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The Concept of Nativism in U.S. Latino Immigration Politics

A study on the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and the 2018 Zero-Tolerance Policy

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis provides an analysis of how the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and the 2018 Zero Tolerance Policy, show signs of a nativist ideology among the American population. The research investigates the historical development of Mexican immigration in the United States and how the government struggled to control the influx of illegal aliens. This issue eventually led to the initiation of the act and the policy, by the two former Republican presidents: Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. Nativist supporters of these governmental actions believed that Mexicans were negatively affecting the American population and the structure of their society. Their prejudiced attitudes towards the immigrants from south of the border was based on economic reasons and on views of the ethnicity. The results of the research in this bachelor thesis provides evidence for how Latino immigration developed into becoming a much more critical problem among Republicans in politics today, than what it was in the 1980s.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best", claimed former President Donald Trump in 2016 (Reilly qtd. in Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, p. 169). He was addressing the issue of Latino immigration in the United States at the time, and how these foreigners were affecting the country. The government had implemented a number of restrictions in the past, in an attempt to reduce this problem, however they had not been successful, and Latino immigration had continued to expand. The development of illegal aliens crossing the border had eventually become a main priority, which led to the initiation of Ronald Reagan's act in 1986, and later, Trump's policy in 2018.

Concurrent with the increase of Latinos in the United States, a nativist ideology against the foreigners developed among the native-born citizens. Their prejudiced attitudes, based on experiences with Mexicans as laborers in the country, and on assumptions that they had made about the ethnicity, affected the immigrants who were entering the country. Immigrants with other ethnic backgrounds had encountered the same xenophobia from Americans, in the past. Several studies have been completed on the nativism expressed towards Asians and Europeans, yet there have been few studies into anti-Mexican sentiment, even though they have always been a major immigrant group in the United States, according to Anbinder (p.192). This is the gap in existing research that my bachelor thesis will contribute to.

My research will attempt to provide an answer for the following thesis statement: in what ways was the Immigration Reform and Control Act from 1986, and the Zero-Tolerance Policy from 2018, evidence of a prominent nativist ideology against Latinos, among citizens in the United States? In this paper, the use of the word 'Latinos' will specifically refer to Mexican immigrants. By applying the concept of nativism to this act and this policy concerning Latino immigration, my bachelor thesis will examine how Americans have favored protecting their own native citizens, over Mexicans who arrived to the country. A comparison between the two will be crucial to see how the nativist ideology has developed over time. My findings suggest that the Zero-Tolerance Policy, as a contemporary policy, shows stronger signs of nativism, than the Immigration Reform and Control Act. It appears that the issue of Latino immigration in the United States has become a much more critical problem among Republicans in politics today, than what it was thirty years ago in the 1980s, during Reagans presidency.

My bachelor thesis will be structured in the following way: First I will provide an introduction for my project where the concept of nativism will be introduced and explained. By referring to a chapter that deals with the origins and the history behind the ideology, we will gain an understanding of why nativism has survived among Americans, and how it has affected

immigrants arriving to the country for many years. The main body of the bachelor thesis will consist of reviewing the two former Republican presidents, Ronald Reagan, and Donald Trump, and the policies/acts they initiated in an attempt to limit Latino immigration into the United States. Some historical context around the 1986 Act will be presented, which includes explaining why the act was eventually passed by the Reagan administration, and how it subsequently affected the Latino minority group. The same format will be applied when discussing the Zero Tolerance policy, passed under Trump. It will be essential to highlight the views that the two Republican presidents had on immigration, during this discussion. This will help provide a deeper understanding behind the purposes of the historical act and the contemporary policy. However, before examining what nativist functions the act and the policy had for Latino immigration, it is important to acquire a general understanding of what the concept of nativism involves, first.

Theoretical Framework: Nativism

In Tyler Anbinder's chapter, titled "Nativism and Prejudice Against Immigrants", the author attempts to tackle the issue of providing a sufficient definition for the term 'nativism' while also informing about the topic as part of the history of the United States. In his introduction, he explicitly informs the readers of the challenges with determining what the concept involves, asserting that there are different interpretations of the term between scholars. While some believe the word describes the specific action of restricting immigrants from entering the country, others use the word to explain a mindset that has its roots in an ethnocentric ideology. Anbinder's own definition of nativism, which his chapter is based on, highlights "worldview and a desire to roll back the impact of immigrants" (p.177) as two significant elements that the concept is comprised of. His theory implies the fact that some Americans have a fear towards immigrants and the ways they can affect the United States, which can lead to a desire for confronting the issue through some kind of nativist action, e.g. immigration restriction (p.177).

