

Deportation Rates in Historical Perspective

In last week's Democratic primary debate, Univision anchor Jorge Ramos [asked](#) Joe Biden about President Obama's record on immigration enforcement. Ramos said, "you served as vice president in an administration that deported 3 million people, the most ever in U.S. history."

Democratic partisans were very upset on Twitter, but the numbers don't lie. President Obama removed more people from the United States, [no matter how you dice the numbers](#) than any other president. But was President Obama's removal record an anomaly? To answer that question, I looked at the number of removals per president going back to 1892 when the government first started [recording them](#). Table 1 shows the presidents, the number of removals under each administration, and the number of removals per year. The latter number is important as it controls for the number of years in office.

From 1892-2018, Democratic presidents were in power for 60 years and removed about 4.6 million people for an average of 76,635 per year. During the same time, Republican Presidents were in power for 67 years and removed about 3.7 million people for an annual average of 54,670. Presidents usually inherit the immigration enforcement policies of their predecessors for at least a year. I adjusted for that by assigning the number of removals in the first year of any administration to the previous administration and the results were almost identical.

But the political parties changed quite a bit over the 1892-2018 period. Shortening the period to 1990-2018 produces a similar result. During that time, Democratic presidents were in power for 55 percent of the time and removed 60 percent of

all those removed or over 3.9 million. Republican presidents were in power for 45 percent of the time and removed 40 percent of all those removed or about 2.7 million. From 1990-2018, Democratic presidents removed an average of 246,006 people per year in power and Republican presidents removed 205,453 people per year in power.

Removals as a percentage of the illegal immigrant population have varied considerably over the 1990-2018 period (Figure 1). Estimates for the number of illegal immigrants come from the [Department of Homeland Security](#), the [Center for Migration Studies](#), and linear interpolation for missing years except for 2018 where I assume that the number of illegal immigrants is the same as estimated by the Center for Migration Studies.

George Bush removed an average of 0.91 percent of the estimated illegal immigrant population each year, Bill Clinton removed an average of 1.86 percent per year, George W. Bush removed an average of 2.42 percent per year, Barack Obama removed an average of 3.33 percent per year, and Donald Trump has removed an average of 2.59 percent per year through 2018. President Trump can still increase the pace of deportations, but he won't overcome President Obama's record.

One problem with the removal statistics above is that they changed in the mid-2000s to include some illegal immigrants apprehended at the border rather than just removals from the interior of the United States. It would be better if we had the number of removals from only the interior of the United States and then recalculated the numbers for Figure 1. Even adjusting for that for the years that we have interior removals still shows that [President Obama broke removal records](#).

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