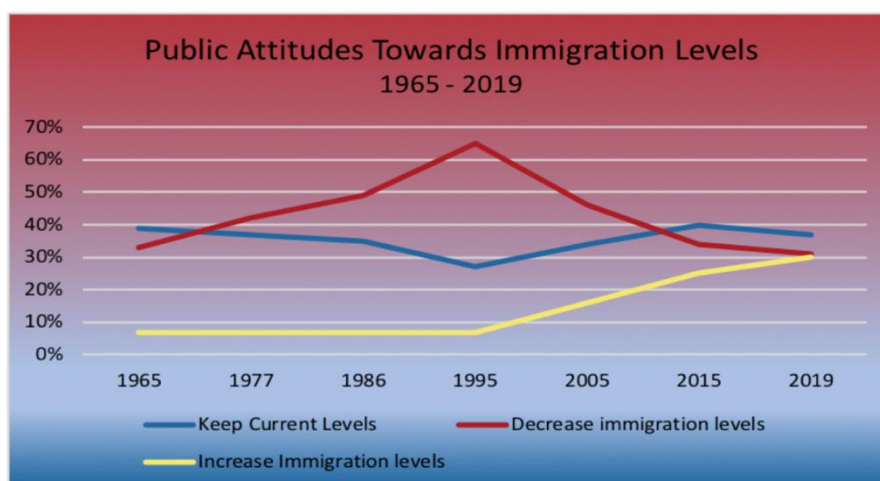
Recent studies by Pew Research, CBS News, and Quinnipiac University show that more than half of Americans believe that immigrants "make the US better", "immigrants strengthen American society", and "immigration is good for the country". However, these beliefs are strongly divided down party lines. For example, while approximately 75% of democrats agreed that "immigrants strengthen American society," only 35% of republicans agreed (National Immigration Forum, 2019).

Percentage Who Say Immigrants are a Benefit to the Country
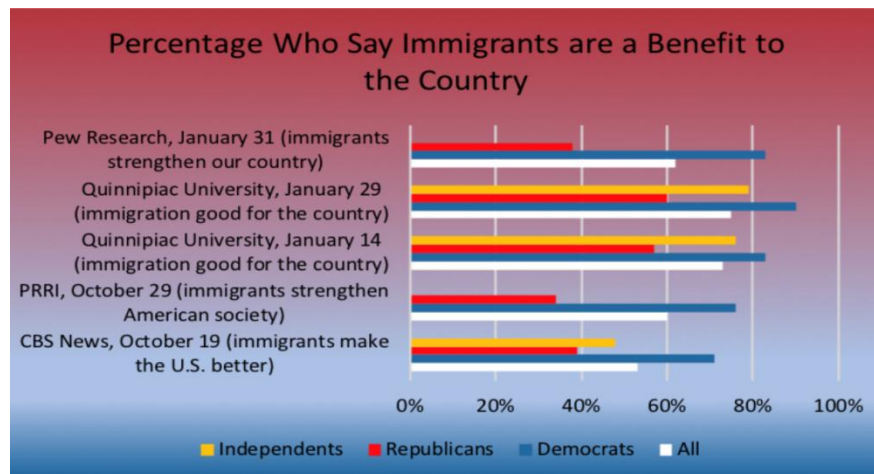
According to Gallup's poll, the number of Americans who would like to reduce immigration to the U.S. is at its lowest level since 1965. Since 2013, the polling has shown consistent public support for granting irregular migrants a path to citizenship. Further, 62% of Americans believe that children brought illegally to the United States should be allowed to remain, a policy that would be supported by an act like DACA. An even greater number of Americans, 72%, oppose current US policy of separating families at the border and trying parents as criminals for attempting to cross the border illegally. Many Americans want to see issues of immigration discussed in the 2020 presidential debate, with an average of nearly one in four Americans claiming that "immigration is the most important problem facing the country." This is the highest ratio reported on this question since Gallup began polling the question in 1993 (National Immigration Forum, 2019). Yet, it is important to note that prioritization of immigration as a 2020 election issue is also divided down party lines. In a survey released by Quinnipiac University, 52%-more than half- of Republicans believed immigration should be the top priority of new administration. By comparison, only 14% of independents and 7% of democrats agreed (National Immigration Forum, 2019).