Even though Anbinder's discussion about the concept is mainly situated from a scholarly point of view, i.e. he presents various studies done on the phenomenon and not a recap of actual historical events, the author still provides enough useful information about the past to prove that nativism has been an ongoing issue throughout most of the country's political history, leading up until today. According to Anbinder, the first signs of this ideology among Americans appears to have begun already in the early 1600s, but an interest in the concept as a scholarly topic did not occur until a few hundred years later, at the beginning of the twentieth century (p.177). Before this, not much attention had been directed towards nativism and immigration,

and there had been a lack of respect for the matter as well, which eventually "began to change in the late 1930s" (p.178) among scholars.

During his chapter, Anbinder refers to a prominent author known as John Higham, and mentions his book, *Strangers in the Land*, published in 1955. The publication is described by Anbinder as a "landmark work of American history" (p.180), in reference to its influence on historical studies about nativism. It is based on the knowledge he achieved from reading work produced by nativists, and it is so thoroughly researched that it has been defined as "encyclopedic" (p.180), as well. This view is shared with Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimer, who also acknowledge the importance of Higham's book in their journal article about the author. They state that even though it was published half a century ago, its status as "the most vital work on the history of American nativism" (p.3) has not changed. According to Dinnerstein and Reimer, John Higham became the most important historical figure in the country for his studies accomplished on the subject of nativism.

Unlike Anbinder, who does not give a complete explanation behind why most Americans had, and continue to have, a hostile attitude towards different minority groups in the United States, Higham presents a detailed theory for this issue. The concept of nativism from his point of view is explained as a "complex ideology" (Anbinder. p.180) that has developed as a result of several different reasons throughout history. He claims that one factor for why nativism evolved specifically between 1860 and 1925 was due to cultural differences that arose among the native population and newcomers. In the twentieth century, though, Higham states that the most important motivator behind the nativist beliefs of Americans had developed into becoming an intense wish to protect their own "race" (Anbinder. P.180).

A few years later after the release of his book, in 1958, Higham presented a journal article titled "Another Look at Nativism" in *The Catholic Historical Review*, which was one of the many articles written by him. Anbinder mentions that the historical author published these essays with the intention of improving his original study of nativism as seen in *Strangers in the Land*. This time he focused more on "status rivalries as a cause of nativist outbreaks" (p.183), than what he had done previously. It is also important to note that during his studies, Higham mainly focused on how nativist attitudes affected European immigration restriction, and conflicts between religious groups. He did not consider the issues of immigration in the west, such as anti-Mexican nativism (Dinnerstein & Reimers, p.7). However, Anbinder states that the topic did not receive much attention by scholars in general, during this period of time (p.192).

In the journal article, the writer provides a thorough insight into his thoughts on why some native-born Americans show signs of prejudice towards immigrants arriving to their

country, while discussing the development of the concept throughout past decades. Similar to the previous author, he also attempts to provide a definite answer for what the nativist ideology concerns. As Anbinder had predicted in his chapter, Higham is one of the many scholars who explains the term as referring to "a set of attitudes, a state of mind" (Higham, p.148) which he classifies as a type of subjective prejudice with irrational motives. He argues that the ideology evolved among activists who were seeking to hold power over others, resulting in a foreign group receiving the blame for problems within the society (Higham, P.149).

Higham and Anbinder's definitions share the understanding that those with nativist views appear to prioritize themselves, rather than helping minority groups, through actions caused by both having concerns about them, and to gain a sense of superiority over others. Furthermore, the authors agree that it is challenging to define the boundaries of what the ideology involves. Higham explains that there are different kinds of nativisms, as a result of the belief being a "defensive type of nationalism" (p.150) and that nativists would often lash out at various areas of threats. With this prejudiced belief having been upheld among Americans throughout the United States history, minorities are, as a consequence, often portrayed as being the victims of the ideology instead of as participants (Higham. P. 152).

Having said that, the historical author takes into consideration the effects of 'status rivalries' as a second explanation for why Americans have prejudiced views against external populations. He interprets the notion of status rivalries as a conflict that occurs between men with different ethnic origins when they compete for high status within a community (p.151). According to him, the overall principles of nativism are sometimes not sufficient enough to explain the issues that exist between groups (p.152). This interpretation applies to the American population in the way that it describes how the country has become more ethnically diverse, and to be able to analyze the development of its inhabitants from a historical perspective ethnic terms have to be considered. If one group is different from another within a competitive society in the country, a "conflict of interest" is likely to occur (p.154).

Higham includes some background context on what determines the ethnic statuses, and their positions in society, for citizens of the U.S. He believes that "the order of arrival" (p.155) between ethnicities was an important factor that established who would receive the main authority among the culturally diverse population. Immigrants who were allowed to enter the country later would have to obey the dominant group to be able to settle down there, and they were often exposed to tough conditions. In some situations though, if immigrants arrived "at a sector of American society during its formative stage" (p.155), they would have the possibility to stand out in the communities, especially if they were looked upon as useful.

