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A Rush of Refugees: How the United States and Canada have Responded

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February 7, 2020

Abstract

Today it is common practice in almost all countries to vet non-citizens seeking to enter their country. In recent years the United States and Canada have developed strict guidelines regarding who is allowed to enter temporarily for business and leisure, and even stricter guidelines for people who would like to become permanent residents and eventually citizens. The standards that people are held to vary from country to country, and the question arises as to why that is the case. One possible answer focuses on who the leader of the country is and their individual views. For much of the history of both the United States and Canada, the countries have held similar standards in regards to immigration and refugee policies, but over the past few decades the policies have begun to diverge. This thesis examines how the past two leaders of both Canada and the United States have responded to the current global refugee crisis and how the attitudes and views of the leaders can shift the refugee policies pursued and implemented by the country

Keywords: refugee crisis, immigration law, American policy, Canadian policy

The Problem

After World War Two (WWII), countries found themselves confronted with many people who were forced from their homes as a result of fighting as well as survivors from the Nazi concentration camps who were unwilling to return to their home countries after facing persecution.¹ As a result of the mass number of people seeking new homes, some countries starting to open their borders for these people. While Europe was struggling to handle the millions of people that needed to be resettled in 1950, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established to deal with the remaining refugees.² The 1951 Refugee Convention defined a refugee as, “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”³ People often are forced to flee their home country when a political leader or party comes to power that is known to be hostile and target some group of people for a particular attribute, e.g., race, religion, political affiliation. Civil wars are another common reason why people are forced to leave their homes when violence takes over the country.

The present refugee crisis has impacted all countries, whether politically, economically, or socially. As of 2014, the current refugee crisis involves the largest number of people to be

¹ Martin, Susan F. "The Global Refugee Crisis." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2016): 5-11. Accessed February 14, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26396147.

² Martin, Susan F. "The Global Refugee Crisis."

³ United Nations. "What Is a Refugee?" UNHCR. Accessed February 12, 2020.

<https://www.unhcr.org/afr/what-is-a-refugee.html>.

displaced since the end of WWII.⁴ In June 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that there were a total of 70.8 million forcibly displaced persons globally.⁵ This is broken down into three categories: internally displaced persons (41.3 million), refugees (25.9 million), and asylum-seekers (3.5 million).⁶ While the majority of refugees, 80 percent, end up fleeing to countries that share borders with their home country and living in refugee camps, many try to be placed in other countries where there are better living conditions and opportunities; for many it is unclear when they will be able to return home, if ever.⁷

While the global refugee crisis is the most pressing immigration issue currently, the Syrian refugee crisis is an example of one of the countries contributing to the broader problem. The largest number of refugees comes from Syria (6.7 million in the June 2019 estimate), as a result of the ongoing Syrian Civil War, which has been destroying the country for years, forcing

⁴ Martin, Susan F. "The Global Refugee Crisis."

⁵ United Nations. "Figures at a Glance." UNHCR. Accessed March 2, 2020.

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

⁶ Internally displaced, refers to persons who were forced to leave their homes, but still reside in their home country. Refugees are those who are granted the status, usually by the UNHCR, and are in the process of being resettled in a new country, while asylum-seekers are those who are physically in another country and requesting protection within that country. The line between refugee and asylee becomes blurred within refugee camps, where the people would technically be considered asylum-seekers, but are most often categorized as refugees prior to be granted the status officially. United Nations. "Figures at a Glance."

⁷ United Nations. "Figures at a Glance."

more and more people from their homes.⁸ Children are one of the most vulnerable groups impacted by the crisis. Around half of all designated Syrian refugees are children under the age of 18 and at the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, 60 percent of refugees in the camp are children.⁹

The Syrian Civil War which broke out in 2011, has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has ever seen. As the war has continued raging on for years, it has resulted in the deaths of over 500,000 people and over 20 million people have been uprooted, 5 million of which are refugees in surrounding countries.¹⁰ Three main countries are hosting the majority of the Syrian refugees: Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.¹¹ Turkey has taken on the most responsibility, sheltering over 2.8 million refugees from Syria alone, while Lebanon hosts more than 1 million, and one in ten people in Jordan is a Syrian refugee.¹² Many of these surrounding countries are providing for people who are not their own citizens, which requires time, resources, and money that they may not have. The economic, social, and political strain that is being placed on these countries that already have their own problems such as corruption and protests, are now

⁸ United Nations. "Figures at a Glance."

