



## **An Exploratory Study: Christianity, Immigration, Diversity & Global Economies**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper explores the potential economic impact on global economies in light of perceived Christian support for bans against specific cultural and religious groups. This article includes a review of the attitudes for and against immigrants entering the United States legally and illegally. This paper does not suggest that all Christians are supportive of bans against others. However, it does ask the questions, “Why do these initiatives which are viewed as non-Christian, attractive to some? And, Will these initiatives to ban particular cultures and religions have a significant impact on global economies?”*

*This paper further explores the attitudes of Christians towards legal and illegal immigrants.*

*The United States has the right to protect its citizens. One would agree that it is important to have policies and processes in place to safeguard one’s country from threats. However, it is also important to take a controlled, considerate and diplomatic approach in addressing the “how” to establish and implement a plan that works for the U.S., other countries and the people impacted.*

*It is important to note that the vast majority of Christians support law abiding legal immigration and do not support harsh initiatives. In fact, many Christians view the action of banning groups of people based on stereotypes, as hateful and divisive rather than compassionate and filled with Christian love; which is the foundation of the faith.*

**Key Words:** *Immigration, Illegal Immigration, Muslim Ban, Christianity, Economic Impact, Global Diversity*

## **Introduction**

Are American Christians not compassionate? Are they perceived as harsh, cold and uncaring to those outside of the United States? Of course not. However, the actions of a few are beginning to frame a negative impression of the American Christian. These perceptions affect various areas of society, to include the economy; specifically the global one.

The attitudes of the global world can become hostile to the United States on several levels due to this perception. Tensions can become the norm between the U.S. and other nations that have been long-term allies and short-term partners. Some of these nations are vital in helping America further their agenda throughout the world. Some of these nations are trading partners, whether in exports or imports or collaborators in research and development.

The Christian agenda is to do good in the world. Christians are to influence the world for Christ. Christ's message is that of "Love your neighbor as yourself." Therefore, when others begin to put all Christians in the same category as the fringe group that does not reflect the actual tenets of Christianity, the whole of society hurts. That's the global impact.

What happens in society, positive and negative, can ultimately be seen and felt in the economy. Christians have influenced the global market for centuries and have done so positively (Beckwith, 2016). They cannot allow radicalism to negate their efforts of building bridges in the world.

## **2. Review of Relationships between Mexico, the Middle East and the United States. Racism, or Classism?**

Economic and trade relationships with Mexico are important to the economies of both Mexico and the United States. In particular, it is of interest to U.S. policymakers because of Mexico's proximity to the United States, the high level of bilateral trade, and the strong cultural and economic ties that connect the two countries. Also, it is of national interest for the United States to have a prosperous and democratic Mexico as a neighboring country. Mexico is the United States' third-largest trading partner, while the United States is, by far, Mexico's largest trading partner. Mexico ranks third as a source of U.S. imports, after China and Canada, and second, after Canada, as an export market for U.S. goods and services. The United States is the largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Mexico (Villarreal, 2016).

The United States and Mexico have strong economic ties through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has been in effect since 1994 and began under President Ronald Reagan (Villarreal, 2016; 2010). Studies show that the net economic effects of NAFTA on both countries have been small but positive, though there have been adjustment costs to some sectors within both countries. (Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32934.pdf>).

Based on this insight to Mexico and the United States' economic ties, there has been a strong relationship with the country in the south. The promise to "Build a Wall" concerns many Christians in the United States and hurts long standing relationships with Mexico. There is a concern that building a wall" does not reflect the command by Jesus to "love thy neighbor." Some worry that the mischaracterization of the American Christian's response to illegal immigration is the same as a fringe group in the United States.

There are legitimate concerns of illegal entry into the United States, however, the vast majority of Christian Americans state instead of building a wall, which to some represents creating barriers rather than bridge building, the U.S. should enforce the already existing laws of the land. Illegal immigration is a problem, however, an intentional focus on tightening the rules

and applying them from both sides, create benefits for both nations. The fear of illegal immigrants is one of the reasons the wall is attractive to some. Miller (2014) stated that a majority of Americans worry that illegal immigration will erode the country's culture and economy. Some believe that illegal immigrants threaten traditional U.S. beliefs and customs, as well as jeopardize the economy.