An example of such a minority group in the United States, who were employed to work as contract laborers, in exchange for the opportunity to live in the country legally for a period of time, were Mexicans during the Bracero Program (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.265). The description of the relationship between Americans and the Latino population through this formal agreement is comparable to Higham's portrayal of ethnicities and the supposed positions they each have in society. By analyzing the IRCA and the Zero Tolerance policy, the development of Mexican immigration and their status in the United States in relation to the superior status that Americans have, will be presented. The exact definition of the term 'nativism' that will be used in this thesis, when examining the two governmental actions targeting Latinos, is a combination of Anbinder and Higham's interpretation. In other words, the term will be used to highlight the shared concern among most native-born Americans regarding how Latino immigrants negatively impact the structure of their society and its citizens. This fear resulted in the population having a prejudiced view that has led them to act on irrational motives against the foreigners.

Leading up to the IRCA - History behind Latino immigration

The issue of immigration in the United States has not always been as prioritized as the way Donald Trump advocated the problem with his campaign, and later during the course of his presidency. In a journal article published in 2005, titled "Ronald Reagan and the Task Force on Immigration, 1981", Thomas R. Maddux states that over thirty years ago, the topic of immigration was instead only seen as a "secondary issue" (p. 195) by Ronald Reagan and his administration. In fact, while working as a governor, the former president had been more concerned with dealing with "migrant farm worker issues" (p. 203), than confronting the significant pressure he had received from the public on the topic of illegal immigrants (p.203). This external influence, along with congress voicing their concerns and receiving a report from the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (SCIRP) as well, eventually forced Reagan to assemble a task force to deal with the various aspects of immigration in the United States (p.197).

The SCIRP, which had been established three years earlier in 1978 by President Jimmy Carter and Congress, influenced the structure of Reagan's task force. The report that the commission had delivered to the governmental team consequently decided which matters the task force would focus on during their discussions, and their recommendations continued to be essential for how the task force managed significant issues. However, a disagreement between SCIRP and the task force arose when they attempted to solve the growing problem of illegal

immigration in the United States. They could not decide on what was the best solution for this issue (p. 209). Yet, they were certain that Mexico was the main cause of most of the issues connected to immigration in the country, after conducting investigations into the matter (p.218). Maddux claims that due to how the 40th president had distanced himself from politics around this matter at the time, "the initiative for immigration reform definitely did not come from Reagan or from his conservative agenda" (p.202). However, through this governmental team that he constructed in 1981, their decisions would, in the end, contribute to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) (p.198).

James Ciment and John Radzilowski define the IRCA as a "frontal attack by Congress" (p.265) in their chapter titled "Fourth Wave (1965 – 2001)". The act was directed towards illegal immigration, and it was initiated in an attempt to prevent any further entries of undocumented migrants to the United States, and to eliminate those who had already settled down in the country. According to the authors, by the time the IRCA was introduced, the number of illegal aliens in general had reached a staggering 1.8 million (p. 265). Ciment and Radzilowski mention several times throughout their chapter that out of all the countries who contributed to the expanding immigrant population, Mexico had most often been the largest supplier. Between 1985 and 1994, Mexican immigrants covered 30% of the total number of illegal aliens (p.247), and by the year 2000 they had expanded to 54% (p. 254).

One major reason for why the number of undocumented Latino immigrants had increased substantially, and why they continued to cross the U.S. border in a steady flow, was due to the opportunity of acquiring well-paying jobs in the United States (p.254). A previous historical event from 1942, that had subsequently influenced this temptation among Mexicans, was the Bracero Program (p.265). Through this formal agreement that was established between the United States and Mexico, agricultural labor workers could come and work for a short period of time. This benefited both parts; the American employers who owned plantations had access to cheap labor, and Mexican migrants earned more money than they had back at home.

Unfortunately for the laborers, the official program ended 23 years later, in 1965 (Dinnerstein, Ch.6, p.122). According to a chapter written by Leonard Dinnerstein, the motivations behind this decision was influenced by concerns and criticisms from other laborers who were either native-born American, or Mexican American. For the Mexican immigrants who had obtained citizenship in the United States and were already employed, having to compete with "imported foreign laborers" (p. 121) in the job market was resented. Also, the conditions that the Latino citizens were put in were often worse than how the braceros were treated during their stay, even though the laborers had the same jobs. Another critical factor that

8

led to the cessation of the formal work agreement was the amount of immigrants who were able to enter the U.S. illegally, disguised as the laborers who were part of the program, while it was in action. This increase in undocumented farm workers crossing the border resulted in the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) eventually implementing a movement known as 'Operation Wetback' in an effort to "plug the border separating the two nations" (Dinnerstein, Ch.6, p.122).

However, this action instigated by the INS, along with the termination of the Bracero program, did not prove to be entirely successful with preventing Mexicans from continuing to cross the border in search of work. Immigrants who previously had entered the country legally as agricultural workers, now had to enter without the proper documents in order (Ciment, Radzilowski. p.281) Due to economic reasons, and a destitute living situation in Mexico, many people had no choice but to defy the restrictions and enter the United States illegally to be able to earn a living and support their families. The jobs that were available to them there were usually positions with low value, considering that most Mexicans did not have sufficient education, and hence it was difficult to find work with a high income (Dinnerstein, Ch.6, p.123).