⁹ "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Aid, Statistics and News: USA for UNHCR." USA for UNHCR.

Accessed May 19, 2020. <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>.

¹⁰ Brandt, Jessica, and Robert L. McKenzie. "Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis."

In *Brookings Big Ideas for America*, edited by O'Hanlon, Michael E., 340-48.

Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017. Accessed April 21, 2020.

www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1kk66tr.39.

¹¹ Brandt, Jessica, and Robert L. McKenzie. "Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis."

¹² Brandt, Jessica, and Robert L. McKenzie. "Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis."

the main providers for millions of refugees and it is unclear when it will be safe for them to return to Syria.

Refugee Process

In most cases it has become necessary for the UNHCR to step in and provide aid and resources as well as trying to resettle some of the refugees in other countries that have more resources and better conditions for people to live in.¹³ Once a person has crossed into the host country after fleeing persecution they are considered an asylum-seeker within that country and are usually housed in large refugee camps established by the UNHCR. The UNHCR is then responsible for conducting the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process to determine if the person meets the international criteria for a refugee.¹⁴ Only after an in-depth investigation and interview has been conducted can the status be granted. The UNHCR is then responsible for determining which country the refugee will be forwarded to; the refugee is not allowed to choose their country of resettlement.¹⁵ The process for resettlement then continues as each country then has their own criteria, investigation, and series of interviews that have to be conducted before they can determine if they will accept the refugee to be resettled in their country.¹⁶ In part one, the history of immigration and refugee policies in the United States will be discussed, in part two

¹³ Brandt, Jessica, and Robert L. McKenzie. "Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis."

¹⁴ United Nations. "Refugee Status Determination." *UNHCR*, www.unhcr.org/en-us/refugee-status-determination.html.

¹⁵ United Nations. "Refugee Status Determination."

¹⁶ United Nations. "Refugee Status Determination."

the history of Canadian immigration and refugee policies is examined, and in part three the policies of the different leaders in both countries are compared and contrasted.

Part One: The United States

History of Immigration in the United States

For most of American history, immigration was not seen as a major legal problem as the people entering the country were mostly left unregulated. At different points in time certain limitations were placed on the type of people that were allowed in, but the first major immigration policies were not implemented until the late 1800s. The first significant piece of legislation that was aimed at restricting immigration came in 1882, after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act which set a precedent of discriminatory restrictions on the basis of national origin.¹⁷ Prior to the Quota Acts passed in the 1920s, there was never a numerical limit set on the number of immigrations that could enter the country. Following an influx of immigrants totaling over 800,000 following World War I (WWI), the nation responded with panic and the issuance of the first numerical cap placed on immigrants in American history.¹⁸ Discriminatory racial and ethnic limitations barred many potential immigrants from entering the

¹⁷ “Chinese Exclusion Act.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, August 24, 2018.

<https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/chinese-exclusion-act-1882>.

¹⁸ Bonomi, Federico. 2019. “The United States Immigration Laws: History of a Nation Set up by Migrants.” *Vergentis. Revista de Investigacion de La Catedra Internacional Conjunta Inocencio III*, no. 9 (July): 253–77.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.unh.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=141225844&site=ehost-live>.

country until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed nationality preferences to create a more equitable playing field.¹⁹

Fear has often played a major role in shaping immigration policy in the United States, specifically after dramatic events such as World War II and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The fear that permeated Americans' minds following the rise of Nazi Germany led to a complete restructuring of the immigration system. To deal with public outcry over immigrants, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt moved the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) under the Department of Justice rather than the Department of Labor.²⁰ This was not only a physical shift in location, but also a shift in mentality of how immigrants were viewed. Attorney General Robert Jackson acknowledged this shift when discussing the restructuring of INS when he stated, "the doctrine that any person may come to this country unless it is shown that he is a menace must at least temporarily yield to the policy that none shall be admitted unless it

¹⁹ Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration

Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

In *National Rhetorics in the Syrian Immigration Crisis: Victims, Frauds, and Floods*,

edited by Rountree Clarke and Tilli Founi, 269-304. East Lansing: Michigan State

University Press, 2019. Accessed February 19, 2020.

www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctvj7wpdx.14.

²⁰ Kramer, Paul A. 2018. "The Geopolitics of Mobility: Immigration Policy and American

Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century." *American Historical Review* 123 (2):

393–438. doi:10.1093/ahr/123.2.393.

affirmatively appears to be for the American interest.”²¹ This created the foundation for merit-based preferences in immigration in which the most desirable immigrants were those that are well-educated and highly skilled.