Policy Options

According to Michelle Bachelet, immigration practices in the United States are potentially in violation of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and fail to provide for the needs of migrants, particularly at the Southern border (UN News, 2019). From the perspective of international human rights activists, an alternative policy must address the influx of childhood arrivals, treatment of migrants at detention and processing facilities, structure and funding of ICE, and the root causes of irregular migration. In comparing current policy with propositions for change, insights can be drawn regarding current American sentiment towards migration. Below, the policies implemented by President Trump during his time in office are compared to the policy programs proposed for implementation by the leading 2020 presidential candidates.

I.   President Donald J. Trump

Immigration reform was a key issue to President Trump's 2016 election platform. Notably, President Trump promised to build a wall along the United States' southern border as a measure of national security. After years of difficulty in working with and through Congress to fulfill this promise, President Trump managed to negotiate $1.6 billion in border-wall funding. However, this victory for the Trump administration did not come without a price. The process of negotiations caused the longest government shutdown in history, from December 22, 2018 until January 25, 2019 (35 days). In addition to the $1.6 billion in wall funding, President Trump increased ICE Funding by more than 10%, allowing ICE to conduct over 225,000 documented removals and 110,000 arrests in 2017. Focusing on criminality of irregular immigrants, President Trump launched the Office of Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE). The office was launched by means of executive order, with the mission to serve victims of crimes that were perpetrated specifically by irregular immigrants. Another measure which targeted immigrants as criminals was the rescindment of DACA, along with the lesser known Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) program. These measures prevented irregular immigrants from postponing their deportation processes by declaring their status to the government.

Finally, President Trump's 2020 campaign celebrates the fact that the president removed the United States from discussions and negotiations leading to the creation to the UN's Global Compact on Migration. The plan, President Trump argues, may have compromised US sovereignty (Donald J. Trump for, n.d.).

In summation, the policies implemented by the Trump administration focused on national security and criminality, rather than providing a means of regularization. Just as significantly, those Obama-era policies which he dissolved addressed ethical issues of the immigration debate, relating to the human rights and dignity of migrants, particularly childhood arrivals. In this way, President Trump's approach targets his populist voting base.

II.   Senator Mark Sanford, GOP Incumbent

While Senator Mark Sanford's plans for 2020 focus on the economy, immigration is still a key aspect of his platform. Senator Sanford promotes himself as a fiscal conservative, claiming that equality under the law is his priority; this applies to both financial gain and migration. In short, Senator Sanford claims, "I view the immigration issue primarily through the principle of fairness and rule of law." In 2020, Senator Sanford is calling for updates to amnesty laws, which under certain circumstances, can pardon individuals who have entered the United States illegally (Sanford, 2019). However, he does not specify how in fact those laws should be updated.

Senator Sanford's other claims are slightly more centrist than President Trump's. While Senator Sanford voted for wall funding in 2018 to support President Trump's plan, he also calls for an increase in the number of work permits, which would allow more non-citizens to work and contribute to the United States' economy. Backed by a similarly fiscal argument, Senator Sanford

suggests that the United States work to stop chain-migration. Though he does not openly support family separations at the border, Senator Sanford wants the United States to transition from the family reunification system to a merit-based model for immigration, which would favor highly skilled labor migrants over uneducated or underprivileged migrants (Sanford, 2019). It is clear that though Senator Sanford has policies prescriptions for the influx of migration that the United States is experiencing. His focus is on how immigrants impact the US economy, rather than their supposed criminality.