Rivera-Batiz (2001) argues that undocumented workers in the United States are presented to the world as a population of low-level workers who are uneducated. He believes the media perpetuates this type of stereotype frequently. Rivera-Batiz points out an analysis of a sample conducted of illegal immigrants in Chicago, Illinois wherein Chiswick (1988; 143) concluded that "most illegal aliens have low-levels of schooling." Rivera-Batiz's (2001) research makes a distinction between illegal immigrants, some of which are Mexican, while others are not he points out. He argues that the perception of illegal immigrants being mostly unskilled may not be a correct representation. For example, the Mexican undocumented may be unskilled and low-income, but one neglects to mention that many illegal immigrants are those who came to the U.S. on visas and stayed. Thus, they then became illegal because they overstayed their visas. Many of these illegal immigrants are educated and skilled.

A survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1989 supports Rivera-Batiz's claim that there is an inaccurate picture portrayed of illegal immigrants. The study was carried out using approximately 4,000 illegal immigrants waiting to get citizenship through the proper channels of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. It showed that many illegal immigrants were highly educated. Why do some Americans think differently? That is how television portrays them. They are the ones sneaking across the border to the U.S. from Mexico. However, what video neglects to point out is that the Mexican illegal immigrant and other illegal immigrants are different.

There are legitimate concerns with data showing that in 2014, more than 11 million or 3.5% of the U.S. population was illegal. In 2007, the peak of anxiety, 12.2 million was illegal (Pew Research Center, 2016). Fifty-two percent of all unauthorized immigrants in 2014 were of Mexican descent, today, however, Mexican immigrants are on the decline. What makes up for that decline, according to the data, is that of other nations such as Asia, Africa, and Central America, which accounts for an estimated 5.3 million in 2014. (Pew Research Center, 2016). There is a problem with illegal immigration in the U.S., and steps should be taken to ensure safety, security, and prosperity for its citizens. However, for those who are not citizens, a clear path should be established to help them attain that goal.

### **3. Immigrants and the Global Economy**

There are legitimate fears of illegal immigrants in the United States. Fear of legal immigrants is also a concern. This fear shows up in the rise of bigotry against legal immigrants of the Muslim faith. The primary concern is that too many people associate the religion of Islam or the people who are Muslim with terrorism (Schwarz, 2017).

It is necessary to establish processes that are legitimate and fair to protect the citizens of your home country. No one could in good faith say that a country should not bear that responsibility. The question isn't should it be done, of course, it should. The uneasiness resides in how such actions happen. Are actions being taken with compassion, kindness, and thoughtfulness that leads to screen out those who are opposed to America's liberties and freedoms versus using hate and prejudice to disenfranchise those who seek an honest means of achieving their American dream?

Understanding the reasons behind a ban cannot be ignored, but many mainstream

Christians are stating that bans are morally wrong. The day after a proposed policy was said, one governor of Indiana, one evangelical Catholic named Mike Pence, tweeted that “Calls to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. are offensive and unconstitutional.”(Graham, 2017). Further, many Christians empathically stated that the ban on radical Muslims is one thing, but a ban on “all” Muslims and particularly the Syrian refugees, is quite another. Many Christians are against banning refugees from entering the U.S. (Graham, 2017). In fact, many issued statements against the prohibition and signed papers condemning it. What impact can a ban against Syrian refugees or "all" Muslims have on the economy?

#### **4. Economic Data**

According to [www.money.cnn.com](http://www.money.cnn.com), the United States does more than \$220 Billion in trade with Muslim countries. Will the band of Muslims in the United States affect relations with these countries?

Reports show that tourism is first to be hurt if a ban occurs. Muslim tourists spend on average \$2,000 more than European travelers (Hyde, 2016).

DinarStandard and CrescentRatings conducted research that predicted by 2020 overall spending would reach \$192 billion, which will come from Muslim tourism. Also, in 2011, Muslims spent approximately \$126.1 billion on international travel. As the U.S. places restrictions on Muslims, the U.S. will suffer and other countries will benefit.

