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Erin Hernandez

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AUTHOR: Erin Hernandez

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ADVISOR: Dr. April Clark

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Legislative behavior and intergroup relations have had a significant impact on comprehensive immigration policy. In recent years, immigration policy has taken the world stage and now immigration legislation has had more media coverage and dialogue in Congress. In order to obtain current sentiment in Washington DC I traveled there during Spring Break to talk to some old colleagues. I gathered data from recent studies and statistics from polls. My findings were that groups themselves have a large impact on immigration legislation as a whole through lobbying efforts and future elections for members of Congress. Lack of action on comprehensive immigration legislation has large negative effects on human rights and the overall economy.

The significance of this work is debunking the many myths surrounding undocumented folks. If the undocumented community could vote, they would have accurate representation in Congress. If the undocumented population were
to have more representation in Congress, elected officials would have more support to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Members of Congress stall in progress in immigration legislation because of their constituency and their personal beliefs. Politics gets in the way because Democrats don’t want to give Republicans the credit for passing comprehensive immigration reform and vice versa.
Legislative behavior and intergroup relations have had a significant impact on comprehensive immigration policy. In the past decades, immigration legislation has not had any movement towards comprehensive immigration legislation with bipartisan support. In recent years, immigration policy has taken the world stage and now immigration legislation has had more media coverage and dialogue in Congress. Groups themselves have a large impact on immigration legislation as a whole through lobbying efforts and future elections for members of Congress. Lack of action on comprehensive immigration legislation has large negative effects on human rights and the overall economy.

In the United States it is common that every new group of immigrants is ostracized, demonized and targeted. There is evidence to suggest that there is a certain level of distrust for incoming immigrants. Immigrants became the scapegoats for the downfall of the economy or any issue affecting many citizens at the time (Wilson 3). As a result, Congress has historically represented that sentiment in the passage of anti-immigrant friendly legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (Migration Policy Institute). Past legislation has already restricted immigration from certain racial groups and a similar system still exists today. Every new batch of immigrants faces barriers and backlash by citizens currently residing in the US. Congress followed to pass legislation that would restrict immigration of racial groups. Now immigrant friendly legislators are trying to enact laws to remedy the mistakes made in the past. The problem now is that politics is getting in the way of progress.

The United States created Ellis Island in 1892 to process immigrants through a screening process to make sure they were fit to reside in the country (Ellis Island Foundation). Legislation during the 1800s further restricted immigration of non-Europeans. Then, Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed into law the Social Security act in 1935 to create the social security
administration and ways to make it possible to provide general welfare, insurance, and retirement benefits to citizens (Social Security Administration). It also marked the beginning of the system still present today that holds much importance to immigrants and citizens today, the social security identification number. This number alone determines whether or not you can receive services if needed and determines what rights you get. The current immigration system is outdated because it does not account for the larger population of immigrants currently in the US and the circumstances by which they come by. Although Ellis Island is no longer in use, US Citizenship and Immigration services now conduct the screenings for immigrants and Immigrations Customs Enforcement processes immigrants who are unlawfully residing in the country. Due to the unfair treatment of immigrants, there has been a push to reform the immigration laws set in place. Part of the reason why there are about 11 million undocumented people residing in the US without legal status is that the immigration system is outdated (Pew Research center).

There are strict prerequisites to gain legal status in the US, not many are able to pass the rigorous screening process. In *Race and Racisms: A Critical Approach*, by Golash-Boza outlines the Land disputes in 1845 that followed the Mexican-American War displaced many Mexicans that were already residing in the United States. Anti-immigrant sentiment contributed to the creation of laws that restricted who could stay. US immigration policies focused on who comes in the country and picked and chose who deserved to stay. Since the creation of the social security administration, the US has devised policies to select who deserves documentation necessary to attain citizenship. The preferred population is northern European immigrants. Recently the trend is still the same with the exception of adding the rest of Europe and Cuban immigrants. Current US immigration policies allow European and Cuban immigrants to have the
highest acceptance rate. The group with the highest immigrant population in the United States is Mexican immigrants. Yet, they are the group that is the most forgotten. Golash-Boza is right; immigration has always served as a lynchpin in the creation and perpetuation of racial inequality in the United States. The solution to US admission to the US would be to redefine the requirements for immigrant and refugee status. If legislation on what is required for refugee status would add, a clause that states include victims in danger of violence from a gang it would solve so many problems.