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks drastic steps were taken to strengthen the borders and prevent the possible entry of future terrorists through unsecured border points and lenient security measures. National security became the driving force behind new immigration policies as well as the restructuring of the agencies involved in the immigration process. Immigration was once again moved under the administration of a different department, this time under the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS).²² The INS was dismantled and separated into three different agencies: the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP).²³ With this restructuring came a turn away from the prior organization’s goal of helping immigrants with the process of entering the country and becoming a citizen and moved towards an organization focused on security and deterrence, exemplified by ICE and CBP.²⁴ Not only was the structure of the immigration system changing to become more hostile to immigrants, but public opinion and attitudes also changed as people began calling for stricter immigration

²¹ Kramer, 2018, p. 394

²² Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

²³ "Our History." USCIS, January 8, 2020. <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history>.

²⁴ Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

controls as well as the spread of Islamophobia and hostility towards immigrants from the Middle East.

U.S. Refugee Policy

The first time that the United States established a policy specifically for refugees was in 1948, to establish means for displaced people to be resettled in the United States after the end of WWII.²⁵ This legislation was expanded in subsequent years to deal with other refugee populations. Prior to the U.S. establishing a protected refugee category, the United States in 1939, turned away a ship, the St. Louis, carrying more than 900 Jewish refugees.²⁶ After initially being turned away by the Cuban government, the ship requested permission to disembark its passengers in the U.S. and Canada. Rejected the ship returned to Europe where 254 of the passengers perished in the Holocaust.²⁷ It was not until the Refugee Act of 1980, that broad-based standards and protocols were implemented to deal with any future refugees.²⁸ It was in this

²⁵ Office of Refugee Resettlement. "History." *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*, 16 Mar. 2020, www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/history.

²⁶ Blakemore, Erin. "A Ship of Jewish Refugees Was Refused U.S. Landing in 1939. This Was Their Fate." History.com. A&E Television Networks, June 4, 2019.
<https://www.history.com/news/wwii-jewish-refugee-ship-st-louis-1939>.

²⁷ Blakemore, Erin. "A Ship of Jewish Refugees Was Refused U.S. Landing in 1939. This Was Their Fate."

²⁸ Office of Refugee Resettlement. "History."

Act that the U.S. accepted the definition of a refugee that was established by the UN in 1951.²⁹ This Act also established the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) under the Department of Health and Human Services. ORR provides resources and services to refugees being resettled in the United States.³⁰

Under current law, the implementation of U.S. refugee policy is based on annual “determination” by the President.³¹ This “Presidential Determination” memorandum is based on a review of the global refugee statistics and data, which then determines how many refugees will be admitted for the fiscal year, including the allocation of spots to various regions and countries.³² The numbers in the Determination fluctuate every year and the ceiling is not always reached as the process for admitting a refugee into the country is time consuming. The Determination can depend on the present need for resettlement as well as the president’s personal views and attitudes towards refugees, and more broadly where the White House stands on immigration.

²⁹ Office of Refugee Resettlement. “History.”

³⁰ Office of Refugee Resettlement. “History.”

³¹ USCIS. “The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities.” *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, 5 Mar. 2019, www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/refugees/united-states-refugee-admissions-program-usrap-consultation-and-worldwide-processing-priorities.

³² USCIS. “The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities.”

Two presidents have been in office during the current refugee crisis: Barack Obama (2009-2017) and Donald Trump (2017- present). These two presidents have had different approaches in the rhetoric used surrounding refugees and immigrants as well as programs created for these groups of people. While Obama's views are typically associated with "liberal" policies, favoring immigration and less restrictive policies, Trump's views tend to be associated with conservative views, which advocate for limited immigration and greater restrictions.

The process for being granted refugee status and being deemed admissible for resettlement in the United States is a long and complicated process. There are around eleven different phases that a refugee must go through to potentially get placed in the United States, and if at any point during the process there is a question of authenticity or a security concern the application will be immediately denied.³³ After the UNHCR refers a refugee to the U.S. the screening process conducted by the United States alone can take anywhere from a year-and-a-half to two years to be completed.³⁴ During this time extensive interviews, medical exams, and background checks are conducted. Three separate biometric checks are conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Department of Defense (DoD).³⁵ It is only after all of these different steps are passed can the refugee make the

³³ "Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States." *U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants*, 2015, [refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/USCRI-Security-Screening-Process-5.16.16.pdf](https://www.refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/USCRI-Security-Screening-Process-5.16.16.pdf).