III. Former Vice President Joe Biden

The policies of President Trump and Senator Sanders are contrasted by those of former Vice President Joe Biden. Rather than funding for a wall, Biden proposes increasing spending on screening procedures at legal ports of entry, and investing in border technology, not border barricades. Contrary to President Trump's focus on criminality or Senator Sanford's focus on economics, Biden's proposal considers how the United States might act as a world leader in migration, adjusting policies so that they are "commensurate with our responsibility and global need" (Biden for President, 2019). Biden makes further appeals to morality with his more specific plans. First, he proposes the creation of special protections for undocumented immigrants who have served the United States in armed forces. Additionally, he promises the immediate end to separation of families at the border and the closure of for-profit border detention centers which have been under UN and Human Rights Watch investigation (Biden for President, 2019).

Also, Biden's approach is much more world-engaging than world-withdrawing. For example, Biden promises to order the review of Temporary Protected Status to vulnerable populations such as Venezuelans, meeting the UN, IOM, and UNHCR's call to action during the Solidarity Meeting on Venezuelan migrants. In his statement on immigration reform, Biden addresses the need to advance human rights and democracy around the world and to support women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence (Biden for President, 2019). This global-minded approach acknowledges a few of the root causes of migration, rather than seeking to prevent migration outright. Biden's plan makes moral and philosophical changes to political rhetoric, tailoring the language employed by policy to public opinion. For example, one of Biden's proposals is to return the phrase, "nation of immigrants," to the mission statement of Citizenship and Immigration Services (Biden for President, 2019). Thus, Biden is implementing identity politics by drawing on his audience's sense of collectivism in an attempt to unify a population that has become polarized and divided.

IV. Senator Elizabeth Warren

Senator Elizabeth Warren has campaigned with the statement, "I have a plan." Claiming that she has a plan to resolve nearly every issue on the 2020 debate stage, Senator Warren succeeds in presenting a quantitative approach to immigration reform. Her plans pose in stark contrast to those of both President Trump and Senator Sanford. Unlike President Trump, who increased

funding to ICE, Senator Warren seeks to rebuild Customs & Border Protection (CBP) and ICE so that law enforcement is separate from immigration enforcement. In this way, she hopes to decriminalize migration, focusing law enforcement resources on what she deems "true criminal activity". In contrast to President Trump's VOICE, Senator Warren proposes the creation of the Office of New Americans, which would focus on providing due process and resources to immigrants. Next, rather than transitioning from a family-reunification system to a merit-based model, as Senator Sanford proposes, Senator Warren hopes to increase all regular migration by making naturalization easier and reducing the family-reunification backlog. This would effectively bring families together faster, speeding up the chain-migration process (A fair and welcoming, 2019).

Senator Warren's approaches are similar to Biden in that she addresses the forces that displace migrants. She seeks to increase international aid- though she does not specify by how much- in order to support vulnerable foreigners before they are forced to leave their homes. Also similar to Biden, Senator Warren promises to end unnecessary detention and eliminate for-profit detention centers. However, Senator Warren differs from Biden in that her approach appeals to voters' senses of logos by putting forward particular data. Senator Warren claims that she will raise the current refugee cap instituted by the United States from 22,000 refugees to 125,000 refugees in her first year, eventually increasing the limit to 175,000 (A fair and welcoming, 2019). Here, Senator Warren meets Biden's claims of stepping up to meet global demand and goes one step further by defining an upper limit.

V.   Senator Bernie Sanders

Senator Bernie Sanders, who was presented as an outlier or fringe-candidate in 2016, is making another attempt at the presidency in 2020. Like the other democratic candidates, Senator Sanders opposes many of the policies that President Trump has supported. For example, Senator Sanders hopes to fundamentally restructure ICE, an organization that Senator Sanders voted against the creation of at its inception. Further, Senator Sanders hopes to expand DACA and DAPA by granting immediate legal status to all people eligible for DACA, rather than requiring them to apply for admission to the program. In line with his fellow candidates, Senator Sanders promises to end the practice of separating families at the border and get rid of detention centers that pose unsafe and inhumane conditions. He also claims that he will implement a comprehensive path towards citizenship, though he is yet to publish the key principles of such a path (Bernie 2020, 2019). Overall, the immigration reform plan that Senator Sanders has promoted is less developed than Senator Warren's and Biden's. Essentially, Senator Sanders' plan is presented as the anti-Trump plan; while he promises change, he often fails to articulate what those changes will be, or how they will occur.