The concept that one group has a claim over an entire nation because they were there “first” is ridiculous. Since the beginning of the human species, people have constantly moved from one region to another (Golash-Boza). Then people began to settle and create communities. In the case of America, Native Americans inhabited the land way before Europeans came to colonize it and claim it as newly discovered land. Then, when more and more Europeans came in search of gold they decided to settle and kill and/or move out Native Americans that were still present in the land that they wanted to take for themselves. It was not until immigrants began to come to the United States in search of the same opportunities that they began to establish citizenship rules. This made Europeans create a new identity and began evolving into white Americans. Mexican land became part of the US and the Mexican people already there became forcefully removed and relocated further south, just as the Native Americans were forcefully removed and moved to the west. This nativist rhetoric began to emerge, according to Golash-Boza, this meant giving preference to native-born citizens and withholding resources from incoming immigrants because of the fear of people from different races and ethnicities.

Explicit racial restrictions started with the naturalization act of 1790 when only free whites that have acquired 2 years of residency had the option to apply for citizenship. According
to Golash-Boza, this law restricted African-descendants of slavery from applying for citizenship. This law set the precedent for racially motivated laws to restrict immigration from non-northern European countries. Other laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Johnson-Reed Act, the Oriental Exclusion Act and the creation of border patrol was all geared towards restricting immigration and promoting the nativist mentality. Then, the Bracero program continued to take advantage of Mexican labor only to send Mexicans back to Mexico. There was some movement against racist policies through the repeal of the Chinese exclusion act, but it did not end there. Racist legislation like Operation Wetback allowed raids targeting Mexican people to deport them. It is very similar to what still happens in the US since the creation of the US Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Customs Enforcement. Now when undocumented immigrants detained by ICE, they are held detention centers that violate their human rights. After the repeal of the racial quotas, there are still quotas set by the nation of origin of an immigrant working towards attaining legal permanent residency. The increasing immigrant population resulted in laws that furthered the nativist agenda. This rhetoric spilled over to target groups racially profiled as terrorists.

All of these policies have furthered the creation and perpetuation of racial inequality in the United States. In the language of each piece of legislation, they have always racially targeted a group in every which anyway possible (Johnson 7). These policies take advantage of immigrants who are already vulnerable. According to Abrego, it creates fear in undocumented communities and a genuine distrust in authority figures. Even policies geared towards helping the undocumented community use archaic language that further dehumanizes undocumented people. For example, the use of the term “illegal” or “alien” is dehumanizing, no human being is illegal much less an “alien”. The constant dehumanization of undocumented people further
perpetuates the untrue stereotypes that immigrants are prone to crime when statistics have shown that communities with the highest immigrant population have the lowest crime rate. Policies need reform in areas associated with Immigration Customs Enforcement, protections for immigrants and the language that is used.

A common misconception about the people who are undocumented in this country is that every undocumented person is Mexican. The non-white undocumented population cannot hide and pass as white to avoid deportation. White privilege exists for light-skinned people in the undocumented community because those who can pass as a "white American" can avoid detention by ICE. Those who are non-white do not have that privilege and have added barriers towards education, employment and chances of attaining legal permanent residency or citizenship. Immigration laws that are currently set in place, make it nearly impossible to attain proper documentation. Those given preference are wealthy when applying for a visa. There are many undocumented people are currently in the US after overstaying their visas.

The controversy over passing immigration legislation continued during the 2016 elections when it became the hot-button issue after Trump said derogatory comments about undocumented Mexicans. After the elections, it became the center of foreign and domestic policy. Trump promised he would end Differed Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Instead, he proposed Congress should come up with a more permanent solution than DACA and he gave them 6 months before the program stops accepting applications. All of this anti-immigrant sentiment sparked more controversies and more fear of the immigrant population. Now people can still renew but new applications are no longer accepted. Mexicans were not the only targets; the Muslim community becomes the scapegoat for the actions of radical people who they have no control over. There are many misconceptions about the Muslim religion because terrorist
organizations use it as a justification for their violent actions. The national arena creates divisions within the population and fosters hate within communities.

Due to how their image portrayed in the media, Immigrants usually receive backlash and are dehumanized and mistreated by many Americans and other immigrant populations that have resided in the US longer. Congress has lagged behind when creating immigrant-friendly legislation because of grid lock and anti-immigrant sentiment. An example of a push in immigrant friendly legislation was in 2001, when Senator Dick Durbin wanted to propose the first DREAM Act after hearing the story of Tereza Lee, whose family emigrated from South Korea and sought him out for help because she was a talented pianist that wanted to attend a prestigious university, but her immigration status was holding her back. Stories like Tereza's sparked the conversation of the many young undocumented youths that arrived at a young age and America is all they know. Although, what many did not foresee was how the DREAMER narrative would be used the same undocumented community they wanted to help. Many did not realize the narrative harmed parents more than help them. They receive backlash for coming to the country without inspection and bringing their children. This leads to older populations ignored in comprehensive immigration reform discussions.