With the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, obtaining a job in the United States became even more difficult for immigrants, especially for those arriving from south of the border. Even though the act did revoke the national-origins quota system, support family reunification, and gave refugees more attention (Ciment & Radzilowski, p. 235), it also reinforced the protection of employment opportunities for its native citizens. Ciment and Radzilowski inform in their chapter how a background check was often conducted by the Labor Department before hiring an immigrant in a particular field. The primary reason had been to see if there was a demand for more employees among the American workers who were already hired, but also to ensure that employing a foreigner would not affect the wages of the native citizens, or their work environment (p. 238).

This shared concern among most Americans, regarding how uneducated illegal Mexican immigrants were affecting the employment of the native-born citizens, increased coincident with the growing number of Latino immigrants who were appearing in the country. The 1965 act had been introduced to ease this fear and offer job security for its citizens. However, what Americans had not expected was the increase of illegal immigration that came with it (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.254). The two authors establish that up until the 1980s, 90% of these undocumented travelers had come from Mexico. A few years later, between 1985 and 1994, Mexican immigration alone developed into covering 30% of the total number of immigrants, which has been labelled as the period of "exceptional Latino immigration" (p.247).

The main goals of the IRCA

It was not until Ronald Reagan passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, during his presidency in 1986, that the government ultimately "established sanctions" against American employers who were knowingly hiring illegal aliens, which was contributing to the influx of these undocumented immigrants (Ciment & Radzilowski. P.254). The Republican president and his administration had not paid much attention to the emerging issue of illegal immigration before, or even considered the idea of initiating immigration reform, yet by 1981 the matter had to be addressed. Maddux states that "all immigration specialists and historians" acknowledge how this confrontation was connected to the changes that had occurred after the 1965 act. As mentioned earlier, the outcome of this legislation, along with the end of the Bracero Program, had resulted in both an increase of legal immigration, as well as a rise in undocumented immigrants from the south of the border (p.199).

A reason behind why American employers had appeared to prefer using Mexican workers, and why they continued hiring them instead of native-born citizens, could be explained through an American grower's point of view during the 1980s. Dinnerstein informs in his chapter that, after the end of the bracero program, plantation owners had complained of how difficult it was to find trustworthy laborers to hire. According to them, American-born workers were not as reliable as the Latinos, and they also demanded to be paid more than the immigrants. As a consequence, most growers did not hesitate to employ Mexicans, and this resulted in their population eventually covering half of the "farming labor supply in the first decade of the 21st century" (Ch. 6, p.123).

Similar to the goals of the 1965 act, one of the main priorities of the IRCA had been to protect the jobs of American citizens from Mexicans who were entering the country. However, this time the government took more drastic measures to enforce the safety of its native-born citizens in the job market, despite the fact that it meant having to punish other native citizens as a consequence. This decision was evidence of a united ambition among the citizens to take action against Mexicans, therefore it supports the argument that the IRCA had nativist motives. The purpose of targeting the employers had been to subsequently reduce the job opportunities in the United States that had encouraged undocumented Mexican immigrants to continue crossing the border. The expectation was that, without a reason to enter the country, this form of immigration would decrease (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.266). In this way, the Americans were able to protect themselves from the undocumented Latino immigrants who were both acting as a competition in the labor market and were also limiting the few low-paying employment positions that were available to the weaker, uneducated native-born citizens.

Higham's theory of status rivalries, as a cause of prejudiced views towards immigrants among Americans also applies here, considering that the American population had eventually viewed the Mexicans as a threat, after years of hiring Latino workers. The author writes in his journal article how conflict may arise between two groups when the new group "pushes upward rapidly in the status system" (p.156) With the history that Mexicans had of working as agricultural laborers for American employers, they had established a status among themselves as a source of cheap labor. As soon as the foreign workers had obtained a better reputation than some of the weakest native-born Americans, the native-born population became hostile towards them.

Despite the government enforcing a law that criminalized the act of hiring illegal aliens, the IRCA did also grant a one-time amnesty for 3 million undocumented immigrants through a legalization program that was set up at the same time as the employer sanctions were established (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.247). For Mexicans who had previously entered the country illegally, this accord gave them the opportunity to acquire an official status as a "permanent resident alien" (p.266). However, the amnesty only applied to the number of Latinos who could validate that they had been living in the United States with an undocumented status, the entire time from the beginning of 1982 and up until that point. The process for such a qualified immigrant involved them first receiving a temporary status that was valid for a period of 18 months, before being able to receive a permanent status (p.266). For illegal immigrants who were not eligible for the amnesty program, which were mainly undocumented labor workers, Reagan and his task force had suggested implementing "a short-term foreign worker program" (Maddux, p.220).