Analysis

Polarization of political parties in the United States is fully apparent in the debate on immigration

reform amongst 2020 presidential candidates. From broad-based decisions about funding and the role of different actors, to significant distinctions like the choice to use the terms "illegal alien" versus "undocumented refugee", the candidates have created great ideological distance between one another. In general, President Trump's "America First" policies utilize sectarian rhetoric, focusing on crimes committed by a small percentage of migrants. Targeting low-income voters with predominantly lower levels of education, this approach plays on the fear that immigrants can "steal jobs" from Americans. Those that still feel the lingering effects of the 2008 financial crisis or other job insecurity may favor this approach (Cole, 2019). Senator Sanford uses a different approach to appeal to the same voting base. His policies are economically motivated and seek to define the types of migrants that the United States accepts. In this way, Senator Sanford promises to use immigration policy to improve the United States economy, behooving those that are sensitive to populist concerns.

On the opposite side of the playing field, democrats Biden, Senator Warren, and Senator Sanders are united in their vision of America as welcoming more migrants and refugees. Biden, who is driven by international cooperation and the ideology of human rights activists, parallels Senator Warren, who has similar policy programs but more precise plans. Finally, Senator Sanders promises a future inclusive of migrants, but does not make immigration reform his central campaign claim by lacking in specificity on the topic. Together, the democratic candidates appeal to a high-income, higher-educated segment of the American voting base (Cole, 2019). These voters tend to be more secure in their socioeconomic positions. Further, the democratic candidates often appeal to communities of color. Thus, the democratic candidates speak to voters who value the liberal ideal of unity in diversity, and those who see the United States as an international leader making decisions about the rules of the game in the international arena.

Conclusion

Potential human rights violations at the southern border have politicized and securitized the issues of immigration in the United States. Where Congress was historically unable to pass key legislation, such as the DREAM Act, the need for immediate action is becoming clear. Cases of medical malpractice and forced family separations bring to light the urgency of immigration reform. Recent increases in the number of American citizens who believe that immigration reform should be the top priority of our political leaders is further evidence of politicians' obligation to readdress policies.

At present- one year prior to the election- the leading candidates in the 2020 presidential race are Donald Trump and Mark Sanford of the Republican Party, and Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren, and Bernie Sanders of the Democratic Party. These candidates were selected for this analysis on the basis of their ranking in New York Times polls and the gross value of their campaign funds. President Trump, who focuses on irregular migrants as national security threats, contrasts with his own party member, Senator Sanders, who focuses on aspects of economic and labor migration. President Trump and Senator Sanford collectively make an appeal to a populist voting base, oft composed of lower-income, lower-educated, and socioeconomically insecure individuals. By targeting groups of Americans that are concerned with their own jobs or security, the Republican candidates make migration a United States citizen-centric issue. On the other hand, Biden, Senator Warren, and Senator Sanders center the debate on the human rights aspects of

immigration. They make appeals to their audience's sense of pathos through drawing attention to things like family reunification and the rights of refugees. Their approaches are all international, examining the role of the United States as an actor in the immigration space, and its actions relating to the responsibility to protect.

The difference between how candidates and parties have approached the immigration debate showcases the polarization of the American political sphere. Where Democrats and Republicans exhibit the strongest disparities in their responses to opinion polls, it is possible that they are approaching the issue from different angles, with varied political motives. As such, immigration policy may serve to be a divisive issue in the continued 2020 presidential debates.

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