



All the ways President Trump is cutting legal immigration

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During a 2016 campaign stop in Illinois, then-candidate Donald Trump invited to the stage a man wearing a shirt that read: "Legal Immigrant For Trump."

Asked to say a few words to the crowd, the man chastised the media for missing a fundamental aspect of Trump's candidacy: that he was opposed to illegal immigration, not legal immigration. Trump repeatedly patted the man on the back and told him, "I totally support it."

"People are going to come into our country," Trump said. "We want people to come in. But they've got to come in, like you, legally. My man."

Despite his campaign rhetoric, President Trump has acted very differently since moving into the White House. His administration has granted fewer visas, approved fewer refugees, ordered the removal of hundreds of thousands of legal residents whose home countries have been hit by war and natural disasters and pushed Congress to pass laws to dramatically cut the entire legal immigration system.

The White House has argued the moves are necessary to protect national security and American workers.

"These are measures that will make our community safer and more prosperous," Trump said while laying out some of the proposals during a meeting with lawmakers in January. "These reforms are supported by the overwhelming majority of Americans."

Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued the latest volley Monday when he limited the ability of foreign victims of domestic violence and gang violence to seek safe haven in the U.S. through asylum.

"That's further confirmation that the administration's official policy toward legal immigration is restriction by any means necessary," said David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute. "They're looking across all programs for ways that they can reduce the number of new legal permanent residents, and other foreign workers in the U.S. economy."

Here's a look at the different ways the Trump administration has cut or proposed cuts to the nation's legal immigration system.

Limiting Asylum

Unlike previous administrations, the Trump White House has taken aim at the nation's asylum program, which protects foreigners fleeing persecution in their home countries.

Sessions has complained the program is being abused by "dirty immigration lawyers" who coach applicants on how to game the system. He has pointed to massive increases in asylum claims at the southwest border as proof it is being taken advantage of.

Human rights activists say the rise in applications simply shows how dire the situation has become in Central America, where most are coming from. They have pleaded with the administration to maintain the program so the U.S. can continue serving its role as a global beacon for the oppressed.

Sessions disagreed, issuing new directives that will make it more difficult for victims of domestic violence and localized gang activity to win entry to the U.S. "The asylum statute is not a general hardship statute," he said, announcing the change that could affect tens of thousands of applicants.

Travel Ban

The first major move from Trump was the controversial travel ban, which the president signed into effect a week into his tenure.

Trump said the temporary ban was needed to give his administration time to overhaul the country's vetting systems to ensure terrorists don't infiltrate the U.S. through legal channels. Critics blasted it as nothing more than the "Muslim ban" he called for during his presidential campaign.

The travel ban, which temporarily barred all immigration from seven majority-Muslim countries, was struck down by federal courts and reintroduced in various forms over the following year. The Supreme Court allowed a watered-down version of the ban to go into effect, and the administration was later able to implement "enhanced vetting" procedures on people coming from countries with ties to terrorism.

The latest version, which targets nearly 150 million residents of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, is back before the Supreme Court, which is expected to issue a ruling sometime this summer.

Refugee Program

The president has also been able to severely limit the admission of refugees, just as foreign countries are overwhelmed by the largest global migrant crisis in decades.

Despite the court rulings against him, Trump was able to halt the Refugee Resettlement Program program for seven months last year. Once it restarted in October, the Department of Homeland Security said it would conduct "extreme vetting" of people using the program.

Trump also lowered the annual cap on refugee admissions to 45,000 — the lowest figure since Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980. And it seems unlikely that the administration will even reach that number.

As of Tuesday, the U.S. had accepted 14,893 refugees with less than four months left in the fiscal year, according to State Department data. Only 46 of those were from Syria.

Temporary Protected Status

One of the largest groups of legal immigrants hit by Trump's efforts have been those legally living and working in the U.S. under the Temporary Protected Status program.

Created by Congress in 1990, the program is intended to allow people from countries ravaged by war, famine and natural disasters to remain in the U.S. as their countries recover.

More than 310,000 people from 10 countries were on the list when Trump came into office. But Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen has been cutting down the program country by country, arguing it has long outlived its mandate and ruling the countries have recovered enough to welcome back their citizens.

Nielsen has now cut TPS for El Salvador, Honduras, Haiti, Nepal, Nicaragua and Sudan, which represents 98% of the people covered by the program. That means TPS enrollees from those countries, many of whom have legally lived in the U.S. for nearly 30 years, must return home in the coming months or risk becoming undocumented immigrants.

U.S. embassy officials in El Salvador, Honduras and Haiti spent months begging Washington not to end the programs. They argued the countries have been ravaged by other atrocities and repatriating so many people would harm not just those countries but "the U.S. national interest," according to a report prepared by Democratic staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The administration also ended a similar program that has protected nearly 4,000 Liberians over the past 25 years.

Fewer Visas

Every time the White House has tried to negotiate with Congress over an immigration bill, it has requested one change: the end of so-called "chain migration."

That is a derogatory term used to describe the long-standing practice of family immigration to the United States. The White House says it allows foreigners to sponsor too many extended relatives for permanent placement in the U.S. But critics argue it's unfair to ask immigrants to

leave behind their parents, brothers, sisters and other relatives who would be cut out by the White House proposals.

Congress hasn't moved on that plan, but the administration has still lowered the number of legal immigrants.

In fiscal year 2017, the U.S. approved 559,536 foreigners for legal permanent residence (known as a green card), a 9% drop from the previous year. So far in 2018, the numbers are even lower, falling an additional 6%, according to State Department data.

There have also been similar drops in temporary visas issued to foreigners. Bier said the drops have been especially pronounced for people trying to enter the U.S. from Muslim countries, since those applications are being unnecessarily delayed and scrutinized.

"There's something going on, whether it's the deterrence effect of scaring people away from wanting to apply, or ... this increased scrutiny of applications," he said.

The administration has looked into restrictions on visas for high-tech workers, and ignored calls by the agriculture industry to expand the guest worker program for agricultural labor. But the administration has increased visas in one area: the H2B visa program, which is used for non-agricultural, seasonal guest workers.

Nielsen ordered an increase of those visas in July — from 66,000 to 81,000 — to help businesses hire enough workers. Three days later, the Trump Organization requested 76 of them.

Up until last year, nearly 800,000 undocumented immigrants who were brought to the country as children had legal status to live and work in the U.S. That has resulted in much debate in Washington, but the only concrete step taken so far came from Trump when he ended the program in September.

The Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program remains active due to federal judges who ruled the Trump administration used flawed legal reasoning to end it. The fate of those DREAMers will also be decided by the Supreme Court, which could take the case in the coming months.

The Department of Justice argues the program was illegal from the start. Immigration lawyers and professors around the country disagree, saying a president is well within his rights to exempt some classes of undocumented immigrants from deportation.

If the Supreme Court sides with the Trump administration, it could be up to Congress to find a rare compromise to save the DREAMers.