

Original Paper

Trump and U.S. Immigration Policies. Lessons from the Eisenhower Administration

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Abstract

While U.S. immigration entry policies after 1953 became a hallmark of ideological openness, designating the United States as the unquestioned leader of a freer and more just world order, Donald Trump's current immigration strategies isolate America, damage her economy, and fuel divisive feelings among citizens. This paper hopes to persuade the Republican Party not to revert to its pre-1953 restrictionist and nativist stance, thereby undoing the crucial work undertaken by the Eisenhower Administration. The author argues that a sound grasp of the debate that led to the approval of the Refugee Relief Act in 1953 can lead to better informed political decision-making, tracing a new phase of America's active presence on the world stage, in line with the country's national interest and Cold war tradition.

Keywords

Trump, Muslim Ban, U.S. immigration policy, restrictionism, nativism, Eisenhower, Cold War

1. Introduction

On August 7, 1953, President Eisenhower signed the Refugee Relief Act. This document authorized permanent entry on special visas for 214,000 refugees, orphans, expellees, and relatives of U.S. citizens or aliens in the United States. With the Refugee Relief Act, America abandoned the idea of immigration quotas based on the country of origin, developing a more flexible concept of national security. At a crucially unstable phase of the Cold War, with the Soviet *troika* fighting over power after Stalin's death and the Korean War coming to an end, the Republican Party chose to embrace a more liberal approach to immigration. With the Refugee Relief Act, America's immigration policies became an ideological, economic, and political asset used by Republicans to fight communism both in the domestic and international realms.

This pivotal shift in the Republican Party's thinking on immigration paved the way for forthcoming legislation, such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. In addition, the 1953 Refugee Relief Act proved to be consistent with national security requirements, upholding the conservative tradition of American exceptionalism during the Cold War. From then onwards the U.S. officially abandoned entry mechanisms centered upon country of origin, recasting its public image as a safe haven among the oppressed and politically persecuted. Furthermore, with the passing of the Refugee Relief Act the United States assumed a more ideologically authoritative role in world politics, promoting the American dream overseas.

Despite the contingent and temporary fluctuations that inevitably characterize policymaking, U.S. legislation has been consistent with its liberal tradition since the end of World War II (De Laet, 2000). America has always been a country of immigrants: they are vital to the long-term prosperity and security of the United States, and they constitute an increasingly important asset for the U.S. armed forces. Allowing people into the country to visit, study, or work, is "one of the surest ways to build friendships with future generations of foreign leaders and to show America's best face to the world" (Bush, McLarty, & Alden, 2009, p. ix). Nevertheless, the traditionally open response to immigration into the United States is under severe scrutiny today, as the Republican Party reverts to a much older political tradition, epitomized by the doctrines of restrictionism and nativism.

Donald Trump's Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, colloquially known as the Muslim Ban, has sparked heated debate both domestically and abroad, proving as divisive as it is resilient. This paper argues that the logic underlying Trump's nativist and restrictionist entry policies for immigration is not only negatively affecting national interest; it also fails to propel the U.S. forwards on the world stage, making America look hesitant and fearful. The Administration's position on immigration also shows disengagement from ideals that are conventionally associated with Cold War strategies and the American dream.

Assessing the entirety of current U.S. immigration policies, or discussing the constitutionality of Donald Trump's Executive Orders, are beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly, this essay does not wish to address the domestic and international effects of U.S. immigration strategies, past and present. Instead, this research will outline the reasoning behind the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, and compare it to the narrative on immigration that has shaped the campaign and the presidency of Donald Trump to the present day. Available research on migration considers the juxtaposition of two historical periods immensely fruitful, pointing out the benefits of such methodology (Gerstle & Mollenkopf, 2001). By looking at similarities and divergences in Republican immigration strategies at two different historical moments, this paper hopes to transcend contingent perspectives and suggest an alternative way of thinking about immigration today.

2. The 1953 Republican Turn on Immigration

In the Fifties, the issue of immigration in the United States reached an important turning point. At the end of World War II, the Allies had pledged to assist and relocate a massive number of political refugees and displaced persons in Europe. Many of them, because of family ties or economic necessity, dreamed of moving to the U.S. Approaching the end of his presidential term, and following the famous speech of March 24, 1952, Harry Truman appointed a presidential commission on immigration and naturalization. Its testimonies, collected in the document *Whom We Shall Welcome*, pointed almost univocally to the call for a more tolerant America, which would be open to migratory flows from southern Europe (Woolley & Peters, 2009). This led to the belief that a greater number of visas for DPs from World War II, victims of political persecution, and unemployed Greeks, Italians and Germans, would match the image of a free and generous nation, in contrast with the obscurantism of communist countries (Loescher & Scanlan, 1986, pp. 44-47).