While it may seem that these accomplishments did not have nativist intentions towards the Latino population, seeing as the official decisions only increased the number of Mexicans with a legal status and foreign laborers in the country, it was in fact a calculated move made by the Reagan administration and his task force in favor of the native-born Americans. The idea of an amnesty program had originated from the shared concern that Reagan's task force and the White House had about illegal immigration. The suggestion had been a part of the recommended package that the team presented as a solution to the Latino immigration issue, which also included a proposal of enforcement and a foreign worker program. By allowing the legalization of some of the undocumented immigrants who were already in the country, they believed that it would distract Mexico and help reduce the concerns that the country and its inhabitants had of the employer sanctions against them (Maddux, p.219). Members of the SCIRP had also claimed, during their deliberations of how to solve the immigration issue, that

with a legalization program, it would successfully lower the arrivals of future undocumented immigrants (p.208).

The authorization of the amnesty program had been similar to the efforts made with the 1965 Act, when the U.S. government had allowed for family reunifications among immigrants who were already residents in the country, which the Mexican population had benefited from as well (Ciment & Radzilowski, p. 253). Both the 1965 Act and the 1986 IRCA had concluded with the same solution for limiting future arrivals of undocumented immigrants. By permitting a small number of Mexicans to become permanent residents, under specific terms, it could help reduce the intensity of issue. However, while the family reunifications had been granted with the intent of shifting the focus away from employment-based immigration among Latinos (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.238), the amnesty program had authorized Mexicans to continue working in the country under a temporary U.S. visa. Frank Hodsoll, a White House official, and an important figure for the task force, had believed, along with other members of the government, that establishing a work-program would satisfy the needs of American employers, as well as "reduce the opportunities for future illegal immigrants" (Maddux. p.228).

The task force had been focused on reducing illegal Mexican immigration in the United States for the reason that they believed the connection people made between various types of immigrants, i.e. legal, refugees and undocumented, were increasing the national concern about this issue among the public and the Congress, and also how they viewed the Latino population as a whole. They were worried that "a backlash against legal immigrants might occur" (Maddux, p.217). However, the government's attempts at lowering the numbers of illegal immigrants proved to be unsuccessful. As Ciment and Radzilowski state in their chapter, "the IRCA's legalization program was a onetime occurrence, and the size of the resident undocumented population has been climbing ever since" (p. 267). Maddux claims in his article that the task force, along with the White House and the IRCA, had not expected the magnitude of future illegal immigration, further describing this as their "the biggest failure" in the U.S. government's struggle against solving the problem. According to him, the total number of illegal aliens had reached between 6 to 8.5 million by the year 2000, and he believed that the statistics would continue to climb as long as illegal immigrants were being hired in the country, regardless of the efforts made to prevent this (p.228).

The negative reactions of the public to the rising number of immigrants confirmed what the government had predicted earlier. A major concern emerged of how the Latino immigrants could not assimilate into the society in the United States, which had also been one of the decisive elements that had ensured the IRCA passed through Congress. The reasoning behind

why these immigrants could not assimilate into the country had been based on nativist fears that included how Mexicans stole jobs from Americans, and also how they took advantage of social services, which was bad for the economy (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.283) A widespread demand that developed, and was expressed by the native citizens, was a call for stricter border controls between the United States and Mexico. Ciment and Radzilowski state that the IRCA had in fact originated from the fear that the government had lost control of the borders that separated the two countries, and they wanted to take back that authority (p.265).

The Bureau of the Census is also crucial when attempting to understand why parts of the American population had nativist views against Mexicans. It had impacted the prejudiced views that native-born Americans had of the ethnicity in the way that the Census had evaluated the diverse population in the United States throughout history. In a journal article by Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley and Paz M.-B. Zorita, the two authors state that Mexicans had, in fact, not been included in the count at all until 1930. Moreover, when they were eventually considered as part of the citizens, the Census at the time had formed guidelines for how to precisely count and classify the Latinos. Mexicans had been labeled as "a very mixed group belonging primarily, if not totally, to the laboring classes" (p.165). These instructions implied that class and status might have been a determining factor for how to differentiate between people who belonged to that culture. It appeared that most immigrants from south of the border, who were laborers in the United States and had a Latino background, were grouped together under the same racial category, 'Mexican'. However, other immigrants who had this nationality and who had achieved a better status in society, could also be categorized as 'White', although "they were rarely treated as white" (Ortiz & Telles, p.43-44).

Another significant issue that arose as a result of how the U.S. Census counted its citizens, was the inaccurate data that the Bureau acquired on the total number of illegal aliens in the country. When gathering information about the population, it had not distinguished between the three main forms of immigrants: legal immigrants, undocumented and refugees. This would not change until the census in the year 2000. Therefore, in the 1980s, the same decade that the IRCA was initiated, only estimations could be made about how many illegal immigrants were settled in the United States, which had been approximately 3 to 6 million around this time. Due to this lack of data, specialists could not come to a conclusion on whether or not immigrants from Mexico negatively influenced the country. Maddux brings up an important point in his journal article, claiming that most of these experts had merely relied on assumptions when forming conclusions to their studies, in the end (Maddux. p.209).

