

Transactive Discussion Family Separation

Please read the following prompt and quotes. In small groups, discuss the questions below.

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In the last few years, immigration in the United States immigration policies have been in the national and international spotlight. One policies that gained a lot of attention are Family Separation policies. Under the Obama administration (2008-2016), families crossing the border without documentation were detained together. In addition, individuals were often granted bail, assigned legal counsel, and granted asylum when necessary. On April 6, 2018, the Trump administration enacted a “Zero Tolerance” policy that criminally prosecuted all individuals who crossed the border illegally and separated family units. Babies to 17-year-olds were classified “unaccompanied alien children.”¹ This policy detained everyone who crossed the border while they awaited sentencing for long stretches of time months. Although the policy was enacted in April of 2018, evidence shows it started unofficially in 2017.² In June 2018, after much criticism and protest, President Trump signed an executive order to end family separation at the border. However, family separations continued even after the formal end of the policy. Children and adolescents taken from their families were placed in overcrowded and poorly resourced detention centers. Despite court orders that mandated families be reunited within 30 days of separation, many children remained separated from their guardians. Some parents were even deported without their children.

Trump’s zero tolerance policy was very controversial. Supporters of the policy believe it was a powerful deterrent to people who wanted to enter America without documentation. They also believe there should be consequences if you break the law. Opponents of the policy believe it was cruel and unusual punishment to separate families and that the practice traumatized children in potentially irreversible ways. Many opponents also believe the policy was racist, as the Trump administration disproportionately targeted Latinx immigrants.³ The administration did not enact similar policies towards other immigrant populations from Europe and Asia, despite the high levels of undocumented individuals living in the U.S.⁴



¹ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/R45266.pdf>

² <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2019/09/24/family-separation-under-trump-administration-timeline>

³ <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/08/fact-check-trumps-speech-on-the-border-crisis-1069539>;
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/05/16/trump-immigrants-animals-mexico-democrats-sanctuary-cities/617252002/>; <https://time.com/5645501/trump-anti-immigration-rhetoric-racism/>

⁴ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>



“While people trying to enter our country illegally should be held accountable and our immigration laws should be enforced, my faith has taught me that our policies should also reflect our values, and I believe that the Administration’s new policy that separates families – including separating babies and young children from their parents is wrong and not consistent with our shared American values.”

-Joe Donnelly, former U.S. Senator from Indiana



“Now the President is now doing what we should have been doing all along, prosecuting all border crashers. So if you enter the country illegally, you're breaking the law. The United States is not a repatriation center where any indigent person in the world feels free to just walk in and assume that all of us will take care of all of them and their families. There's a process and it has to be respected...Well consistent with American law, when a party is arrested, your children are either sent to relatives or they become wards of the state. So since more illegal immigrants are rushing the border, more kids are being separated from their parents and temporarily housed in what are essentially summer camps.”

-Laura Ingraham, Fox News Reporter and Show Host

Discussion Questions

1. Given what you have read, including the quotes above, which perspective on this topic do you align with more, and why?
2. Using answers from Question #1, can you integrate the two perspectives or find a compromise between the two positions?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. If so, what would the solution look like?