Congress, however, was divided. On one side, the most numerous were the restrictionists: those who believed in strict regulatory policies, irrespective of the circumstances and motivations of migrants. On the other, a minority who was clamoring for a review of the entire quota system, in order for it to become more liberal. In this view, visas would be allocated regardless of provenience and solely based on so-called “functional” priority: special skills and individual humanitarian motives. The largely centrist area supported the continuation of the current quota system instead, granting “emergency” visas to refugees, based upon the country of origin (Robbins, 1956, p. 313).

After taking office, Eisenhower seemed willing to follow the path charted by Truman. Unlike most Republicans, who held restrictionist views, the president was convinced that migrants did not represent a threat to U.S. security. The President was certain that a more open policy toward immigration would be a valuable resource in the ideological struggle against the Soviet Union. Therefore, Eisenhower requested Congress to consider the entry of a greater number of migrants in the United States. A more open and pragmatic attitude on U.S. immigration would allow America to strengthen her bond with other NATO countries, facing the Cold War with a solid coalition led by the United States. In fact, a more fluid approach to immigration could consolidate support and gain electoral traction for centrist coalitions in office in allied nations, such as Italy. This policy could thus ensure that these countries would not fall hostage to a communist party intent on presenting itself as a champion of the weak, by supporting governments that could fend off economic and social malaise. Hence, it would help keep both government spending and the social discontent of citizens under control. To make the proposal more palatable, Eisenhower argued that these were temporary measures, solely aimed at protecting the interests of the United States abroad.

This idea was particularly intriguing for Republicans, due to its decisive anticommunist tinge. However, Senator Robert Taft’s isolationist legacy was holding strong, as the Senator of Ohio still benefited from much popularity after running for the Grand Old Party primaries in 1952. McCarthyism was equally cumbersome: in 1953, Senator McCarthy was chairman of the Senate Committee on Government

Operations and amply used his powers to investigate supposed Communist infiltrations in the U.S. Also, the only document on immigration that had been approved after the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952, known as the McCarran-Walter Act. The McCarran-Walter Act, proposed by the Democrats, had become law on June 27, 1952 despite a presidential veto by Truman. It regulated immigration in the United States and the expulsion of illegal immigrants, making the naturalization process more difficult, and many conservatives did not see reason to change an agreement so recent and, until proven otherwise, still effective.

Even though the number of immigrants who were accepted into the United States had increased with the INA, communist sympathizers were banned and the government maintained highly restrictive categories based on the country of origin. McCarran's reasoning had been that it could be highly risky to let foreigners come to the United States, especially when they came from countries where communism was strong and poverty was widespread. Social discontent could be a catalyst for revolutionary talk, and this could not be permitted on U.S. soil (Campi, 2004; Shanks, 2001). Therefore, a more liberal policy towards immigration was unacceptable to many pragmatist conservatives, whose notions of patriotism and citizenship were framed in primarily restrictive terms.

Nevertheless, between 1952 and 1953, Republicans redefined their positions. With the prospect of a prolonged Cold War, the party needed new and bold strategies. For this reason, the Eisenhower Administration adopted the arguments of the liberalizing front, highlighting the possibility of opening its borders to counter the communist ideology. A new immigration program would first need to rectify the apparent stigma associated with minorities from Southern Europe, whom Republicans had long ignored, as they could turn into a valuable source of future electoral support (Bon Tempo, 2008, pp. 36-37). Republicans also understood that new immigration legislation was politically attractive because it fulfilled Eisenhower's electoral promises of revising the McCarran-Walter Act, in order to better deal with recent changes in the geopolitical landscape. It also aligned with the president's will to review Truman's containment policies in a more active way, emphasizing deterrence and rolling back the Iron Curtain. Still, it did not represent a radical break with the past, given that the new proposal would assume an extraordinary and temporary character and not be presented as a comprehensive immigration reform. As Rorty (1955) explains, "Both Mr. Eisenhower and his Democratic opponents had repeatedly denounced the disastrous inequities, injustices, and obstructions embodied in our basic immigration law. But neither party was politically willing or able to legislate a statesmanlike immigration policy, or even, as it turned out, to pass an effective emergency palliative" (pp. 301-309).

