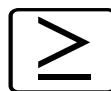


POLICY BRIEF



InterAgency Institute
BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES

TERMINOLOGICAL ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT
THE GLOBAL ANALYSIS ON IMMIGRATION:
REFLECTIONS ON THE UNITED STATES
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POLICY STATEMENT

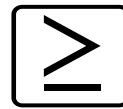
On April 15th, the Pew Research Center published a study that points to a strong approval of the United States President Joseph R. Biden Jr., within his nearly 100 days at the helm of the White House command. To illustrate, 2% is the difference between Joe Biden and Barack Obama, on the occasion of his first term (2009–2012). In the survey, focused on the first 100 days of the presidential terms, Biden appears with 59% approval whereas Obama, in 2009, reached 61%. (1) It is important to highlight that in the United States it is common to use the first 100 days of the President of the Republic's term as an indication of what will be a priority for that country's government and which paths will be taken to deal with these priorities. Considering the fact that the United States continue to occupy the place of the main economic, political, and military power of the international system and the shift promoted by the management of Joe Biden *vis-à-vis* his predecessor, Donald Trump, it is important to reflect on the conduct of the foreign policy of the United States, with emphasis on the possible impacts on the course of the global agenda and on the behavior of actors more sensitive to North American choices.

BACKGROUND

Donald John Trump took office as the 45th President of the United States on April 20th, 2017. Having no filter, the Republican's personal style was the focus of media spotlight throughout his term, sparking criticism and reactions from the international community regarding relevant issues on the global agenda. A few days after his arrival at the White House, Trump instructed the then United States Department of Homeland Security Secretary, John F. Kelly, to plan the construction of a wall along the country's southern border. This was the beginning of a series of immigration actions, a recurring theme in the Republican campaign.

In that pitch, one of Trump's first executive orders initiated the prohibitions imposed on Muslim countries in the name of National Security. In its first version, implemented on January 27th, 2017, the "travel ban" temporarily suspended immigration from seven countries, mostly Muslims. People with valid visas, who were departing, were prevented from boarding flights to the United States or were detained on arrival and forced to return to their home countries. After objections, the decision went through the second and third versions, but kept restrictions on six countries, most of them Muslims.

In 2018 the Trump government announced the policy that was known as "zero-tolerance." According to this policy, adults who illegally entered the United States would be apprehended and held in detention centers or prisons and criminally prosecuted. Children should be separated from their parents or legal guardians and taken to shelters distributed throughout the country. Photos and complaints involving the suffering of children, victims of this policy, caused international commotion, fact that was added to other



reasons why Trump suspended the separations. It should be observed that the suspension of separations did not put an end to apprehensions, due to breaches in the injunction, for example; and it was not enough to reverse the damage caused by the “zero-tolerance” policy, since there was no prescribed procedure to track the whereabouts neither of the children, nor of their parents or guardians.

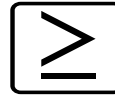
Indeed, during the Barack Obama administration (2009–2016), with regard to the restraints of illegal immigration, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security, remained focused on undocumented immigrants with criminal records and newcomers. However, Obama was labeled a “deporter in chief” by representatives of organizations which are connected to immigrant rights such as Juntos and Not One More (2). Subsequently, under the leadership of Donald Trump, within the first month of its term of office, ICE was compelled to find, arrest, and deport undocumented foreign individuals, regardless of their time of residence in the United States or their criminal record. The fact is that, between removals, returns, refusals, or regress, which in the end go back to deportation, under the risk of academic conflicts, the United States, a country of immigrants, seem to leave aside the idea that they are a country of opportunities to increase the ranks of countries that resort to a variety of justifications, undoubtedly conjunctural, to reject immigrants by avoiding compromising their image within international society or betting on internal support despite external complaints.

FINDINGS

Unclear conceptual distinctions might hinder understanding of immigrant policies and actions, to the point that, on the one hand, organizations labeled former President Obama “deporter in chief,” because he “removed” more than his predecessors (George W. Bush and Bill Clinton), although the total number of “deportations” has been lower compared to those administrations. On the other hand, surveys point to the record number of “apprehensions” in the United States—Mexico border between October 2018 and September 2019 (US fiscal year), namely, 851,508, the highest in 12 years (3); however, following the analysis of the Migration Policy Institute, it could be considered a number far short of the millions of “deportations” promised by Donald Trump during his campaign (4).

Given the complexity of using terms such as “apprehension,” “removal,” “return,” and “deportation,” regarding the migration policy of the United States, it is necessary to shed light on this terminology, because the migrant’s integrity and dignity is the responsibility of numerous agencies, distributed all over the planet, which can be considered guardians of the human rights of these individuals anywhere in the world. Having said that, according to the Migration Policy Institute, these are the enforcement terms used in the basis of American policies, actions, and research: “Apprehension: An action by immigration enforcement officers to take physical custody of a noncitizen; Deportation: A general, general, nontechnical term describing the movement of a noncitizen out of the United States through either a formal removal or a return; Removal: The compulsory movement of a noncitizen out of the United States based on a formal

order of removal; Return: The movement of a noncitizen out of the United States based on permission to withdraw their application for admission at the border or an order of voluntary departure.”(5)



CONCLUSIONS

It is common to come across publications claiming that Donald Trump is responsible for changes in the political culture of the United States, making it more intolerant. However, with regard to the numbers involving immigrants who went to that country, this does not seem to be confirmed. Why is it so difficult to understand the migration policy and its results? Unfortunately, the question will remain unanswered. It is not a matter of supporting one or another presidential administration, from one country or another, but of advocating that, among other priorities, migration policies should be analyzed from deep terminological scrutiny, considering their specificities, terms, and respective meanings, thus avoiding distortions. Finally, this policy brief is limited to the United States, but it does not seem to be an exaggeration to suggest that something similar should be considered a methodological basis for each study that needs to rely on some migration policy.

SUGGESTIONS

- To develop a conceptual basis, taking into account specific categories and terms used by this migration policy before starting an analysis involving related themes.
- To pay attention to the justifications of each migration policy, seeking to think them before sticking to the numbers.
- To consider the right to migrate as an inherent right to any individual, avoiding using sovereignty as a neutralizing principle of this right.

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- (2) See Marc R. Rosenblum (2015). Understanding the Potential Impact of Executive Action on Immigration Enforcement, p. 5. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/ExecAction-Removals-SCOMM.pdf> Accessed 18APR2021. Accessed 17Apr2021.
- (3) See John Gramlich and Luis Noe-Bustamante (2019). What's happening at the U.S.–Mexico border in 5 charts. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/01/whats-happening-at-the-u-s-mexico-border-in-5-charts/>. Accessed 24Apr2021.
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