



New immigration policy: a closer look

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On April 6 of this year, United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that every adult migrant illegally crossing the US-Mexico border would be detained and criminally prosecuted.

Known as a “zero tolerance” policy, this is a step away from the US’ former “catch-and-release” policy, a practice denounced by the Trump Administration. Under the former policy, migrant families were allowed into the US as their immigration cases were processed. The biggest difference between zero tolerance and catch-and-release is that the new policy requires the separation of families, since children are not legally allowed to be kept in detention camps with their parents.

“If you are smuggling a child, then we will prosecute you and that child will be separated from you as required by law,” Sessions said in a [speech](#) to the Association of State Criminal Investigative Agencies. “If you don’t like that, then don’t smuggle children over our border.”

President of Case Western Reserve University’s Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences Grover C. Gilmore released a statement condemning the zero tolerance policy as against the ethics of social work:

“Many of the immigrant families crossing our borders are seeking refuge or asylum from atrocities and unlivable circumstances in their home countries,” the statement read. “The practice of separating children from their families compounds their traumas, causes irreparable damage, and is a violation of human rights.”

The school joined the American Civil Liberties Union, the Human Rights Watch, the Council on Social Work Education and National Association of Social Workers in their condemnation.

The Trump Administration brought talks of child separation to the table in March of 2017 to “deter more movement along this terribly dangerous network,” according to White House Chief of Staff John Kelly. According to a [New York Times report](#), border separations began as early as October 2017. The report also stated that 700 children had already been separated by late April 2018, 100 of which were under four-years-old.

Thousands of undocumented immigrants are currently seeking asylum in the United States from their home countries, and according to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), about 70 percent of undocumented immigrants are from Mexico or Central America.

History professor John Flores discussed the significant, historic role of Mexican immigrants, specifically in the US economy.

“What makes the story of Mexican laborers, in particular, unique in the history of this country is that we have historically incorporated them into the economy when it is expanding, and we’ve historically deported them when the economy is contracting,” he said.

A temporary admissions program actively recruited Mexicans into the US around World War I, where there was a need for a larger agricultural workforce. During the Great Depression, Mexican workers were then actively deported and driven out, only to be recruited back during the expanding World War II economy.

President Trump has justified his controversial immigration policies through national security claims.

“They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime,” said then-candidate Trump about Mexican immigrants during his campaign announcement in 2015. “They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

However, legal and illegal immigrants are overwhelmingly nonviolent. The libertarian think tank Cato Institute reported that, compared to native-born Texans, the criminal conviction rates for legal and illegal immigrants were 85 and 56 percent lower, respectively.

Additionally, Criminology found that areas with higher percentages of illegal immigrants actually have lower crime rates compared to areas with lower percentages.

“The Mexican people have a truly unique and exceptional history,” said Flores, “where they are the only people in the history of the United States [who] have been actively recruited to enter the United States by the tens of thousands, and then have been aggressively deported by the United States by the tens of thousands.”

In terms of a historical basis for policies aimed at deterring or scaring immigrants, Flores finds that control is the main goal.

“[I find that] the economic, [covert] side of this narrative is that harsh immigration policies and active deportation campaigns silence and intimidate these workers from fighting for [labor rights],” he said. “In many ways, a more aggressive immigration policy serves to discipline the large numbers of immigrant laborers that have always been a part of the US economy.”

To Flores’s knowledge, the zero tolerance policy of separating of children from parents is a very “unique” and “modern-day practice.”

Case College Republicans President David Rodriguez agrees that separating families is an extreme practice, but also maintains that the US should not be lax on immigration policy.

“You don’t want to just turn everyone away who really needs [asylum], but the first priority of the American government is to protect the people here already,” said Rodriguez. “We have to stop criminals from coming over first, and then we can help those children and families who really need to come over.”

He added, “As a Mexican American, with grandparents who came to the United States from Mexico for a better life, I understand what immigrant families are going through, but it’s to big of a risk to take to let everyone through with little screening.”

National, bipartisan outrage on the zero tolerance policy was fueled by reports of children being kept in cages, as well as pictures and recordings of children crying for their parents. In response, Sessions, a Methodist, justified the policy with his religious beliefs on June 14.

“I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order,” he said in response to backlash. “Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful.”

More than 600 United Methodist Church clergy and members have since brought up charges against Sessions in response, including “the dissemination of false doctrine counter to Methodist teaching.” Local campus Presbyterian church, Church of the Covenant, displayed signs reading “Jesus was a Refugee” as the policy unfolded.

Director of Covenant Student Ministries Kevin Lowry said, “[The] Trump Administration used Christian language to promote [its] agenda, and it’s not biblically based; it’s not God’s agenda. If you read the entire letter [from Apostle Paul], it’s all about love.”

Lowry expressed the belief that “the leaders of all spiritual worldviews have the duty, and the sacred trust, to call out injustice in the world.”

The Undergraduate Diversity Collective (UDC) expressed similar sentiments of duty regarding their member organizations. After the announcement of repealing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Latinx UDC organization La Alianza held a campus-wide protest rally in front of Adelbert Hall.

“It was a recent and powerful display of the willingness of our students to fight in the face of injustice and bigotry affecting not just their own identities, but those [who] make up our entire student body,” said the UDC Executive Board. “In light of this new ‘zero tolerance’ policy, we have no doubt that this tenacity to strive towards justice and equity will not waver, particularly when it concerns members of the student body.”

On June 20, President Trump signed an executive order that will halt the child separations. National immigration policy has more or less returned to the previous catch-and-release policies President Trump has denigrated, according to the [NYT](#). The Justice Department requested a change of rules requiring children to be released within 20 days after separation, far shorter than their detained parents’ immigration cases would take to process.

This request, however, was denied by a federal judge from California, who ordered that immigration officials to reunite families within 30 days. A district judge ruled that children under the age of four be reunited within 14 days.

Both the [NYT](#) and [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported on the psychological damage on children after reunification. Some children, for instance, have forgotten their parents, believe fellow separatees are their siblings and are “so deeply traumatized that [they] might have appeared psychotic.”

The Department of Homeland Security reported that 1,995 minors were separated from 1,940 adults between April 19 and May 31, and a Customs and Border Protection spokesperson stated that 2,342 children were separated from 2,206 adults between May 5 and June 9.

The judge-ruled deadline for reunification of five- to 17-year-olds falls on Thursday, July 26. According to NPR, more than 2,000 children still await reunification.

The UDC Executive Board wants “students to know that they are forever accepted, and that [UDC] will always stand besides them in the fight for their right to a better future, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic or national identities.”