



Trump reduced legal, not illegal immigration

Arun Kumar

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As President Joe Biden made a bold move to undo his predecessor's tough immigration policies, a Washington think tank noted that Donald Trump was "wildly successful" in reducing legal immigration, but failed to eliminate illegal immigration.

Calling Trump's Covid-19-related restrictions as "the most severe and impactful part" of his immigration policy, Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, says they brought about a virtual end of legal immigration from April 2020 onward.

These restrictions have had the most impact on tech professionals from India who get about two thirds of H-1B visa for high skilled workers.

While Biden has criticized Trump's proclamations blocking the entry of H-1B and other temporary foreign workers and applicants for green cards, he has not yet said whether he would immediately reverse them.

Biden's immigration plan **provides an eight-year pathway to citizenship** for the roughly 11 million people living in the country illegally, including about 450,000 Indians.

He has also promised to create permanent protection for young migrants in the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals** (DACA) program, known as "Dreamers."

Trump entered the White House with the goal of reducing legal immigration by 63 percent, Nowrasteh pointed out in a blog post.

"Trump was wildly successful in reducing legal immigration," **he wrote**, noting by November 2020, the Trump administration reduced the number of green cards issued to people abroad by at least 418,453 and the number of non-immigrant visas by at least 11,178,668.

But the former president "failed to eliminate illegal immigration", Nowrasteh said with a virtual collapse in interior immigration enforcement and the stabilization of the illegal immigrant population.

Trump cut the average number of monthly green cards issued by 18.2 percent relative to former President Barack Obama's second term, but that "average monthly decline hides the virtual end of legal immigration from April 2020 onward," he writes.

In response to the recession and the Covid-19 outbreak, Trump virtually ended the issuance of green cards to people abroad, Nowrasteh said noting in the last six months of the 2020 fiscal year (April-September 2020) the US government only issued about 29,000 green cards.

In the same period in 2016, the US government issued approximately 309,000 green cards. Thus compared to the last half of FY2016, the number of green cards issued in the last half of FY2020 fell by 90.5 percent, he said.

Without the Covid-19 immigration restrictions unilaterally imposed by the President, the issuance of green cards to foreigners abroad would have barely declined relative to the second term of the Obama administration, Nowrasteh suggests.

"Trump also cut the monthly average number of NIVs by about 27 percent relative to Obama's second term, but that decline obscures the virtual end of NIVs from April 2020 onward," he says.

As with immigrant visas, Trump virtually ended NIV issuance in response to the recession and the Covid-19 outbreak, Nowrasteh said noting in the last six months of the 2020 fiscal year (April-September 2020) the US government only issued 397,596 NIVs.

In the same period in 2016, the US government issued more than 5.6 million NIVs. Compared to the last half of FY2016, the number NIVs issued in the last half of FY2020 fell by almost 93 percent, according to Nowrasteh.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, during the period from January 2017- February 2020, the average number of monthly NIVs issued was down about 12 percent under Trump compared to the January 2013- February 2016 period under the Obama administration and the cumulative numbers were down by just over 14 percent.

Beginning in mid- to- late March, the Trump administration virtually halted the issuance of NIVs to people abroad, Nowrasteh said calling the Covid-19- related restrictions "the most severe and impactful part of Trump's immigration policy."

Although Trump succeeded in cutting legal immigration more than he initially planned, he oversaw the collapse of interior immigration enforcement, he says.

In 2020, the removal of illegal immigrants from the interior of the United States was the lowest as an absolute number and as a share of the illegal immigration population since ICE was created in 2003, Nowrasteh says

"Trump failed to increase removals because local jurisdictions refused to cooperate with his administration, continuing a trend begun during the Obama administration in response to their deportation efforts," he said.

As a result, the population of illegal immigrants remained about the same as when he took office, Nowrasteh noted.