³⁴ "Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States."

³⁵ "Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States."

journey to the United States and if at any point in the process, new information surfaces then the process must start again.

Part Two: Canada

History of Immigration in Canada

Prior to 1967, Canadian immigration policy had its roots in ethnic and race-based restrictions and preferences, similar to those seen in the United States.³⁶ It was in the Immigration Act of 1976, that the structure and guidelines for the present Canadian immigration system was established.³⁷ In this Act, three pathways for immigration were established: family-based, economic-based, and humanitarian-based. Family-based immigrants focus on reuniting families when some member of the family is already an established resident or citizen of Canada, economic-based encourages immigrants with desired skill sets who can perform needed jobs and contribute to the economy, and lastly humanitarian-based immigration provides a way for refugees to enter the country.³⁸ The immigration system was then updated in November 2001, with the passage of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which looked at immigration

³⁶ Ellermann, Antje. "Fifty Years of Canadian Immigration Policy." In *Policy Transformation in Canada: Is the Past Prologue?*, edited by Tuohy Carolyn Hughes, Borwein Sophie, Loewen Peter John, and Potter Andrew, 151-58. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2019. Accessed February 15, 2020.
www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctvfjcz59.20.

³⁷ Ellermann, Antje. "Fifty Years of Canadian Immigration Policy."

³⁸ Ellermann, Antje. "Fifty Years of Canadian Immigration Policy."

from a security standpoint as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States.³⁹ As a result of this Act a similar shift was seen in Canadian immigration policy (similar to post-9/11 changes in the United States under the Bush Administration) based on a tightening of restrictions to preserve national security and prevent the entry of potential terrorists.

Canadian Refugee Policy

This Immigration Act of 1976 was the first time that legal recognition was given to refugee status.⁴⁰ This Act also provided that refugees were treated as a separate group of people rather than included with all other immigrants.⁴¹ The refugee system in Canada is split into two different areas: the first being the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for refugees who are outside of Canada and looking to enter the country, and the second being the In-Canada Asylum Program, which is only applicable when a person is already physically in the country and then requests protection from being returned home.

³⁹ Adelman, Howard. "Canadian Borders and Immigration Post 9/11: IMR IMR." *The*

International Migration Review 36, no. 1 (Spring, 2002): 15-28.

<https://unh.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.unh.idm.oclc.org/docview/215274406?accountid=14612>.

⁴⁰ Ellermann, Antje. "Fifty Years of Canadian Immigration Policy."

⁴¹ Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies

since 1945." In *Canada and the Challenges of International Development and*

Globalization, edited by Masaeli Mahmoud and Munro Lauchlan T., 107-30. University

of Ottawa Press, 2018. Accessed March 13, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8j6b1.13.

Although the UN Refugee Convention in 1951, defined what a refugee was to be considered by the international community, this definition was not adopted by Canada until 1969.⁴² Despite not adopting a refugee classification until much later, post-WWII many Hungarian and Czechoslovakian refugees fled to Canada to avoid persecution by the Soviet Union.⁴³ Similar to the United States' response to the requests of the St. Louis, Canada had also denied the request to accept the Jewish refugees. The immigration minister Frederick Blair was concerned that accepting the refugees would set a dangerous precedent for Canada, "if these Jews were to find a home [in Canada] they would be followed by other shiploads...the line must be drawn somewhere."⁴⁴ An Immigration Loan Program was established in 1951 and required that immigrants who fell in certain categories, mostly refugees, repay the money used to bring them to Canada and resettle them in the country within 30 days of their arrival.⁴⁵ This was seen as a barrier for many refugees who struggled to provide for themselves so quickly after moving into a new country with a completely different culture than what they were used too and unable to speak the native language.

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) is responsible for reviewing refugees that the UN would like to resettle in the country and determining if they are

⁴² Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies since 1945."

⁴³ Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies since 1945."

⁴⁴ Blakemore, Erin. "A Ship of Jewish Refugees Was Refused U.S. Landing in 1939. This Was Their Fate."

