

Introduction—President Trump's Executive Order

In his first week in office, U.S. President Donald J. Trump signed a flurry of executive orders addressing topics such as foreign aid, trade, healthcare, and the U.S.-Mexico border. (An executive order is an order signed by the president that does not need to be approved by Congress.) On January 27, 2017, Trump signed an executive order titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” that restricted immigration and travel to the United States. Trump stated that the goal of this order is to protect the United States from terrorist attacks committed by foreigners.

In the hours and days that followed, airports throughout the United States became scenes of confusion and protest. Airport officials detained travelers, and thousands of demonstrators gathered to voice their opposition to the order. The executive order sparked strong reactions within the country and around world, as individuals and government officials voiced concerns about the



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President Trump signs an executive action on oil pipeline construction on January 24, 2017. Days later, he signed “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.”

constitutionality of the order, U.S. treatment of Muslims, and U.S. national security.

How does the executive order restrict travel to the United States?

There are several components of the executive order. First, the order places several limitations on refugees coming to the United States. Refugees are individuals who have fled their home country to escape conflict and persecution. The order suspends the U.S. refugee program from admitting refugees from anywhere in the world for 120 days, and also prohibits the United States from accepting

The Global Refugee Crisis and the Syrian Civil War

In recent years, the global refugee crisis has worsened dramatically. The crisis has displaced more people than any crisis since World War II. As of 2015, 65.3 million people had been forcibly displaced. This includes refugees (21.3 million), asylum seekers (3.2 million), and people who have been displaced within their home country—or internally displaced people (IDPs)—(40.8 million). In 2015, more than half of all refugees were children, and nearly one hundred thousand of these children were separated from their families.

The violence of the Syrian Civil War has prompted about half of the country's population of twenty-two million to flee from their homes since 2011. The war has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians and injured more than a million. While many Syrians seeking to escape this violence are internally displaced, nearly five million Syrians have become refugees in other countries.

refugees from Syria indefinitely. The order calls for the U.S. government to review its refugee admission process and consider additional measures to screen refugees for security threats. The order also decreases the number of refugees that the United States will admit in 2017 to 50,000 or less. President Obama had set the limit for 2017 at 110,000, while the limit for 2016 was 85,000.

The executive order does not only restrict refugees. It also limits other types of immigrants and travelers. For example, the order prohibits citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries—Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia—from coming to the United States for 90 days following the order.

What happened immediately after President Trump announced the executive order?

Within hours of President Trump signing the executive order, travelers were detained at airports within the United States, and some were sent out of the country. Others were stopped in foreign airports and turned away when attempting to fly to the United States. Individuals who were refused entry or detained included refugees from around the world as well as citizens of the seven countries listed in the executive order. This included individuals attending school or working in the United States, visitors, and green card holders (legal permanent residents of the United States).

Social media was flooded with posts about the controversial executive order, as individuals in the United States and around the world shared their views. Protesters flocked to airports throughout the country to denounce the order. While some government officials support the executive order, others have called for it to be overturned.

On Saturday, January 28—the day following the executive order—a federal judge in New York blocked part of the order, ruling that travelers must not be ejected from the United States. Federal judges in several other states issued similar rulings in the days that followed, some of which also prohibited the detention of travelers. On Sunday, January 29, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus announced that individuals from the seven countries who have green cards would be allowed to enter the United States going forward. On Monday, January 30, acting Attorney General Sally Q. Yates issued a statement questioning the legality of the order. She announced that Justice Department lawyers would not defend it. President Trump fired her that evening.

Since the country's founding, people in the United States have debated what U.S. immigration policy should be. In the wake of President Trump's recent executive order, journalists, policy makers, and other individuals have referenced different immigration policies in U.S. history as a reference point for either defending or supporting the order.

The Refugee Screening Process

While some people argue that the U.S. system for screening refugees is thorough, others fear that the system is not strong enough and that it could allow terrorists to enter the country.

Refugees are given the highest level of security screening of any travelers to the United States. After being registered and interviewed by the UN and referred to the United States for resettlement, refugees go through an extensive process in order to be admitted to the country. The process often takes two years or longer. Refugees go through multiple rounds of background checks and interviews before being approved and admitted. A range of government agencies are involved in the screening of candidates, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department. In recent years, Syrian refugees have been subject to additional security checks. In 2011, President Obama called for additional review of Iraqi refugees who had recently been admitted to the country and those who were applying to enter. This did not ban Iraqi refugees, but slowed the process for about six months.



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A protest against President Trump's executive order. January 29, 2017, Washington, D.C.

How has the United States limited or banned the immigration of certain groups in the past?

Throughout U.S. history, anti-immigrant sentiment and concerns about security have shaped immigration policy. The following are just a few examples.

The Chinese Exclusion Act—1882: In response to rising anti-Chinese sentiment, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. It prohibited Chinese workers from entering the United States and barred people who already resided in the United States from returning if they traveled outside of the country. Additional laws led to a complete suspension of Chinese immigration and prohibited family members of those already in the country from entering. The Chinese Exclusion Act set the stage for later efforts to establish immigration restrictions on the basis of nationality and race.

The Anarchist Exclusion Act—1903: In 1903, Congress passed the Anarchist Exclusion Act. The act was motivated by a growing concern that immigrants brought radical and

dangerous ideas to the United States and could threaten U.S. security. Some people in the United States feared the arrival of political agitators and anarchists from Europe, particularly those who protested for workers' rights. The 1903 act prohibited the immigration of anarchists. This was the first U.S. exclusion of immigrants based on political beliefs.

Japanese Internment during World War II: During World War II, national security concerns and racist beliefs influenced many decisions about U.S. policy. Fueled by the Pearl Harbor attack and deeply rooted anti-Asian racism, many people argued that people of Japanese descent could not be trusted. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. This paved the way for the U.S. officials to imprison U.S. citizens of Japanese descent and Japanese immigrants living in the United States. The U.S. government forcibly relocated Japanese-Americans to concentration camps beginning in 1942. Of the 110,000 people of Japanese descent forcibly relocated, around 62 percent were U.S. citizens. Evidence did not support claims that Japanese-

Americans posed a security threat. In reality, these policies were based more on racist ideas than legitimate security concerns.

How has the United States sought to limit discrimination in its immigration policy?

While several U.S. policies have restricted immigration of certain groups, there have also been efforts to limit discrimination against those seeking to immigrate to the United States. For example, the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 created new guidelines for issuing immigration visas—it banned discrimination based on race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence. For the first time, U.S. immigration policy afforded immigrants from around the world more equal consideration for relocation to the United States. The act immediately boosted immigration for the nationalities

that previous policies had restricted. While previous policies had prioritized European immigration, after the 1965 act Asian, Latin American, and African immigration increased.

What questions remain regarding the recent executive order?

The executive order remains a controversial topic that will likely continue to be debated among the public and within Congress, the courts, and the media. It poses numerous questions to be considered. For example, is the order legal according to U.S. and international law? How will it be carried out moving forward? Will it be expanded to include other countries? Will it be effective in improving the security of the United States, or provoke anti-American sentiment around the world?