Weighing the Pros and Cons of U.S.-Mexico Border Wall

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One of President Donald Trumps signature campaign promises was that if and when he was elected president, the United States would build a “great” wall along it’s southern border with Mexico. That southern border shared between the U.S. and Mexico spans almost 2,000 miles. Walls, fences, and virtual walls of sensors and cameras monitored by the U.S. Border Patrol are already built along one-third of the border (approximately 670 miles) to secure the border and cut down on illegal immigration.

Americans are split on the border barrier issue. While most Americans are in favor of increasing the security of the borders, others are concerned that the negative impacts do not outweigh the benefits. The current U.S. government views the Mexican border as an important part of its overall homeland security initiative. Below are several keep points to consider, though, before making a definitive decision on the value of expanding our current U.S.-Mexican border wall.

Cost of the Border Wall

The current price tag for a complete border wall is estimated to be between 10-15 billion dollars. While President Trump initially promised that the entire project would be paid for by Mexico, the Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto said his country would not pay for the wall under any circumstances and even canceled a scheduled meeting with Trump at the White House in protest, early on in the Trump presidency. It is important, though, to understand that just like buying a house your costs don’t end once you purchase something. The estimated cost for upkeep of the wall is said to be another 15-20 billion over the next 30 years and it is unclear if the Trump administration plans on having Mexico pay for the necessary upkeep or if that will be paid for by the United States taxpayers.

Questioning Border Enforcement Success

The use of physical barriers and high-tech surveillance equipment increases the probability of apprehension and have shown success. The number of people caught crossing San Diego's border illegally has dropped dramatically over the years. In the early 1990s, roughly 100,000 people attempted to cross the border illegally in a given year. After the construction of a fence and increased border patrols, that number dropped to 39,000 in 2015. A strong counter point to this steady decline in the San Diego area is that where there is a will there is a way. Building a wall won’t necessarily stop people from trying to cross the border, rather, it just forces them to find another way over, under or around the constructed barrier. The Gulf of Mexico’s coastline is roughly 1,700 miles. Building a physical barrier puts more stress on our United States Coast Guard to keep our shorelines safe. In southern California, sea arrests have spiked year-over-year, as enforcement efforts ramp up to meet the challenge.While only a small fraction of border arrests are at sea, authorities say, heightened enforcement on land, and a bigger fence, is making the offshore route more attractive.

The Cost of Having People Here Illegally

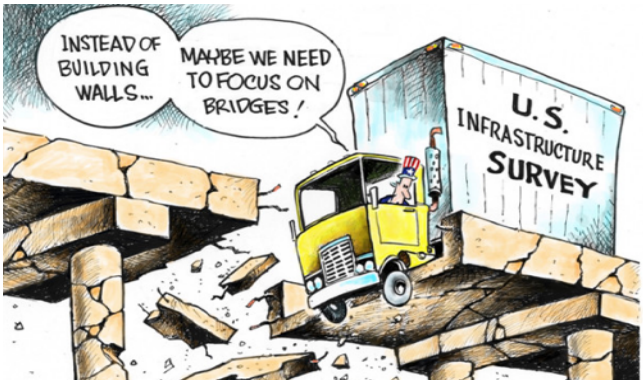
President Trump argues that "decades of immigration have produced lower wages and higher unemployment for our citizens." He also contends that low-skilled immigration is responsible for African-American and Hispanic unemployment. The argument is that building a wall, therefore, will make more jobs available to American citizens. In fact, the Trump administration says that Illegal immigration is estimated to cost the United States millions of dollars, and according to Trump, $113 billion a year in lost income tax revenue. Research, however, shows that immigration positively affects U.S. workers' wages and employment. How can that be? immigrants generally do not have a direct negative impact on the earnings of native-born workers, as native-born workers and immigrant workers generally complement each other rather than compete for the same job. Native-born workers and immigrants tend to have different skill sets and therefore seek different types of jobs. Thus, immigrants are generally not competing with native-born workers and therefore do not negatively affect American workers' earnings. Two counters points to Donald Trump's claim that immigration costs the U.S. $113 billion in lost taxes are that immigrants help keep prices low for such things as produce and other food products and that when forced to replace a shrinking workforce, many farmers are simply choosing to use more machines, meaning, no taxes are still being collected.

Safety is Our Top Priority

Any parent will tell you their number one concern is the safety and well being of their family. When it comes to immigration, there tends to be two views on whether immigrants make our country more or less safe. During the 2016 election, Senator Bernie Sanders claimed: "I understand that the crime rate among undocumented people is actually lower than the general population." If true, this would mean that while immigrants do commit crimes such as murder and rape, they generally do it at a lower rate than legal citizens. President Trump, however, said it's "not true" that immigrants in the U.S. illegally are "safer than the people that live in the country," So who is correct? Unfortunately, there are not readily available nationwide statistics on all crimes committed by immigrants in the country illegally. Researchers have provided estimates through statistical modeling or by extrapolating from smaller samples. One such study backs the president's claim, but there are several others that support Sanders' statement. Often times, in hopes of proving one side right or wrong, research groups end up causing more confusion. For example, one group known as the Cato Institute attempted to provide national estimates for overall crimes committed by illegal immigrants. The research concluded: "Illegal immigrants are 47 percent less likely to be incarcerated than natives." This sounds great but just because somebody wasn't caught doesn't mean they didn't commit a crime. At the tune of 50% less crime, it would seem to suggest immigrant communities are safer on average but that number alone doesn't provide definitive proof.

What are your thoughts? Are you in favor of the Trump administration building a wall between the United States and Mexico? Are you opposed? After reading this article are you more or less confused on your stance? Leave a comment in the feedback section below.

Please answer the questions in the *"Current Events"* section of your journal. Be sure to answer in complete and detailed sentences.



Do you think we should spend $10-$15 billion on a wall or other areas of need in the United States?