Working in the Eisenhower Administration, William Draper, then Air Force Aide to the President, was first to suggest the use of increased immigration quotas into the United States to influence election results in countries with communist leanings. A memorandum by Harold Linder (1986) and James C.H. Bonbright, sent to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and dated February 25, 1953, brought to the President's attention the need to accelerate the approval by Congress of specific legislation that would allow about 240,000 immigrants to enter the United States within the following two years, including

75,000 Italians (p. 1605).

The specific reasoning on the Italian case better exemplifies the goals of the Eisenhower Administration. As Bon Tempo (2008) observes, “In Italy, American experts worried that population pressures—from both refugees and ‘overpopulation’—might lead to political discontent, which would facilitate the rise to power of the Italian communist party. The upcoming Italian elections in May 1953 sharpened State Department apprehensions” (p. 35). Admittedly, the Eisenhower administration viewed immigration law as one of the keys to keep the Italian Communist Party (PCI) under control. Through new legislation, the United States could support and strengthen then Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi’s party, the Christian Democracy, viewed as the most moderate and balanced player in the political arena. At the same time, it would erode support for the PCI, and simultaneously show to the people on both sides of the Atlantic that America cared about Italy’s fate, and was prepared to welcome its citizens who were in difficulty and wanted to leave. This would provide an additional source of income to the families most in need, expand democratic consensus, and therefore, by extension, the power of the DC in future government coalitions.

Following the aforementioned memorandum by Linder and Bonbright, Secretary of State Dulles wrote a document on March 26 addressed to President Eisenhower, in which he recommended Congress to authorize the entry of 240,000 non-quota immigrants. Dulles also noted that Representatives Emmanuel Celler and Ruth Thompson, as well as Senators William Langer and Robert C. Hendrickson, would support the project (Dulles, 1983a). For his part, Celler had reminded the President in a personal meeting that such an initiative would be consistent with his recent State of the Union address, insisting on the bipartisan character that the proposal ought to assume (Rep. Celler, 1953). It was also fundamental that this type of legislation would not be purported as a revision of the McCarran-Walter Act. Indeed, many in the Administration feared that McCarran would resort to filibustering: he had already proposed an all-refugee amendment, which in practice would reduce the quotas, leading to negative political and diplomatic repercussions among America’s allies (Dulles, 1983b; Zolberg, 2009, p. 322).

On May 31, 1953, Republican Senator Arthur Watkins, who chaired the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest, presented to the Senate the project known as the Emergency Migration Act. The rationale in support of the document was that of national security, in line with Cold War policies, adding emphasis on the economic benefits which would be reaped from a major influx of workers into the country. At the same time, a National Security Council memorandum recommended the passing of the law, “to encourage defection of all USSR nations and ‘key personnel from the satellite countries’ in order to ‘inflict a psychological blow on communism’” (Zolberg, 1995, pp. 123-124). Still, despite the cautious optimism shown by the president’s special assistant in his communication to Ambassador to Italy Clare Booth Luce on July 6 (Jackson, 1953), many senators remained vehemently opposed to the project (Dulles, 1983b).

Nevertheless, in the conference with the Legislative Leaders on July 20, the president renewed his

support for the document in its latest form, even recommending increasing the number of permits for special categories (Eisenhower, 1983, p. 1631). Resolution HR 6481 was approved in the House 221-185 on July 28, 1953, lowering the threshold of immigrants to be admitted from 240,000 to 217,000. 132 Republicans, 88 Democrats and one independent declared themselves in favor, and 74 Republicans and 111 Democrats opposed. The day after, the Senate agreed to a revised version by a 63-39 roll-call vote, with the support of 38 Republicans and 24 Democrats, again lowering the total number of immigrants allowed to enter to 214,000. All the senators from the South, besides two, expressed a negative opinion, showing the presence of a more visceral and traditionalist conservatism in the Southern part of the nation (Cisek, 2006, p. 67; Rorty, 1995, p. 302). However, such opposition did not have a lasting impact, as on July 31, 1953, the House accepted the report, and the Senate granted its final approval on the next day.

