



Just Say No to Just Immigration Amnesty

by [Bob Quasius, Sr.](#) on Aug. 18, 2013,

What is Immigration Amnesty?

The anti-any-immigrant lobby, led by the Federation of Americans for Immigration Reform, NumbersUSA, and the Center for Immigration Studies, all founded by the notorious population reduction liberal and bigot John Tanton, are calling the bill amnesty.

What exactly is amnesty? Merriam-Webster definitions:

[Amnesty](#): the act of an authority (as a government) by which pardon is granted to a large group of individuals

[Pardon](#): the excusing of an offense without exacting a penalty

[Penalty](#): the suffering in person, rights, or property that is annexed by law or judicial decision to the commission of a crime or public offense

Does the 'gang of eight' immigration reform plan grant immigration amnesty to unauthorized immigrants? No, there are stiff penalties, and therefore no amnesty is proposed.

Senator Marco Rubio made quite clear that unauthorized immigrants will be required to pay a fine and go through a lengthy process just to apply for permanent resident status. In other words, unauthorized immigrants will be held accountable for their illegal acts, which is not amnesty. Marco Rubio explains on Fox News Sunday:

Is Immigration Amnesty a Magnet for More Illegal Immigration?

Opponents of immigration reform often claim immigration amnesty is a magnet for more illegal immigration, and point to the 1986 immigration reform as an example. Approximately

three million unauthorized immigrants were granted permanent resident status, and were not required to pay fines, wait, etc.

Yes, the 1986 reforms is clearly an example of immigration amnesty. No fines were required, and no long wait in line for permanent resident status either. Many legal immigrants who had waited a long time to come to the U.S. legally were justifiably outraged, while those who came here illegally in effect 'cut in line.'

Immigration reform opponents claim the 1986 reforms caused more illegal immigration, and point to the increase in the unauthorized immigrant population to a peak of 12 million.

However, in statistics and science there's a basic concept: correlation does not necessarily imply causation. For example, there's a strong correlation between ice cream sales and drowning deaths. Does eating ice cream cause drowning deaths? Hardly! People eat more ice cream during hot months, which is also when more people are around large bodies of water and drown.

According to the Cato Institute, demographers who have interviewed thousands of unauthorized immigrants found the overwhelming motivation for immigrating illegally is work or family reunification, not the prospect of future amnesty. Immigration inflows fluctuate with the state of the economy, and history shows when immigration policy, quotas, etc. unreasonably impedes the flow of immigrants to meet economic needs, illegal immigration is invariably the result.

American Experience with Mass Amnesty

If immigration amnesty serves as a magnet for more illegal immigration, then we'd expect to see a repeated correlation between illegal behavior and amnesty. Without a consistent correlation, then other factors must be the root causes.

The first immigration amnesty came in the late 1920s. Early modern progressives were huge fans of eugenics, and pushed immigration laws through Congress from 1882 (Chinese Exclusion Act) to 1924 (National Origins Act) which slammed shut the door on legal immigration from outside Europe. The 1924 law reserved 85% of immigrant visas to the "Nordic" nations of Northern and Western Europe, though most immigration at the time was from Southern and Eastern Europe. In the early decades of the 20th century, [200,000 Italians immigrated to the U.S. each year. In 1924, the quota for Italy was set at just 3,845,](#) less than 2% of previous immigration levels.

Not surprisingly, the same economic forces that led Southern and Eastern Europeans to immigrate to the U.S. didn't change with the imposition of arbitrary quotas in 1924. Within a few years, the U.S. had several million unauthorized immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, who were given immigration amnesty.

Did this immigration amnesty lead to more illegal immigration? No! The great depression which immediately followed the immigration amnesty ended the economic incentive to

immigrate to the U.S. In fact, until the Nazi era drove large numbers of Jews to seek refuge in the U.S., immigrant quotas for Northern and Western Europe often went unfilled.

The U.S. did not experience another surge in illegal immigration until the post war boom created demand for foreign guest workers far in excess of the bracero program quota. The Eisenhower administration authorized a crackdown, and approximately one million Mexicans were either deported, or in most cases simply left. No amnesty was granted.

With the elimination of the braceros program following the 1965 reforms, at the behest of big labor, illegal immigration resulted, especially during strong economies. As Americans became better educated, with lower drop-out rates resulting in a smaller pool of Americans willing to work in unskilled jobs, especially those requiring mobility. At the same time, Mexico's economy, especially after NAFTA, resulted in a surplus of young, often unemployed, adults seeking but not finding work in Mexico, but able to find work in the U.S.

Two other examples of mass amnesty demonstrate a lack of causation. President Abraham Lincoln declared mass amnesty for confederates who took a loyalty oath promising not to take up arms against the U.S. again. Lincoln didn't live to see the end of the civil war, but his successor, Andrew Johnson, followed through on Abraham Lincoln's amnesty proclamation, though he excluded more confederates.

President Jimmy Carter granted mass amnesty to 100,000 Vietnam era draft dodgers.

Now how many civil wars have we experienced since 1865? How many instances of widespread draft evasion since Vietnam? If we accept the amnesty magnet theory advanced by the anti-any-immigrant lobby, then perhaps we should feel lucky that somehow 147 years passed without another bloody civil war!

