Cato scholars take center stage in immigration debate

Immigration: Setting the Record Straight

Anti-immigrant sentiments are nothing new in America—from Benjamin Franklin worrying that the "swarthy" Germans would "establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours" to the Know-Nothing party agitating against Catholic immigrants in the 1850s, there has always been some fear that immigrants will disrupt America's economy and way of life. Cato scholars have long championed a freer immigration policy, arguing that, in fact, each wave of immigrants has added to the American economy and enhanced its culture with their independence and entrepreneurialism. John Judis of *The New Republic* credited a left-right coalition drawn together by "the theories and policies developed at the Cato Institute" with halting restrictive legislation in 1995 and 1996, and former Cato scholar Dan Griswold's 2002 paper on how to stem illegal immigration by making legal immigration easier was influential in congressional reform efforts from 2003 to 2013.

In recent years, the campaign and election of Donald Trump have brought immigration debates to the forefront of public policy in a new way. Many of the president's most important campaign promises and first initiatives—the border wall, the travel ban—target immigration, and popular rhetoric toward immigrants has become increasingly hostile. During this time of fraught debate, Cato's immigration team has established itself as one of the most widely cited sources for factual analysis and policy reform proposals.

Policy Analyst Alex Nowrasteh's analysis of the risk of foreign-born terrorism by visa category—the first study of its kind—generated record-breaking traffic to Cato's website and was cited by ESPN, *The View,* the *Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, the *Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, and the *Washington Post*; on the floor of the United States Senate and in the European Parliament; and by numerous other political and media figures. Nowrasteh's

Research by Cato immigration analysts ALEX NOWRASTEH and DAVID BIER was cited widely in print and television over the past year, including on shows pictured here such as *The View*, the *Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, and the *Daily Show with Trevor Noah*.

study was of particular interest in the debate over admitting refugees to the United States. While many have claimed that refugees pose a grave terrorism risk, Nowrasteh found that this visa category poses an incredibly low risk of terrorism, thanks in part to an already-rigorous vetting process—the chance of an American being murdered in a terrorist attack caused by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 billion per year. The risk of being murdered in a terrorist attack by an undocumented immigrant is even lower, at 1 in 10.9 billion per year.

Meanwhile, in 2016, fellow Immigration Policy Analyst David Bier published the first legal analysis explaining why Trump's plan to ban immigration from certain countries—then still just a proposal—would be illegal, since Congress explicitly outlawed discrimination by country of origin decades ago. When Trump issued his executive order for the travel ban in January 2017, Bier wrote an op-ed on its illegality for the *New York Times* and was cited on the front page of the *Washington Post*, in the *Wall Street Journal*, and elsewhere. "The gentleman with the most impact over the weekend was . . . David Bier at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity," said Tom Keene of *Bloomberg Surveillance*. When various groups sued the White House over the Executive Order, a federal appeals court used Bier's argument to reject the

ban as illegal, and two appeals courts cited Cato's amicus briefs challenging the program.

Several other 2017 Cato blog posts and studies on immigration were widely read and cited this year, including Cato visiting fellow Ike Brannon's post on the enormous economic and fiscal impact of repealing DACA; Bier's post explaining the long lines for green cards, in which time can, in effect, "move backwards"; and Nowrasteh's study, cowritten with Michelangelo Landgrave of the University of California, which provided the first rigorous attempt to estimate illegal immigrant incarceration rates.

Cato's ideas also continue to make waves in Congress—in May, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI) introduced a bill to create a state-based visa pilot program that would allow states to tailor immigration programs to their own particular economic needs, and thus create a competitive system among the states that would accord with America's tradition of federalism. Johnson modeled this bill, which Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) cosponsored, after a policy that Cato first proposed in 2014 and has continued to advocate ever since. "I certainly want to thank the Cato Institute for . . . working very closely with myself, my staff, and Congressman [Ken] Buck in developing this pilot program," said Johnson. ■