On August 7, 1953, President Eisenhower signed the Bill and the proposal outlined for the Emergency Migration Act finally became the Refugee Relief Act. The fixed annual immigration quotas (154,657 visas) had already been established by the Immigration and Nationality (McCarran-Walter) Act of 1952. Additionally, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 authorized the permanent entry of 214,000 refugees, orphans, expellees, relatives of US citizens or aliens temporarily in the United States, on special non-quota visas. It remained in place for three years, until December 31, 1956 (Refugee Relief, 1956, pp. 312-315).

It was a significant event for several reasons. First, with the Refugee Relief Act America officially committed to abandoning immigration quotas based on the country of origin, paving the way for a possible revision of the Walter-McCarran Act. More specifically, the Refugee Relief Act laid the theoretical basis for subsequent legislation, like the Refugee-Escapee Act (REA) of 1957, and the Refugee Fair Share Act of 1960 (Martin, 2011, p. 179). However, in the following years, conservative Democrats from the South in powerful congressional positions prevented racial egalitarians in their own party from enacting more profound and lasting immigration reforms. Therefore, the national-origins system was not erased from legislation entirely until the introduction of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (the Hart-Celler Act), which openly relied on a preference system focused on immigrants' family relationships with U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, or their skills (Fitzgerald, 2014, pp. 119-120).

The Eisenhower Administration was pivotal in liberalizing immigration laws. After 1953, the Republican Party developed a more flexible concept of national security, up to then limited by unrealistic and overly oppressive rules towards asylum seekers. Additionally, the Refugee Relief Act introduced for the first time in American legislation the term "escapees", which brought together the idea of refugee and expellees within a broader notion of "fugitives". The term "asylum seeker" was under all aspects considered applicable to individuals "unable to return to a communist country, or dominated by the Communists" (Henson, 2013, pp. 1816-1817), an idea that would later be resumed and expanded in the United States Escapee Program (USEP), which officially began in 1954 (Curti,

1963, pp. 538-539; Carruthers, 2005). This meant that national security could be protected precisely by welcoming those oppressed, persecuted, and politically moderate elements who came from countries “at risk”—and not keeping them out because of their provenience.

The Refugee Relief Act also legitimized the use of the concept of “parole”, previously introduced—albeit in a restrictive manner—by Walter and McCarran in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. After the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, Eisenhower authorized the entry of 38,000 fugitives into the U.S. through the Hungarian Parole Program. The President took advantage of a provision in the McCarran-Walter Act that allowed special access to the United States through the mechanism of paroling, for medical reasons, family reunification or other humanitarian reasons, at the discretion of the Attorney General. The recipients of this extraordinary act were allowed entry in the country not as permanent residents, but as asylum seekers instead. With a remarkable decision, Eisenhower then assigned those visas that lay unused as part of the Refugee Relief Act, in order to rectify the Hungarian escapees’ precarious situation. Such action directly connected the possibility of paroling with the term “refugee”, making the two concepts interchangeable, and drawing a continuum in US legislation for the use of immigration to oppose communism (Buff, 2008, p. 32; Bon Tempo, 2008, pp. 70-71).

Despite the difficulties and the controversies related to the implementation of the Refugee Relief Act, as it appears from the profuse literature on the Corsi affair (Immigration, 1955; Corsi, 1955; U.S. Congress Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1955), changes in immigration policies were met with high approval ratings among U.S. citizens. Americans responded positively to a liberalizing turn in immigration law, as popular support for the admission of refugees rose to 47% in 1953, double the percentage of 1947 (Fetzer, 2000, p. 40). Although the Republican Party was not able to create unequivocal internal support for the proposal, the Refugee Relief Act became a valuable tool for foreign policy in the GOP during the Cold War (Zucker, N. L., & Zucker, N. F., 1992). In this sense, the progressive abandonment of isolationism and a more resolute anti-communism in the Republican Party exemplified the conservatives’ attempt to differentiate themselves from liberal intellectuals after World War II, as the latter were perceived as consistently ready to ignore, and sometimes excuse, the great evils of communism in the world.

Furthermore, the approval of the Refugee Relief Act marked the moment when the Eisenhower Administration realized the immense potential that laid in soft power. The U.S.’s open support for refugees and escapees, broadcast by “Radio Free Europe”, “Voice of America”, and “Radio Liberation”, echoed strong behind the Iron Curtain. The use of these media to purport the U.S. as a safe haven for refugees supported the image of a powerful country, which nonetheless cared about the oppressed and politically persecuted, and was ready to offer shelter (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2009; Puddington, 2000).