The U.S. Census, from over 90 years ago, is therefore undeniable proof that the American population had a history of not viewing Latino immigrants as equals or as a part of their society. The uncertainty of how to classify a Mexican in the Census not only affected the how the public viewed them, but also created a problem for how these immigrants viewed themselves. (Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, p.166) Ortiz and Telles believe that the history Mexicans had of working as laborers in the United States had placed them in a low position in society, both economically and racially. Therefore, using "Mexican" as a category became a way to classify these immigrants, among Americans (p.42).

The election of President Trump

Regardless of whether the information gathered on illegal immigrants by the U.S. census had been reliable or not, a nativist ideology continued to expand and thrive among the native-born Americans. Mexicans were already being viewed as a threat to the United States when the 9/11 terrorist attack occurred in 2001, which would turn out to have a tremendous impact on how the immigrants would be treated from then on, based on their ethnicity. In the aftermath of 9/11, the public grew even more hostile towards all foreigners, identifying them as a serious threat to various areas within their society. Even though the attack had not involved any Latinos, they were inevitably affected by the consequences. Martinez-Brawley and Zorita explain that "Mexicans, being the closest, most numerous and poorest, fitted the public search for a scape goat" (p.173). Since then, politicians and the media have also increasingly played a part in influencing Americans to believe that undocumented immigration is a national threat to their country (Young, p.227).

A separate incident that would again have an effect on attitudes towards Latinos, further fueling the nativist views that Americans had of immigrants, happened seven years later. In 2008, the United States experienced a financial crisis, and this increased the anti-immigrant views that the Americans had based on fears of losing their jobs. At the time, there had been more Mexican immigrants than there had been employment positions for the native citizens (Martinez-Brawley & Zorita. P.168). Dinnerstein informs that by that year, undocumented foreigners had made up a total of 11 million out of all the inhabitants of the country, and over half of these had arrived from Mexico (Chapter 6, p.122). The response from the native citizens resembled the same reactions that American workers had expressed to the increase of Latinos crossing the border in search of labor after the end of the Bracero Program, over 40 years earlier. Martinez-Brawley and Zorita claim that this perspective was then manipulated by politicians to achieve support for their plans on, e.g. increasing border security and control (p.168). One such

politician who was dependent on the nativist views of American citizens in his run to become president, was a man named Trump.

With the election of the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, as the 45th president of the United States in 2016, Americans who had had a strong nativist view against illegal immigrants received a leader who was as dedicated as them to end the issue once and for all. Young describes him as being "an outlet" (p.228) for his supporters and their beliefs, which generations in the past did not have access to. With his well-known slogan, 'Make America Great Again', during his campaign, and the promises he made of initiating various solutions to stop Mexicans from entering the country, Trump became an idol for most of the native-born Republican citizens. His victory had primarily been dependent on the support he received from American workers who had experienced a hard economic situation in the past, and they had been dependent on him for bringing their dreams of illegal immigration restrictions to life (Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, p.170).

Presidents before Trump had attempted to increase the enforcement along the southern border in the past, however they had not succeeded with putting an end to illegal immigration. George W. Bush "had been beefing up" (Dinnerstein, Ch.7, p.138) the protection during his term in office, which involved increasing the number of agents who were tasked to patrol the border, as well as investing more money into new supplies. A similar strategy had been used by Reagan many years earlier when the passage of the IRCA provided the INS with more funding to improve the security of the border, which resulted in the number of border patrol employees expanding from 3,200 in 1986 to 4,800 in 1987 (Ciment & Radzilowski, p.266).

The protection of the United States border had been a central topic for Trump as well, and he had voiced his nativist beliefs about it throughout his presidency. One of his biggest passions was building a wall to prevent Latinos from entering the country, which Mexico would then have to pay for (Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, p.171). Trump's anti-Latino views affected how the American citizens perceived the race, and the ethnicity, of immigrants. In general, the public had often been influenced by the information they received from the media and political figures when forming an opinion about immigration. High profile figures expressed their prejudiced views on platforms accessible to everyone (Young, p.222). Trump's opinions on various issues, such as building a wall, "continued to ignite the nativist flames of his followers" (Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, p.171), and he had support even when he initiated the Zero Tolerance Policy, which Frye has described as "systematic attack" (p.369) in her article.

The Zero-Tolerance Policy

On the 6th of April in 2018, the Attorney General Jeff Sessions released the news of the Zero-Tolerance Policy to the public. The number of illegal immigrants who were entering the United States had increased by 203 percent between March 2017 and March 2018, and a further 37 percent from February 2018 to March 2018, according to the Department of Homeland Security. As a response to this escalation, Trump's administration initiated the policy to "prohibit both attempted illegal entry and illegal entry into the United States by an alien" (Justice.gov) During his press conference, Sessions detailed how a crisis had developed at the border due to Congress, in the past, not passing the necessary legislation needed. He implied that this new policy would provide that essential protection for its citizens. The Attorney General had also included a warning to any future illegal immigrants, stating that their attempts of entering the country from then on would be "met with the full prosecutorial powers of the Department of Justice" (Justice.gov).