In addition to tourism, finance and investments would suffer. According to DinarStandard, 57 Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) represented a GDP in 2013 of \$6.7 trillion with a projected growth from 2015-2019 of 5.4% than the rest of the world at 3.6%. Although many believe that building walls and implementing bans on certain groups will only hurt the economy, there are opposing positions.

According to Aric Jenkins (Fortune, Feb.2017), the bans will have minimal impact on the U.S economy during the first year of the embargo. However, he argues, the predictions that the bans won't have any significant impact, is due to the belief that the ban will not stick (Saraiva & Jamrisko, 2017).

#### **5. Current Trends and Limitations**

Currently, the new President of the United States took a bold step in taking these divisive steps towards illegal immigration. However, the President did not make these promises and move to take these actions alone. Many Christian Evangelical Americans approved of his actions when he signed an executive order banning people from several Muslim countries from entering the United States (Erickson, 2017).

Seven countries that included Iran, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Sudan — were banned for 90 days. Why? It may have made sense had these countries been proven to be the countries that have had recent attacks on America and created anti-American rhetoric against America, but they are not. In addition to the 90-day ban on these seven countries, the United States did the anti-Christian thing of halting the entrance of refugees for at 120 days and Syrian refugees indefinitely. How would such actions impact the U.S. economy? The United States will suffer not only economic backlash but also a diplomatic and societal backlash. According to Erickson (2017), *“the decision sent shock waves around the world, throwing U.S. immigration policy into chaos.”*

In 2016, the State Department issued 617,752 immigrant visas and 10,891,745 nonimmigrant visas. About 5 percent went to people from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. Here's how the affected countries are beginning to hit back at the

legislation, along with reactions from around the world: In Iraq, Renas Jano, a member of the parliament's foreign affairs committee, told journalists that *"after the U.S. president's decision to stop granting visas for Iraqi citizens, it is very likely that Iraq will stop granting U.S. citizens entry visas."* This decision, he noted will mostly impact American soldiers, diplomats, and companies that do business in the country. *"The reciprocal decision to stop giving visas will cause damage to a lot of people as there are large U.S. forces here to support us in our war against [the Islamic State], in addition to the presence of diplomatic personnel and U.S. businessmen."* He noted that Iraqi students would also be affected. Fellow Iraqi lawmaker Majid Chenkali, a Kurdish Sunni, told reporters that his country should respond with similar visa policies for Americans. *"It should be an eye for an eye,"* he said.

(<http://www.khaleejtimes.com/region/mena/muslims-around-the-world-react-to-trumps-visa-ban>)

Iran issued a statement calling the President's executive order *"a flagrant insult to the Muslim world, especially the great Iranian nation."* Iranian officials also aimed at the idea that the measure would keep Americans safer. *"It will be recorded in history as a great gift to extremists and their sponsors,"* the statement read. Iran said it would retaliate by limiting visas to Americans and that it is closely monitoring the short-term fallout from the move and is considering "appropriate legal, consular and diplomatic measures."

Did the President not think that there would be a defiant and quick response to what is seen as an attack on the people of other countries? Did he not critically consider that citizens of both countries are living, traveling and working in each other's countries and the U.S. citizens abroad could face the same backlash?

Closer to the United States, the Prime Minister of Canada reaffirmed his commitment to resettling refugees. (Retrieved from [http://live.reuters.com/Event/Election\\_2016/658431220](http://live.reuters.com/Event/Election_2016/658431220)) Immigrants built the United States.

The ban on Muslim immigrants seems fundamentally anti- American and anti-Christian. Especially when there is no substantive evidence to support a blanket ban. Racially profiling a group of people based on religion is also anti-American and anti-Christian. The impact of these actions is bound to hurt the economy. This discriminatory practice is viewed worldwide as indecent and hateful and not only could but will damage the interests of the U.S.

There are around 47 countries and territories in the world where Islam is the dominant religion. Total U.S. trade in goods with those countries topped \$220 billion in 2015, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In the first 11 months of 2016, the value of trade reached \$194 billion. In other words, the U.S. does roughly 6% of its total trade with Muslim-majority countries. The bulk of the trade in goods -- 94% -- was with just 15 countries, including Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Indonesia, and Iraq.

