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Trump: a New Immigration Policy in the United States?

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According to many commentators, the US immigration policy is totally new with President Trump. The American Administration, at the head of a country whose population was largely made up of migratory inflows, is said to have become hostile to immigration. What is the real truth?

By Gérard-François **Dumont**

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Punctuated by multiple tweets, some of which come to deny the words of his close collaborators, President Trump's policy seems unclear. Yet, at least in one area, the migration issue, Trump's continuity and perseverance in applying his program is remarkable and even astonishing. Indeed, in democracies, voters often find that an elected president moves away from his election promises, whereas President Trump seems determined to implement what he announced.

A precisely announced policy

Indeed, on August 31st, 2016, in a speech in Phoenix, Arizona, several months before the election, Donald Trump presented ten proposals for US immigration policy. Their stated goals were to reduce immigration, including stricter enforcement of existing laws on illegal immigration. This speech was the most detailed of his campaign. The issue of immigration was then one of the key points of his statements during the campaign[1] and one of the elements that can explain his electoral victory against Hillary Clinton. Since his inauguration in January 2017, President Trump has been working to implement his proposals. Admittedly, the thunderous announcement of the construction of a "wall" along the US-Mexico border which, in reality, would only be an extension of the already existing[2] Fence[3] (3), is not yet achieved. But this should not hide the fact that Trump has made different announcements come true:

- stricter enforcement of immigration laws that allow the detention of illegal immigrants;
- the cancellation of several measures that prevented the expulsion of illegal immigrants[4] (4);
- the elimination of temporary protections for non-citizens put in place by previous administrations;
- a sharp reduction in refugee admissions[5].

The above-mentioned measures have reduced the processing of some family immigration applications.

Despite the powers contained in Congress, the courts and the autonomy of municipalities, some of which refuse to apply presidential decrees, immigration, both legal and illegal, has declined significantly in the United States since Trump's election.

> "The Trump administration's immigration policy, consistent with its election commitments, is not without historic precedents"

The return of previous procedures

Should we consider that the principles implemented to achieve this goal, such as the use of quotas tending towards zero with certain countries or the deployment of police officers, are unprecedented in the migratory history of the United States? Actually, this country has always had policies whose purpose was, according to the point of view that we take, to control immigration or to contain it. To take just a few examples, let's recall some decisions. In 1798, there was the *Alien and Sedition Act*, including measures to curb the naturalization process that was deemed too fast. From 1882 to 1943, the *Chinese Exclusion Act* prohibited entry to Chinese nationals. As another example, at the Federal Immigration Center of Fort Clinton, at the southern end of Manhattan, then at Ellis Island in 1892, criteria were set to quarantine some people or even deny them entry. The shipping companies that transported the migrants were required to repatriate them at their expense[6]. Approximately 2% of the entrants thus had their admission to the United States rejected because of their poor health or criminal record.

The migration policy of the United States has often been based on a logic of quotas decided by Congress, even if the geographical quotas disappeared from 1978 to 2016 to partially reappear in 2017. For the future, it is the voters who, by their choices in the parliamentary and presidential elections, will decide this policy.

(*Translation:* Claude Grandpey)

1. In a context of differentiated voting according to the categories of the population; cf. Dumont, Gérard-François, *Démographie politique. Les lois de la géopolitique des populations*, Paris, Ellipses, 2007.

2. Goussot, Michel, « Le projet de Donald Trump d'ériger un « mur » entre le Mexique et les Etats-Unis » *Raison présente*, July 2017.

3. There is indeed a first wall erected in 1994 between the border towns of San Diego (United States) and Tijuana (Mexico) and barriers built discontinuously since 2006.

4. However, this issue is the subject of negotiations with Congress.

5. In view of the global refugee crisis, the Obama administration increased the number of refugees from 70,000 to 85,000 in fiscal 2016 and to 110,000 in fiscal 2017. The Trump administration immediately reduced the 2017 fiscal year limit to 50,000. In total, 53,716 refugees were admitted in fiscal 2017.

6. Hence the decision of those leaving Cherbourg to carry out initial checks themselves; cf. « Cherbourg, d'une migration l'autre », *Le Monde*, 5 avril 2016.