Finally, this legislation completed Truman’s work, who had already tried to tie refugee policies to national security interests (Rudolph, 2006, pp. 47-49). Refugees were no longer considered a high

security risk, but were instead becoming “potentially valuable instruments of a foreign policy and moral purpose aimed at supporting and encouraging disaffection with the tyranny of the Communist satellites” (Rorty, 1955, p. 305).

3. Donald Trump and the Return to Restrictionism

Until the 1990s, the immigration debate in the United States centered upon economic issues, such as the number and type of immigrants who would benefit the American economy, or legal strategies to deter people from entering the country illicitly (Alden, 2016). With 9/11, both the domestic and the international security scenario changed, and the immigration debate changed with them. Increased security threats gradually pushed the discussion on migration towards issues of national security, mainly in the form of augmented entry restrictions (Bier, 2018). Consequently, the last fifteen years have witnessed a progressive increase in checks and control mechanisms, such as biometric screenings, identity tracking, and information gathering, in order to make it more difficult for potential terrorists to operate within American borders. The political priority today, in the words of the U.S. President, is firmly settled on “protecting American lives from foreign nationals who intend to commit terrorist attacks” (Trump, 2017b).

Donald Trump’s approach to immigration maintains the tone of urgency introduced with 9/11. Since the appearance of his immigration plan on his presidential campaign website, Trump has progressively worked to bring together the concepts of national interest, national security, and economic benefit, in a tenacious argument to restrict migration (Trump, 2016b). The President has also called for a comprehensive review of all existing immigration policies “to determine what legislative reforms are essential for America’s economic and national security” (Trump, 2017d). The claim, clearly stated in a presidential letter to all House and Senate Leaders, upholds that illegal, unqualified, and chain migration, have to be drastically curbed, as they irreparably damage the U.S.

The idea that immigration creates serious economic distress, as well as a threat to public safety in the United States, is not new to Donald Trump’s political discourse. In his presidential announcement speech, Trump (2015a) notoriously accused Mexico of sending to America “people that have lots of problems”, who inevitably bring such problems with them. Mexicans, he claimed, are taking jobs away from the American people. “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists”, Trump declared, as he identified a grave danger not just with immigrants in general, but with their country of provenience.

Immediately after its inauguration, the Republican Administration set out to translate the President’s thoughts into applicable legislation by means of Executive Orders. This also contributed to the sense of an incumbent threat that required immediate action. Just one week after the swearing-in ceremony of January 20, 2017, Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13769 Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States (Trump, 2017b). The EO, “delayed for litigations”, was amended and eventually superseded by Executive Order 13780 (Trump, 2017c). Large influxes of foreigners, the

document asserts, are a source of concern for the country's national interest and national security. Following the signing of the aforementioned Executive Orders, an increase in immigration restrictions, procedural delays, fewer refugees accepted in the United States, augmented deportations, and more visible hostility against asylum seekers have followed (Pierce & Selee, 2017; Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program, 2017).

Although during his presidential campaign Trump advocated for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Trump, 2015b), the legislation on immigration drafted by the current Administration has progressively shifted from a religious-based exclusivist principle to a geographical one. In fact, what is colloquially known as the "Muslim Ban" centers upon country of provenience instead. As the President confirmed, "the Muslim Ban has morphed into an extreme vetting from certain areas of the world" (Trump, 2016c). The shift became necessary when Trump realized that a religious qualifier was too controversial. "People were so upset when I used the word Muslim", the President noticed. "You can't use the word Muslim. Remember this. And I'm okay with that, because I'm talking territory instead of Muslim" (Trump, 2016d).