According to Jaipragas (2017), the ban may be lifted in 90 days, but the damage it inflicts on America's already tarnished image in the Islamic world is likely to endure far longer. Miroslav Volf, Director of the Yale Divinity School's Center for Faith and Culture, stated the following at a conference at Yale in 2007,

Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed" is simple: "What bounds Christians and Muslims together are their common belief in the oneness of God and the commitment to love God and to love neighbor. (Phan, 2007)

Christians supporting the Presidential orders should question their support. For example, to Make America Great Again, some may have forgotten that the return of coal miner's jobs to

the U.S., the restrictions placed on Mexico, and the bans on people who travel to the U.S. in search of a better life, will not hurt others, it will hurt the U.S.

According to Ed Yong, a writer for The Atlantic, bans will hurt American science. Yong provides examples of Iranian scientists who have studied and received doctoral degrees on their way back to the U.S. to continue work, research, and studies, denied entry. Iranian scientists have been a major boon to everything from Mars exploration to Ebola-fighting to advanced mathematics, (January, 2017). Yong also points to international travel as a major and inescapable part of modern science. Many scientists have foreign collaborators, which “substantially increases the pace of discovery and ideas,” says Josh Plotkin (2017). Researchers are expected to attend conferences abroad to share their work. Some have no choice but to fly to visit remote field sites, or unique paleontological digs, or sites of disease outbreaks, or one-of-a-kind facilities like telescopes and observatories. Plotkin further argues that “Professional and personal lives are being destroyed.”

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During the years leading up to the election of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, some have stated that divisiveness has never been as rampant as it is today. Those on the left and right initially argued that this president would never hold office primarily due to his brazen autocratic style of leadership. During the election cycle, many saw the economy take large declines. Although when the new president was elected to office, consumer confidence rose to an all time high in December 2016 (conference-board.org) . In January 2017, the Conference Board reported the following: The Index now stands at 111.8 (1985=100), down from 113.3 in December. The Present Situation Index increased from 123.5 to 129.7, but the Expectations Index decreased from 106.4 last month to 99.8.

## **6. A Qualitative Review of the Christian Response**

What is the Christian response to initiatives that bar certain groups based purely on religion? What is the response to people seeking a better life in the U.S. that so many others have been allowed to do over the years? Ban them? Stop them at the borders? Or should less burdensome policies be enacted that ensures a pathway to legal citizenship?

Overall, the small faction of Christians who support building walls and kicking people out of the country, are the minority and, at times, includes high-profile Christian leaders. As such, the view is that this group speaks for all Christians. This view, of course, is not right. However, the media's attention on these outliers makes it look as though all Christians support them. As the global world watches, they may start to believe what they see on television, or hear throughout the social media world, that these actions on the part of a minority of Christians are the way Christians treat people who are different than they are. The question is asked: Is this how Christians treat the poor, the needy and the outcast?

There is a need for Americans to remember that just as Christianity has had a very positive influence on the global economy, acts perceived as bigoted, racist and hateful can reverse that positive image.

A familiar scripture found in the Bible comes from Matthew 7:9, "*Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?*" That is the question that is being asked and evaluated of Christians in America because of the support of some of the new initiatives set forth by the new sitting president. Under the auspices of "Make America Great Again," many found the

rhetoric appealing. The idea of securing the borders (one of the top campaign promises) is meant to keep out others. "To build a wall, a great wall, and make Mexico pay for it." This statement was one promise that appealed to many Christians and alienated others.

When did Christians in America forget that the ideals of Christ include love, justice, and holiness? When did it become attractive to leave others behind?

Williams (2017) stated the following: "Twenty years ago, in the hot July heat of a north Georgia summer, I was taught that Christianity demands we put others first."

