

Are There Any Limits to Illegal Immigration?

The U.S.-Mexican border is essentially wide open.

Why? Because there is a general expectation in Mexico and Latin America that American immigration law is unenforced. Or it is so bizarre that simple illegal entry almost always ensures temporary legal residence, pending an asylum hearing.

A scheduled asylum hearing, in turn, is seen by border crossers as a mere formality to be ignored. The popular perception on the border, then, is to stick one foot illegally onto U.S. soil, and, presto, win permanent residence for you and any family members who wish to follow.

In an age of 500 sanctuary city and county jurisdictions, few illegal aliens believe they will ever be deported permanently, even if they have been apprehended committing serious crimes. There is also a general perception among would-be illegal entrants that prominent Democrats and progressives welcome their massive influxes as useful and will do their best to ensure illegal immigration continues unabated.

There is also the assumption that the greater the chaos at the border, the less likely Congress will take bipartisan action to end it. After all, 2020 is an election year and progressives are in no mood to hand Trump the semblance of a legislative victory. This fact is also known to would-be border crossers.

Illegal alien families sense that they are vital to progressive agendas of fundamentally transforming the country by importing first-generation, loyal constituents—a sentiment that is slowly replacing the prior idea of mostly young men coming to work off the books. In an increasingly tribal America, they expect on arrival to be recalibrated instantly

from Mexican nationals without any experience of America into “Latinos” and “Hispanics” with historical grievances against the majority population of United States, to be remedied by reparatory hiring and admission, and facilitated by ethnic operatives.

Some polls in the past have suggested that a third of Mexico’s population would immigrate to the United States if possible. The percentages of would-be immigrants from Central America are likely to be even higher. In theory, 50 million could cross the border in the next two decades, which poses the question: *what are the theoretical limits on illegal immigration?*

When would it cease? When 50 million or 60 million or maybe 80 million foreign nationals entered illegally, without meritocratic criteria or much diversity?

Historically massive influxes of migrants from one nation to another are reflections of imbalances in fertility and demography, and radical political, economic, and cultural asymmetries. People vote *en masse* with their feet to escape violence, oppression and poverty to flee to a different, indeed antithetical, system that promises them greater security, freedom, and economic opportunity.

Think in the past of mainland China versus Hong Kong, East versus West Germany, North versus South Korea, or Europe versus North Africa and the Middle East. Or consider why indigenous residents of Oaxaca would give up their homeland to travel 2,000 miles to a quite foreign country whose traditions, language, culture, history, and values were often antithetical to their own.

Saturation Nowhere in Sight

Mass population movements end (or never start) if there is border symmetry, in the fashion that Canadian and American

immigrants roughly balance each other out.

The promise that Mexico and Central America in the early 21st century would obtain rough economic parity with the United States has not happened, despite progress there and lower birth rates in the United States. But what has transpired is a radical increase in cartel and gang violence, endemic corruption and general lowering of the quality of life south of the border.

Under such conditions, the logical limits of immigration can be calibrated not so much by whether countries south of the border reach parity with American standards of living, freedom, security, and quality of life. But rather the current issue is *whether regions of America, especially the American Southwest become roughly indistinguishable from Latin America and Mexico*, and therefore in terms of economic opportunity, safety, and quality of life do not offer that much of an improvement—or at least not such a radical margin of enhancement to justify abandoning one's homeland.

In such an equation, the more that illegal aliens arrive, swamp social services and tax law enforcement, the more that they create ethnic enclaves that resist rapid assimilation and the more that they sense that their hosts see them most useful as an identity politics constituency, then the more parts of the southwestern United States will seem more like Mexico, and perhaps to the point of eventually diminishing illegal immigration.

No one knows what the saturation point might be of illegal and unassimilated immigration, but influxes are now approximating each month a mid-sized American city. In theory, we may already be nearing a point where many immigrants are starting to see their new homes as not all that different from Mexico—although in general far more expensive.

How Illegal Immigration Changes Us

Illegal immigration and its effects on a community are incremental but steady. This past week, two miles from my home, an illegal alien fled the scene of an accident that he had caused, which killed a pregnant Mexican-American and critically injured her 11-year-old daughter. He is still at large. Within a 100-mile radius of central California, at least five citizens were killed by illegal alien gunmen in the last four months. When I go to town to drop off dry cleaning, I rarely hear English spoken. Almost all the stores in the shopping center (where I have gone for 50 years) have Spanish names. Few English signs are apparent or needed.