Did amnesty for draft dodgers lead to more draft dodging? It doesn't appear so! There were no previous amnesties for draft dodgers prior to Vietnam, yet we had a serious draft evasion problem, with 100,000 young men living in exile rather than serve their nation as required. There is no more draft, but we still have draft registration, and no unusual problem has been noted with failure to register for [selective service](#).

Why Didn't The 1986 Immigration Amnesty Work?

When Congress passed and Ronald Reagan signed immigration amnesty in 1986, approximately three million unauthorized immigrants received permanent resident status (green cards), and employers were required to check for certain documents when hiring new employees. Congress promised to follow-up the 1986 reforms with better border security, and guest worker program reforms.

The employer documentation requirement hasn't been effective because forged documents can be readily obtained. Employers aren't required to verify document's authenticity, and the

e-verify system likewise hasn't been effective, as unauthorized immigrants can circumvent e-verify with a real name, real social security number, and fake documents.

Congress was very slow to fund better border security until the Clinton administration a decade later, and didn't get really serious about border security until after 9/11 reminded Americans of our vulnerability to attack. Border security is vastly improved, sadly evidenced by thousands of deaths from immigrants diverted to remote border areas in the Arizona desert, but there's still room for improvement.

Since 1986 Congress has done nothing to reform guest worker programs, which brings us to the principle cause of illegal immigration: arbitrary quotas disconnected from economic need. In 2011, there were 1.8 million legal non-immigrants with guest worker or training visas, with another 7-7.5 million uninvited 'guest workers' who lack visas. Nearly all guest worker programs have strict quotas, with the exception of H2A agricultural guest worker program, which is so thoroughly blanketed with red tape farmers often find they're unable to obtain the guest workers they need, or the guest workers show up after harvest due to bureaucratic delays.

Does Deporting Unauthorized Immigrants Improve Unemployment?

State level crackdowns almost always lead to labor shortages in fields dominated by immigrants, it's obvious there's a huge gap between need for guest workers and available legal guest workers. For example, Georgia and Alabama farmers suffered billions in losses from crops rotting in the fields. Over 100,000 left Arizona following passage of SB1070, and yet Yuma, Arizona, the lettuce capitol of the U.S., continued to experience unemployment rates in the mid-20% range.

As much as the anti-any-immigrant lobby assures us that removing immigrants creates jobs for Americans, all the evidence shows the contrary. Moreover, such theories overlook economic interdependency. For example, there are over one million unauthorized immigrant farm workers. The Commerce Department reports that for every worker on-the-farm, there are 3.1 workers off-the-farm who depend on farmer workers to produce and harvest crops. Remove the one million unauthorized immigrant farm workers without replacing them, and in theory up to 3.1 million other workers could lose their jobs. Most of that 3.1 million aren't unauthorized immigrants either, working in food processing, distribution, etc.

Historically, "Mexicans" were blamed for high unemployment rates during the great depression. Following a failed attempt at legislation in Congress to ban "Mexicans", between 500,000 and one million "Mexicans" were deported or forced to leave through rampant discrimination, etc. There is scant evidence that expelling this many "Mexicans" did anything to improve joblessness during the great depression. Moreover 60% of those forced out were U.S. Citizens, reinforcing the importance of due process in immigration matters.

Just Say No to Immigration Amnesty

Immigration amnesty doesn't cause illegal immigration. Illegal immigration is the result of bad immigration policy, where government tries to interject itself between employers and workers. When immigration policy is severely disconnected from the needs of employers and prospective guest workers, some will come anyway. I don't condone illegal immigration, but also recognize that systems of laws rely mostly upon voluntary compliance, with enforcement needed for a small minority who disobey those laws. Massive enforcement is no substitute for common sense policy!

Immigration amnesty by itself is like a band aid, not a workable solution because it fails to address the underlying causes of illegal immigration, such as seriously dysfunctional guest worker programs. The 1986 law has shown that piecemeal solutions don't work because Congress cannot be expected to follow-through.

President George W. Bush was on the right track when he tried – twice – to pass sweeping immigration reforms that addressed border security, guest workers, and a balanced approach to those here already illegally, neither mass deportations nor mass amnesty either. Sadly, big labor and the Democrat allies including Obama and Harry Reid, along with some Republicans who vehemently opposed immigration reform, sabotaged Bush's reforms.

The 'gang of eight' is making a serious effort at a compromise solution that addresses each element. It's not perfect. In particular I'm not fond of quotas. How can government reasonably anticipate how many immigrants or guest workers are needed by our economy? I'm also no fan of e-verify. Our federal government has been trying to make e-verify work since 1996, yet the present system is still flawed.

Unauthorized immigrants are routinely able to circumvent e-verify, while law abiding citizens and work-authorized immigrants who are victims of flawed databases spend weeks dealing with multiple huge bureaucracies trying to fix government's database errors. Turning employers into immigration agents is not the appropriate role for employers either. A far preferable approach is sensible immigration policy, leading to manageable enforcement. What we have now is de facto amnesty because it's simply not practical, humane, or economically wise to even attempt deporting anywhere near 11 million unauthorized immigrants.

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