Dr. Mark D. Roberts (2010) stated the following in an article titled: *Illegal Immigration: Seeking a Christian Perspective*:

*I have been concerned by what I have perceived to be the absence of serious, theologically-probing, mutually-respectful conversation about immigration and illegal immigration in the Christian community. Oh, there have been plenty of proclamations and diatribes, but relatively little conversation where people with differing convictions work to understand each other and, even more importantly, to understand what God might have to say about the matter. Conversation about immigration among Christians has mostly resembled what we see in the secular arena, with people talking mainly to those with whom they agree and blasting away at those with whom they disagree.*

In the words of Pastor John March of Edina, Minnesota:

*We are all immigrants and sojourners in the world. As Christians, our primary allegiance is to God and to God's kingdom. We are first and foremost citizens of heaven. Often times immigrants understand this intuitively because they are outside the dominant power culture in the country to which they come. White Christians living in the suburbs of America (like myself) are wise to recognize this implicit advantage immigrants have in living as though they are aliens and sojourners in the world. There is much we can learn from them. (1 Peter 1)*

*Immigration reform is complicated. Yes, we need laws that govern our borders. We need rules for how people enter our country, and they need to be enforced. Currently, those laws do not work well, and that's why immigration reform is so crucial. The system is broken and it needs to be fixed. I hope it includes some pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants who have lived here for many years and are more at home in this country than their country of origin.*

*In the meantime, I plan to love and welcome anyone and everyone, regardless of legal status. My allegiance is first and foremost to the Kingdom of God, and in God's government acceptance is preeminent. Join me in loving immigrants and learning from them as we hope for immigration reform that results in a more just and equitable treatment of all people in this country. (Retrieved from*

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/markdroberts/series/illegal-immigration-seeking-a-christian-perspective/> )

## 7. Conclusion

The issues of illegal immigration and bans create a great divide between Christians. In 2014, Pew Research Center conducted a survey that was designed to measure the responses of the Christian communities by denomination regarding illegal immigration. The survey found that fifty-one percent of Evangelicals and forty-seven percent of Catholics agree with increased deportations of illegal immigrants. However, leaders within the Southern Baptist denomination, a coalition named The Evangelical Immigration Table, as well as the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Coalition and the National Latino Evangelical Coalition are opposed. Currently, approximately 57,000 Central American minors crossed into south Texas in 2014; this has only served to intensify friction within the Christian ranks (Turley, 2014).

Turley (2014) further argues that if Christians want to overcome polarization, they have to change their attitudes and seek empathy to understand the attitudes of others towards illegal immigration. In fact, the idea is that what is being seen in Christian culture is a clashing of globalization and tribalization. According to Pew Research Center (2016), a huge portion of the Muslim population is more educated and makes more money. The Muslims tend to focus their efforts in the areas of professional, managerial and technical fields and their purchasing decisions tend to lean towards American products (Hyde, 2016).

The past has made clear that segregation, discrimination and hatred damages societies and can negatively impact, if not debilitate, economies (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012; Roediger, 2005). The enforcement of immigration laws is not discriminatory. To enact stricter and tougher rules that ensure the current laws are carried out appropriately also is not an act of bigotry. Leaders of countries have a responsibility to protect the people that have been entrusted to lead. However, when leaders take vitriol steps to that end, their actions hurt not only the society they represent but brings consequences to that society from others.

There are two different types addressed in this article: the Politician and the Christian. The Politician's role is to safeguard the rights of its citizens. The Christian's role is to provide others with the opportunity to live out God's purpose. Christians are to protect those who are helpless and hopeless; to safeguard the environment, and to embrace and be the leaders in the areas of social justice.

Arguments for church and state and cases against church and state are valid on both accounts. However, when one voice speaks for the whole, one religion influences government, does that not leave open the opportunity for the government to discriminate against those who are not of that faith? When the some Christians claim that God has placed the leader in place, yet, that leader's philosophy does not reflect the teachings of God, others think that Christians are filled with hatred and bigotry.

According to the Pew Research Center, Islam is the second largest religion in the world after Christianity. However, predictions indicate that Islam is the fastest growing religion and if trends continue, it will be the most important by the end of the century (August,2017). If this is true, the United States citizens and its' leaders must reconcile the divide that exists between some Evangelicals and people of different faiths and cultures. All Christians, specifically, all Evangelicals do not support the tenets of racial discrimination of any kind



Should the attitudes reflected with some Evangelicals and the current leadership continues, there is bound to be global implications. Such implications will have political, environmental, and economic ramifications.

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