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Mexican Hypocrisy? U.S. Neighbor Has Its Own Tough Take on Immigration

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When Arizona's law goes into effect this summer, law enforcement officers in the state will be required to verify the immigration status of individuals they suspect are in the country illegally. President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder quickly criticized the law despite its popularity in Arizona, and a referendum drive and a lawsuit have emerged as potential roadblocks to it.

But Calderon's objection has riled some immigration policy experts, who called his take on the measure misguided given Mexico's policies on unauthorized residents, particularly how the country deals with illegal entry and foreign ownership of property.

"It shows more than anything else that Mexico's restrictive immigration policies have kept that country poor and in conflict for years," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst for the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a Washington-based conservative think tank. "The United States should not try to emulate that."

Before last year, when Mexican immigration law was amended, the penalties for entering Mexico illegally ranged from fines to imprisonment for up to two years, followed by deportation. The law now allows for fines up to 5700 pesos (roughly \$470), and a \$400 fine for overstaying on a visa.

And the U.S. State Department warns Americans to exercise "extreme caution" prior to investing in property in Mexico, due to substantially different real estate practices and laws. The Mexican Constitution bans direct ownership by foreigners of real estate within 10 kilometers -- or 6.2 miles -- of any border and within 50 kilometers (31 miles) of any coastline.

"In order to permit foreign investment in these areas, the Mexican government has created a trust mechanism in which a bank has title to the property but a trust beneficiary enjoys the benefits of ownership," the State Department [profile](#) on Mexico reads.

"However, U.S. citizens are vulnerable to title challenges that may result in years of litigation and possible eviction."

Nowrasteh said those policies hurt Mexico financially and contribute to a system that is not designed to accommodate foreigners.

"Restrictive ownership of property by foreigners restricts foreign investment," he said. "It restricts the movement of entrepreneurs and laborers to Mexico who make the country wealthier. Any person around the world should be able to own property and invest in any economy around the world. It's to everyone's benefit."

Syndicated columnist Michelle Malkin said Mexico's immigration laws are "far more draconian" than those in the United States, adding that Mexican authorities can "exercise any discretion" regarding deportations.

"So it's particularly ironic to see them complaining about America when we allow open borders activists and illegal aliens to march on the streets demanding that we give them more than they certainly do in Mexico," said Malkin, who is a Fox News contributor.

Andrew Selee, director of the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, agreed that Calderon's statements regarding Arizona's law are seemingly incongruous given immigration policies in his own country.

"The Mexican government is certainly within its rights to defend its citizens abroad, but they should also remind them of the need to substantially improve immigration laws in Mexico," Selee said. "We would expect the Mexican government to want to protect their citizens living in the United States, but this is a highly public issue. It should certainly also bring about some reflection on how immigration law is applied in Mexico."

Dan Griswold, director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, disagreed, saying Calderon has a right to speak his mind about Arizona's new law.

"The Mexican president has a right to complain about laws he thinks work against Mexican citizens in the United States," he said. "And the Arizona law does raise legitimate questions about discrimination."

Griswold continued, "The Mexican president is an important voice in this discussion. They're an important neighbor, an important trading partner and we have mutual interests."