According to CNN, the clean DREAM Act is the piece of legislation that has the most approval. It has the fastest path to citizenship and has overwhelming support. Although, the problem is that the legislators that support it are majority Democrats with only 5 Republicans as cosponsors. This is problematic because the Republican Party controls both houses of Congress. Even if they have overwhelming support on the democratic side they still have to convince more Republicans to ensure the passage of the bill. It makes it even more difficult when Republicans have lockstep behind their party to ensure support for their re-election. There are a significant
number of Members of Congress that believe that Congress should not pass immigrant-friendly legislation. Legislators with a majority anti-immigrant population vote against comprehensive immigration reform because it is what their constituency wants. Public opinion also has a large role in Congress and their ability to pass immigrant-friendly legislation.

The current legislation proposed in Congress would benefit the 750,000 DACAmented youth currently living in the US but they forget the other 11 million undocumented folks that will still have to make do without status. The solution of this problem would be to add a clause to international law on what constitutes a refugee. The situation is different for other immigrants who fall under the “wet foot, dry foot” policy (Golash-Boza). During the red scare, Cuban Americans were welcomed in the US because they were white, conservative middle to upper class, light-skinned people. The US claimed that they created policies to welcome refugees from Cuba to help them escape communism, they were not that different from their European counterparts. If refugees from Mexico, Central, and South America were treated the same way Cuban immigrants are the process of attaining residency would be better. They would be welcomed with open arms just as if Cuban's were and they would be in a better place financially. They would contribute even more than they already do in the workforce and taxes. They escape persecution from their own governments and poverty as many immigrants do.

The United States Government is a formal institution where laws are decided in a democratic setting. Citizens of this country vote for people to represent them in varying levels of government. Citizens vote because laws affect created by elected officials they elect affect their livelihoods. It would be a safe thing to say that if people’s livelihoods by policies put forward by the government they should have a say on what goes on in it. People who are undocumented, or do not possess the proper documentation do not have the luxury of voting because of the voting
restrictions that exist today. It is nearly impossible for them to vote unless someone messes up and registers them to vote not knowing that they do not possess the proper documentation. It is only reasonable that they vote to have a voice in the decisions that affect them. If they choose to live here, they have already accepted to become a part of this country. They chose to call this country their home so they should have permission to vote.

One reason in particular on why undocumented folks should receive permission to vote is that the government decides the future of immigration policy. When “Congress passed a bevy of laws in the mid-1990s intended to obstruct un- documented migration to the US” (Coleman); it made it more difficult for immigrants to have their voice heard. The immigrant population could potentially be a group of informed voters just like any other citizen because the policies debated in Congress directly affect them. Undocumented folks should have a say in elected officials selected to make the decisions on how to fix the broken immigration system. The immigration system does not have a single quick fix but allowing immigrants and permanent legal residents to vote would be a step in the right direction.

Under the constitution, it states that all men were created equal. It would be a paradox of liberty if the US chose to restrict the progress of equal treatment. Congress has the power to change the course of history and do the right thing. By granting undocumented individuals, the right to vote it only means that there will be a more accurate representation of the population currently living in the United States. According to Lipman, “undocumented immigrants contribute to the U.S. economy by investing and consuming goods and services; filling millions of "essential worker" positions resulting in subsidiary job creation, increased productivity and lower costs of goods and services; and making unrequited contributions to Social Security, Medicare and unemployment insurance Medicare and unemployment insurance programs”
Undocumented folks pay taxes and participate in American society in any way they can. Whether it be through our military, the workforce, education, and many other aspects of society in which we need everyone to contribute.

It is difficult to find a consequence of allowing noncitizens to vote. The only concern that some citizens would have that disagree with undocumented folks voting is that they would have a large impact on US elections. While that may be true, it is not in the sense of all immigrants voting democrat. Undocumented people do not form a single voting bloc, may have conservative or liberal views. There are many parallels between the restriction of undocumented people from voting and other groups who have been restricted in the past based on race and gender. These same groups would lend support candidates who approve of immigrant-friendly legislation, but even then, much more is needed to fix the current broken immigration system that exists today.

Like every group, there are different intersectionality’s that shape people’s perspectives on life, thoughts, and attitudes. Legal status does not determine one's political ideology. There are conservatives and liberals within the undocumented community just like there are in the current voting population in the United States.

As a result, there are many myths surrounding undocumented folks. If the undocumented community could vote, they would have accurate representation in Congress. If the undocumented population were to have more representation in Congress, elected officials would have more support to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Members of Congress stall in progress in immigration legislation because of their constituency and their personal beliefs. Politics gets in the way because Democrats don’t want to give Republicans the credit for passing comprehensive immigration reform and vice versa.
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