Even though Executive Order 13769 and 13780 were introduced as temporary measures, they were pivotal in translating the Administration's theoretical thinking on immigration into formal legislation, paving the way for the indefinite suspension of travel from certain countries through the notion of "extreme vetting" (Panduranga, Patel, & Price, 2017). The idea of additional scrutiny for certain groups in U.S. entry mechanisms is neither new to the American tradition, nor illegitimate. For this reason, screenings for obtaining a permanent visa or refugee status have always been rigorous in America, even more so after 9/11, focusing on suspicious activities and personal history—mostly criminal and medical records. However, Donald Trump affirms that the country needs much tougher entry standards, as foreign nationals might slip through the visa process, posing a serious terrorism risk in the U.S. (Trump, 2017c). As religious vetting has proven politically indefensible, the Republican Party is working to elaborate a renewed proposal of "extreme vetting" centered upon national security threats presented by foreign nationals. In the words of the 45th President of the United States, such vetting would be based on a rather discretionary procedure, screening people for "who they are, where they are from, what their feeling about our country is" (Trump, 2016c). For the current Administration, restrictions based upon the country of provenience may even take precedence over already approved visas. As the Hameed Khalid Darweesh case shows, where a person comes from might even temporarily override that person's rightful claim to enter the U.S. (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017; Brownley, 2017).

The threats to national security and national interest posed by immigration, as identified by the current Administration, are a rise in the number of undocumented migrants; higher rate of criminal behavior among immigrants, compared to U.S. born citizens; an increase in terrorist activities; resistance to cultural assimilation and to English language learning processes; and economic burden/damage for the host country (Woods & Arthur, 2017, pp. 1-26). However, no conclusive evidence has actually been presented in support of these arguments. The economic benefits of more open migration policies have

been noted elsewhere (Clemens, 2011; Cortes, 2008; Ottaviano & Peri, 2012). Additionally, the hazards posed by foreign terrorism are not large enough to warrant extreme action, as immigration checks already in place already provide a solid amount of screening, and vetting failures are rare and pose a minimal risk to the United States (Bier, 2018). There are appropriate procedures in place, and no findings show them to be inadequate, or suggest that the lack of more extreme vetting procedures will harm national interests (Panduranga et al., 2017). Additional studies confirmed that foreign-born terrorists have killed roughly only one American per year since 9/11 (Nowrasteh, 2016). Conversely, identifying risks in a foreign nation, rather than in its citizens, potentially constitutes a danger: Woods and Arthur (2017) claim that coupling the idea of the threat of terrorism and violent crime with that of immigration is a dramatization that is not useful in advancing national security, nor promoting national interest, nor projecting force (pp. 140-141).

The insistence on coupling immigration policies with security threats and economic recession has developed alongside a return of the traditional debate on nativism. Nativism is not new to the American tradition, although it clearly struggles to find an acceptable place alongside its historical heritage as a nation of immigrants. Prior to World War I, U.S. laws did not explicitly restrict the selection or composition of immigrants based on race or nationality, with the exception of Asian immigrants. In general, legislation attempted to exclude people based on income level, education, and moral, biological, and physical qualities (Young, 2017, p. 223). However, after the turn of the century, the provisions in the Immigration Act grew increasingly strict. The rationale for this crackdown was a 40-volume report published by the Dillingham Commission, which was formed in 1909 by Congress in order to assess the effects of Asian and southern and eastern European immigration. The commission “began its work convinced that the pseudoscientific racist theories of superior and inferior peoples were correct and that the more recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were not capable of becoming successful Americans” (Fuchs & Forbes, 2003, p. 55).

Throughout the years, nativists have been portraying new immigrants as unfit to become American citizens: “they were too infected by Catholicism, monarchism, anarchism, Islam, criminal tendencies, defective genes, mongrel bloodlines, or some other alien virus to become free men and women in a democratic society” (Schrag, 2010, p. 4). This idea is recurrent in Trump’s reasoning, where immigrants are portrayed as less able to identify with, and contribute to, national interest, becoming an unwanted burden on dutiful citizens who should instead, “come first” on the government’s priority list (Trump, 2017a).

Kibria, Bowman, and O’Leary note how “reconciliation of nativism with the ideology of America as an immigrant nation has occurred in part through the differential assessment of immigrant groups” (2014, p. 9). This logic aptly fits the President’s remarks on “good” and “bad” Mexicans, previously quoted in his campaign speech (Trump, 2015a). By combining the ideas of nativism (Americans first) with restrictionism (less immigration), Donald Trump has reinforced the good immigrant/bad immigrant dichotomy. The current Administration’s perspective is that not only is it capable of identifying “good”

migrants—lawful citizens who subscribe to American values and are ready to uncompromisingly assimilate into the social fabric embodying the “real” America—it is also able to uncover “bad” migrants, who are a threat to national security and would be an economic burden on American society, by means of tougher vetting procedures. In the President’s words, “in addition to screening out all members or sympathizers of terrorist groups, we must also screen out any who have hostile attitudes towards our country or its principles” (Trump, 2016a). Therefore, Trump advocates restrictions against “bad migrants” who are not able to pass increasingly tight security restrictions centered upon their country of provenience, as well as other rather arbitrary considerations about their moral character.