The formerly rich diverse community of Japanese-, Armenian-, Basque-, Portuguese-, Mexican- and Scandinavian-Americans have long since vanished. I stopped riding a bike in my rural environs four years ago, given the packs of unlicensed and unvaccinated dogs, and the owners indifference to their attacks on passersby. From experience of driving each week across the Central Valley to the California coast, I assume that about one of every 20 cars at rural intersections will run the stop sign. I make the further assumption that if I am hit, the driver of the other car may well flee the scene and has no license, insurance or registration—and has never felt any real need to obtain them.

In my immediate rural environs, there is now the following: 1) an illegal dump of various junk, wrecked cars, and discarded household items; 2) a strange open-air vacant storage lot dotted with porta potties, trailers and assorted junk spread over five acres; 3) a bizarre sort of camp, in which lean-tos, shacks, and tents are hidden among an old persimmon orchard, where no one quite knows how many such structures are hidden inside the mysterious grove; 4) a permanent hanging gardens of Babylon-type of yard sale where a home's trees and bushes are littered with hanging clothing and flotsam and jetsam, some of

them rotting from the recent rains; 5) a former backyard that is now a small goat mart; 6) an unlicensed, ad hoc outdoor barber shop; 7) an unlicensed, ad hoc outdoor daycare center.

I'll stop there, but the avenue where I have lived for 65 years in terms of the fundamental metrics of civilization—sanitation, single-family zoning, building codes, mosquito abatement, dog licensing and registration, and sanctions for illicit activity—has regressed a half-century or more.

Officials apparently assume that visiting these places can become a lose-lose-lose situation: the miscreant will not comply with citations, the bureaucratic costs of enforcement are not offset by collectable fines, and the touchy subject of illegal immigration may earn either unfavorable press coverage or censure from politically sensitive county and local officials. In other words, we are a world away from Nancy Pelosi's gated Napa estate, or Dianne Feinstein's \$40 million hilltop Pacific Heights mansion *but not from the results of their ideology.*

Future Without Law

Life down the street is conducted mostly on the premises of rural Mexico, where one does what one pleases or must in terms of water, power, sanitation, business, commerce, leisure, and pets, without audit from authorities.

If one reads either the local or regional papers, it is composed of stories about one of three themes.

One, the disturbing litany of DUIs, gang stabbings and shootings, fatal hit-and-run accidents, police shootings of armed suspects, high-speed chases, robberies, and drug busts.

Two, there are also many human interest inspirational stories of illegal aliens from Mexico who are running successful

businesses, whose children are star athletes or students. The subtext is not that they are doing the exceptional things other Americans are not doing, but that they merit special attention and approbation because of their immigrant status and the obstacles they have overcome.

Three, the grievance or victimization meme: the lawsuit against law enforcement, the filing of a bias claim against the county, the firing of an official for some alleged insensitivity, or the injustice of some agency that has curtailed support from, tried to deport, or was somehow biased against, an illegal alien.

The point is, that unlike the past, almost every new story is grounded in some sort of overt *ethnic* context, and ultimately related to illegal immigration and its effects.

Latino and Hispanic citizens, to the extent that they identify as such, may in the American Southwest be the key to the future of illegal immigration. So far, they have put up with higher taxes, swamped social services, gang activity, hit and run accidents and subpar schools that are the wages of illegal immigration, on the theory of ethnic solidarity and of general sympathy with the underclass of which many now in the middle class were once a part.

But no one wishes to have a neighbor who is an MS-13 member, or schools where non-English speakers hold back collective learning, or to be hit by an unlicensed driver who flees the scene. For successfully assimilated Hispanics there is a growing resentment that they are being used to support political agendas that are not conducive to improving the quality of life in their own backyards.

Translated that means, for example, that California's high income, sales, and gas taxes, along with sky-high housing, electricity, and gasoline costs, do not make one sympathetic to millions who arrive illegally and without English skills or

a high school diploma but with plenty of instant needs for state services.

In sum, either when Mexico resembles California, Texas, Arizona, or New Mexico, or when these border states resemble Mexico, then illegal immigration will likely cease. Conventional wisdom has always postulated that declining birth rates, economic reforms, and globalization south of the border will discourage Mexicans and Central Americans from coming north as rough parity is achieved.

But it may be that as so many have already come north—and they are coming in increasing numbers—and as so few feel a need to assimilate, that an impoverished “north” is no longer a promised land and thus not necessarily a place for which it is worth abandoning one’s homeland.

The other day I noticed for the first time that I have a lot more fear of an oncoming car in rural California than I had of intersections in Libya; a lot more worries about a wild stray dog wandering into my yard than I did while living in Greece; a lot more anxiety of being shot or robbed than I did when visiting the current Middle East; and a lot less hope of being treated promptly *in extremis* at the local emergency room than I would have expected in Eastern Europe.

In that strange sense, I guess I have some hope that illegal immigration will soon taper off.

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