An immediate consequence of the Zero-Tolerance Policy after it was introduced, was family separations among the Latino immigrants who had crossed the border without documents. The system that the United States had established required children to be separated from their parents, considering that they could not be held in the same facilities. While the adults were detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and brought to federal prison, their children were delivered to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) (Frye. P.353-354). Reilly Frye highlights a significant issue that occurred during the implementation of the new policy, in her journal article. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had not been prepared the day the Zero-Tolerance Policy was implemented. This subsequently affected how they processed and managed all the members of the different immigrant families, and it caused a lack of information to be given to Mexican parents, resulting in them not knowing where their children were, and in what situation they were in. The author mentions that in some cases, adults were deported back to their home country while their sons and daughters were still in the United States (p.353-354).

Frye therefore describes the Zero-Tolerance Policy as a "systematic attack" (p.369). A concise definition of the term, as presented in her text, is an arranged plan that acts in accordance with a policy, which involves a consistent pattern that leads to a repetition of measures being authorized to achieve a specific goal (p.369). The Zero-Tolerance Policy, in regards to its act of separating families, is classified a part of this category because a pattern of splitting up Mexicans, to be able to achieve a criminal prosecution of the adults for their illegal

entry, developed. It then resulted in repeated authorizations of deporting Latinos (p.370). While the 1965 Act and the IRCA had allowed for family reunifications and a one-time amnesty program for Mexicans, which authorized a number of Latino immigrants to be able to enter the country and stay in the United States legally, the Zero-Tolerance Policy had done the opposite.

This is evidence of how the policy supported a nativist ideology among Americans since it was accepted and officially enforced by the Trump administration. Nativism, as Higham had explained the term, describes a united belief which leads the nativists to act on irrational motives against immigrants. In this particular circumstance, the consequence of the nativist attitudes expressed by the American public had been allowing the separations of young children from their parents to happen through the initiation of the Zero-Tolerance Policy. The reason why most Americans had had prejudiced views towards the immigrants from Mexico, was partially based on the fact that Latinos had entered the country without documents in the past, which then led to other issues arising in the country, and they had continued to cross the border even after various restrictions had been introduced by the U.S. government to stop them.

A contemporary study from 2020, completed by McCabe et al., proved that the views Americans have of Mexicans today are somewhat dependent on if they are documented or not. The authors examined the differences between how Americans perceived legal Latino immigrants as opposed to illegal aliens, and they also studied how the illegal status of some Mexicans negatively influenced the perceptions of the ethnicity as a whole. The experiment McCabe et al. conducted involved a group of adults in the United States answering a series of questions about how they perceived documented, versus undocumented immigrants. What the participants had not known was that the order in which the questions were presented had been changed, among the subjects. The findings of the study showed that, overall, Latino immigrants who had a legal status received better ratings, than those who were illegal. However, the researchers also noticed that if the participants were asked about undocumented immigrants first, it negatively affected how the Americans viewed all Latino immigration afterwards. (p.108-109).

As discussed earlier, native-born Americans have tended to be hostile towards illegal immigrants, throughout history, based on various concerns of how the foreigners have had a negative impact on the structure of the society in the United States, especially regarding the economy. Undocumented immigrants are still portrayed by nativists as being a financial burden to society, today (Young, p.227). The concern that they take jobs from Americans has not disappeared or changed since Reagan's term in office, when the IRCA was initiated. Both the IRCA and the Zero Tolerance policy had been supported by "working-class whites" (Young,

p.219), who had believed that the escalation of illegal Mexican immigrants in the country were limiting their job opportunities, among other things. To restrict the growing number of entrants who crossed the border, the two former Republican presidents had similarly opted for funding an improvement of the border security. However, a considerable difference between the act and the policy is who their actions were targeted against. As well as securing the border, the IRCA had also initiated measures that affected both native-born American employers, and undocumented Mexicans. The Zero Tolerance policy had only targeted those who they believed were the main cause of the problem: immigrants. This reveals how Trump, and his nativist followers, had believed that Americans were not the problem, instead choosing to blame and punish a foreign group for the consequences of illegal immigration.

Donald Trump had claimed throughout his campaign, that immigration was one of the major issues which was hindering the United States from achieving greatness. Young believes that the plan to 'make America great again', made by the former president and his administration, had evidently had nativist intentions from the very beginning (p.218). A significant issue with how Trump handled Latino immigration was how he had supported Americans in having xenophobic attitudes towards Mexicans, based on their race and ethnicity. He, himself, had been reported as calling the immigrants for rapists and criminals, in his run to become president in 2016 (Young, p.218). As a consequence, most native-born Americans were further influenced to believe that undocumented immigrants from Mexico could not assimilate into their society, based on assumptions that they had made about the ethnic group, e.g. believing that illegal Mexicans tend to commit more crimes than the native citizens (Young, p.227).