The idea that terrorism—and more generally national security threats—can be tackled by vetting immigrants from specific geographical areas, Trump argues, was commonplace during the Cold War and resembles the “ideological screening test” administered in those years to identify communist and anarchic sympathizers and prevent their admission into the U.S. (Trump, 2016a). What the President is claiming is that there is continuity in vetting procedures against ideologically treacherous beliefs spreading on U.S. soil. Trump proudly considers himself to be leading such a return to tradition. The President possibly deduces the existence of said tradition from the persistence of State Department DS-260 form, which prospective immigrants still have to fill in to enter the country today, and enquires into possible communist leanings of the person requesting admittance (Said-Moorhouse & Browne, 2016).

However, the theoretical debate on the Refugee Relief Act in 1953 in the previous section of this essay clearly shows that the Republican strategy on immigration at the time switched to welcoming individuals who came from communist countries as refugees, escapees, and survivors, rather than classifying them as potentially dangerous because of their provenience. A restrictive approach to immigration based on the country of origin became politically indefensible after the Eisenhower presidency, and slowly faded away. The supposed parallel claimed by the President with Barack Obama’s policy for temporary extra screenings of 2011, placed on visas for Iraqi citizens’ resettlement program, does not seem to constitute a valid precedent (Kessler, 2017).

Further research also highlights that providing a safe haven to persons fleeing persecution and violence mirrors core values in U.S. history, the American tradition, and its commitments to liberty, freedom and dignity (Kerwin & Warren, 2017). For this reason, Donald Trump likening his own immigration policies to an uncompromising, staunchly anti-communist political tradition, reminiscent of Robert Taft, is factually incorrect, and seems more functional than principled. The President’s return to pre-1953 policymaking, perhaps to score domestic political points by appealing to foreign policy issues, rather makes Joseph McCarthy a much more apt term of comparison (Thompson, 2016).

4. Conclusion

The current Republican Administration claims that individuals arriving from certain countries into the U.S. create economic burdens and higher security risks. Immigrants, the President argues, pose threats to law-abiding citizens, and damage the U.S. economy. It is not surprising that such a bleak portrait of immigration has led the Republican Administration to embrace both a restrictionist and a nativist stance, returning *de facto* to pre-1953 policies. However, evidence suggests that more open immigration strategies benefit U.S. economy and do not present increased security threats. Stringent screenings and vetting procedures are already in place, and they are highly effective.

America must remember the debate that led to the approval of the Refugee Relief Act in 1953, and subsequent changes in Cold War immigration policies. While still acknowledging the domestic and international security risks posed by subversive individuals, the Eisenhower Administration welcomed those who fled from communist countries with the precise aim to fight communism itself. This projected an image of America that was strong, confident, and ready to work with foreign nationals to win the battle against its enemy in the Cold War. The Eisenhower Administration's position on entry policies specifically suggests that terrorism could be defeated today by welcoming to the U.S. those who escape it, in order to fight alongside America against obscurantism and oppression in the name of liberal values. By receiving refugees from countries at risk, the U.S. could revamp its Cold War tradition, strengthen its internal unity and better confront foreign threats.

Kerwin (2017) argues that the US immigration system ought to reflect liberal democratic values and an inclusive vision of national identity (p. 545). The driving principle behind the Eisenhower Administration policy debate that produced the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 seemed to do just that. It advocated for a more open America, a country that was stronger because it is able to project outwards its founding values, by embracing all those who came to share them. It found allies, not enemies, in those who escaped oppressive, illiberal political regimes and economic hardships to live out a fuller, better life in America.

The debate on immigration entry policies and the related drafting of Executive Orders during Donald Trump's presidency have taken America very far away from its Cold War tradition. The doctrine of American exceptionalism, which has traditionally belonged to conservatism and to the Republican Party since World War II, is contaminated by a return to restrictionism and nativism. However, Eisenhower's work on the Refugee Relief Act shows that it is possible to reconcile the Republican ideal of a great America with a liberal, more open standing on immigration—an inclusive, rather than an exclusivist one.

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