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The conservative case for open immigration

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I'm not a conservative, but I agree with conservatives on many issues.

But there is one issue where I strongly disagree with conservatives: immigration. I believe that the United States, as a nation founded and built by immigrants, has a historical commitment to the free migration of people who seek a better way of life. Furthermore, I believe that our current immigration system needs to be radically reformed.

I arrived at this opinion, interestingly enough, via core principles that many conservatives champion.

Let's start with guns. It is widely accepted within conservative circles that gun control only disarms law-abiding citizens. More specifically, criminals don't voluntarily surrender their bump-stock-modified AR-15s when a new ban is voted into law, because criminals are not deterred by the law.

I agree!

If so, then the criminally violent will ignore immigration laws too, right? So how does immigration restrictionism solve a problem like MS-13? Or the murder of Molli Tibbetts by Cristhian Bahena? Plus, aren't conservatives the first to protest against the politicization of tragedies, such as how the left pushes for increased gun control in the aftermath of a mass shooting?

These anecdotal examples of violence prove to be outliers when observed within a larger data pool. According to the numbers, it is not entirely clear how increased restrictions would divert these violent immigrants — especially considering that immigrants, broadly speaking, are less likely to be violent than naturalized citizens. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, native-born citizens are almost twice as likely to commit homicide in comparison to foreign-born populations.

Next up: federal bureaucracy; conservatives hate it. The regulatory state suppresses innovation and incentivizes black market activities.

Again, I agree!

So then why aren't conservatives concerned about the undue burdens created by bureaucracy that stifle the legal pathway to citizenship?

To legally immigrate to the United States, a citizen-to-be must have the patience of Job to naturalize. There are a few lines to stand in and wait (e.g., employment-based immigration,

asylum, family petition). However, wait times can vary anywhere between six to 28 years — all depending on country of origin, family sponsorship, marital status, employable skills, and a whole litany of other mind-boggling requirements. For some immigrants, like DACA recipients, there isn't even a line to stand in.

"People enter the United States illegally because they cannot enter legally," writes Alex Nowrasteh, senior immigration policy analyst for the Cato Institute. "If you want a better and more modern immigration system, make it easier to come here legally."

I shouldn't have to fully explain the bureaucratic mess made by the federal government to an ideological group who argue that — from tax code to environmental regulations — the federal government needlessly complicates ... well ... pretty much everything.

Let's pivot to social issues. Here is where I reach an ideological fork in the road where I don't always agree with my conservative friends. However, immigrants, especially those of Latino descent, say "¡De acuerdo!" (That's "I agree" in Spanish.)

"Republicans need not abandon or compromise their principles to attract Hispanic support," said President Ronald Reagan. "To the contrary, their best electoral strategy is to emphasize common conservative values."

On the issue of abortion, Latinos are predominantly pro-life. According to the Pew Research Center, 53 percent of Hispanic voters say abortion should be illegal, and only 40 percent claiming that it should be legal.

Hispanic voters also disapprove of the normalization of marijuana. Only 27 percent of Hispanic voters born outside of the U.S. support marijuana legalization.

Like conservatives, immigrants consider the United States to be an exceptional place. Immigrants don't trek hundreds and thousands of miles on foot to collect a welfare check. Instead, they seek opportunity, safety, and liberty not readily available in their homelands—and they do so against tremendous odds.

Again, I turn to the North Star of the modern conservative movement (or at least used to be): Ronald Reagan. Reagan once espoused a diametrically opposed immigration platform than the current conservative zeitgeist. In 1980, Reagan suggested, "Instead of putting up a fence why don't we ... make it possible for them to come here legally with a work permit and while they're working and earning here, they pay taxes here? When they want to go back they can go back... Open the border both ways." If the Gipper can't convince conservatives of the need for immigration reform, who can?

And this brings up my final point: Conservatives often argue, "We are not against immigration, just illegal immigration."

As per usual, I agree. So let's legalize more immigration. Only then will this be less of an issue.

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