Latinos had not always been the target of these nativist attitudes. Their increasing appearance in the United States had brought about the same prejudiced views from Americans, that Asian- and European immigrants had also experienced from them in the past. Immigrants, overall, had persistently suffered accusations, made by native citizens, of how they brought diseases with them into the country, and how they could not assimilate since they were too different from the native-born population. Yet, Mexicans had still been considered to be "even less desirable, from a racial standpoint, than Europeans" (Kraut qtd. in Young, p.224). César Chaves, a memorable defender of Mexican worker rights, had believed that the Latino immigrants were only being viewed as laborers by Americans, unlike how the native citizens had perceived Europeans. (Rosales qtd. in Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, p. 171).

A study from 2012, by Ortiz and Telles, provides evidence for how Mexican Americans have been, and continue to be, discriminated based on their race, and that this affects how they are able to participate in the society in the United States. Their research was based on surveys

of these citizens, completed in 1965 and in 2000. The results of the study indicated that Mexican Americans who were "darker", encountered more discrimination than others. Ortiz and Telles also noticed that, out of all of the citizens who had a Latino background, "darker" men had experienced much more prejudice than what "lighter" men and women had reported, all together (p.41).

The discrimination against Mexicans, based on their appearance and Latino background, is yet another argument for why the Zero-Tolerance Policy, as a contemporary policy, was a sign of an existing nativist ideology among the American citizens. However, from a practical standpoint, and considering the impact that Latino immigration had had on the country, it can also be argued that the policy was not nativist. The number of new arrivals from Mexico, who were entering the United States without documents, had escalated considerably since 1986, and it did not seem that they would stop without the U.S. government having to take action against them. The illegal immigrants were creating other problems that the government struggled to solve. Previous attempts at establishing restrictions had not been successful, and therefore the Zero-Tolerance policy had been initiated with even stricter measures.

Conclusion

The research conducted in this bachelor thesis aimed to provide an answer for how the Immigration Reform and Control Act from 1986, and the Zero-Tolerance Policy from 2018, showed signs of a prominent nativist ideology towards Latino immigrants, among American citizens in the United States. My thesis statement implied that the act by Reagan and the policy by Trump were both initiated with nativist intentions, therefore the main focus of this paper was to provide arguments that supported this theory. It is evident that the IRCA was nativist. To summarize, it established employer sanctions against native-born Americans to prevent them from continuing to hire undocumented immigrants, authorized a one-time amnesty for Mexicans as a distraction, and funded a stricter border security. The Zero-Tolerance Policy was also focused on securing the border. It authorized the prosecution of undocumented immigrants in an effort to end illegal immigration, which resulted in family separations among Mexicans.

Anbinder and Higham were two central sources that helped define what the concept of nativism involves. The authors agreed that there is no specific definition of the term, instead they provided their own interpretations. Their explanations helped form the framework for my understanding of what the nativist ideology consists of, which I then used to analyze the IRCA and the Zero-Tolerance Policy. The main element of the belief appears to be a shared concern, among the Americans, regarding how Latino immigrants negatively impact the structure of their

country, and the native population. This fear subsequently led to prejudiced views towards Mexicans, which motivated the citizens to support, and act on irrational motives against the immigrants.

The rate in which Latino immigration was increasing in the United States had been a significant factor for why the act and the policy had been implemented by the two Republican presidents. The goals behind them had been similar; to reduce the inflow of Mexicans, specifically stopping undocumented immigrants from crossing the border. The supporters of the IRCA had believed that the illegal aliens could not assimilate into their society based on claims of how they were limiting their job opportunities, as well as hurting the economy. However, because the U.S. Census did not have definite information on how many undocumented immigrants there were in the United States during the 1980s, specialists could not prove this accusation. Yet, they had still assumed that Mexicans were negatively impacting the country.

A separate argument that was expressed by Americans was how Mexicans were too ethnically different to adjust to their society. Leading up to the initiation of the Zero-Tolerance Policy, this point of view had been further influenced by events such as the 9/11 attack, and the financial crisis in 2008. Former President Donald Trump had also been a relevant factor for the increase of nativism. With his election in 2016, the citizens of the United States had received a leader who was determined to end illegal immigration. While Ronald Reagan had not given much attention to the issues of Latino immigration during his term in office, Trump was an advocate for how the issue of undocumented Mexican immigrants was a serious problem for the country. He had used his position as president to influence the public with his remarks and he supported their xenophobic attitudes. Trump's nativist views reflect how there has become more emphasis on ethnicity as a cause for the prejudiced opinions that Americans have of Mexican immigrants today.

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