⁴⁵ Ellermann, Antje. "Fifty Years of Canadian Immigration Policy."

admissible.⁴⁶ There are two main avenues by which a refugee case can be brought before the IRB for review: either the refugee was identified and placed by the UNHCR or through the Canadian private sponsorship program, which is a unique path that allows another option for refugees to pursue to have a better chance of being granted Canadian resettlement.⁴⁷

During the current global refugee crisis there have been two distinct Prime Ministers of Canada: Stephen Harper (2006-2015) and Justin Trudeau (2015- present). While the two Canadian leaders have had differing approaches to both immigration and refugee policy, the refugee crisis was a key debate during the 2015 Federal Elections. While Harper's policies tend to be associated with conservative views of immigration while Trudeau's views are associated with liberal views. Unlike how the President of the United States is responsible for determining the number of the refugees to be resettled each year, in Canada it is the duty of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship to propose to Parliament the annual target resettlement quota.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ "Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada." *Canada.ca*, Government of Canada, 14 Feb. 2020, www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugee.html.

⁴⁷ The sponsorship program requires that the Canadian sponsor be financially responsible for bringing the refugee into the country as well as paying for their resettlement. "Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada." *Canada.ca*

⁴⁸ "Country Chapter Canada." UNHCR, February 2018. <https://www.unhcr.org/3c5e55594.pdf>.

Part Three: The Comparison

When comparing the governments of the United States and Canada it is necessary to note that the leaders of the countries are operating in two different federal systems. The President of the United States is the head of the Executive branch while Congress, the bicameral legislature made up of the House of Representatives and Senate, and the Supreme Court in the Judicial branch provide important checks and balances on each other. One of the key features of the U.S. federal government is that there are many checks and balances in place to prevent one person from becoming too powerful, which also means that the U.S. President is limited in power by the other branches.⁴⁹ In Canada the head of government is the Prime Minister and the legislature is Parliament, which is a very different structure than the United States' system.⁵⁰ The Prime Minister has more power than the President and there are few limits on the power of the PM as there are no comparable systems of checks and balances in the Canadian government as the American one.⁵¹ While the systems of government that the leaders are working in are different, for purposes of studying how the views of individual leaders shape policy, these differences do not prevent the leaders from being compared in policy implementation.

Policy under Obama

President Barack Obama was in office from 2009 to 2017 as a member of the Democratic Party. Although the views of President Obama tend to be considered liberal overall, in regards to

⁴⁹ Courtney, John C. "Has the Canadian Prime Minister Become 'Presidentialized'?" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1984): 238-41. Accessed May 19, 2020.

www.jstor.org/stable/27550070.

⁵⁰ Courtney, John C. "Has the Canadian Prime Minister Become 'Presidentialized'?"

⁵¹ Courtney, John C. "Has the Canadian Prime Minister Become 'Presidentialized'?"

immigration he held a view somewhere in the middle of being supportive and restrictive, being tough in some aspects, but more understanding in others. He was extremely tough on undocumented immigrants, cracking down on those in the country and deporting approximately 2.5 million undocumented.⁵² While being tough in this aspect, he was more lenient with the children of undocumented immigrants; attempting to pass the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act as well as successfully implementing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).⁵³

President Obama was also a strong advocate for refugees and raising the number that could be admitted each year, especially refugees coming from war-torn Syria. Speaking on the refugee crisis, President Obama noted, “It is a crisis of our shared security. Not because refugees are a threat. Refugees, most of whom are women and children, are often fleeing war and terrorism. They are victims. They’re families who want to be safe and to work, be good citizens and contribute to their country...”⁵⁴ While stating that refugees are a positive part of the American community, President Obama still made sure to note that there are enhanced security

⁵² Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

⁵³ Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

⁵⁴ Obama, Barack. “Remarks by President Obama at Leaders Summit on Refugees.” Office of the Press Secretary, *United Nations*, 2016.

measures in place for national security measures and a more thorough vetting process that refugees are put through than other immigrants”⁵⁵

While President Obama was known for taking a tough stance in some aspects of immigration he was more lenient in others, wanting to help rather than block immigrants’ abilities to enter the country. He was responsible for deporting over two million undocumented immigrants, but was also an outspoken advocate of policies that would help the children of undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as babies. In this way he saw that immigration policy could be flexible and applied in various ways in difference circumstances while understanding that these immigrants could benefit the United States rather than harm the country. He also took a more humanitarian approach to the refugee crisis opening the country to more refugees and raising the Presidential Determination to deal with the number of Syrian refugees that needed to be resettled.

⁵⁵ Obama, Barack. “Remarks by President Obama at Leaders Summit on Refugees.”

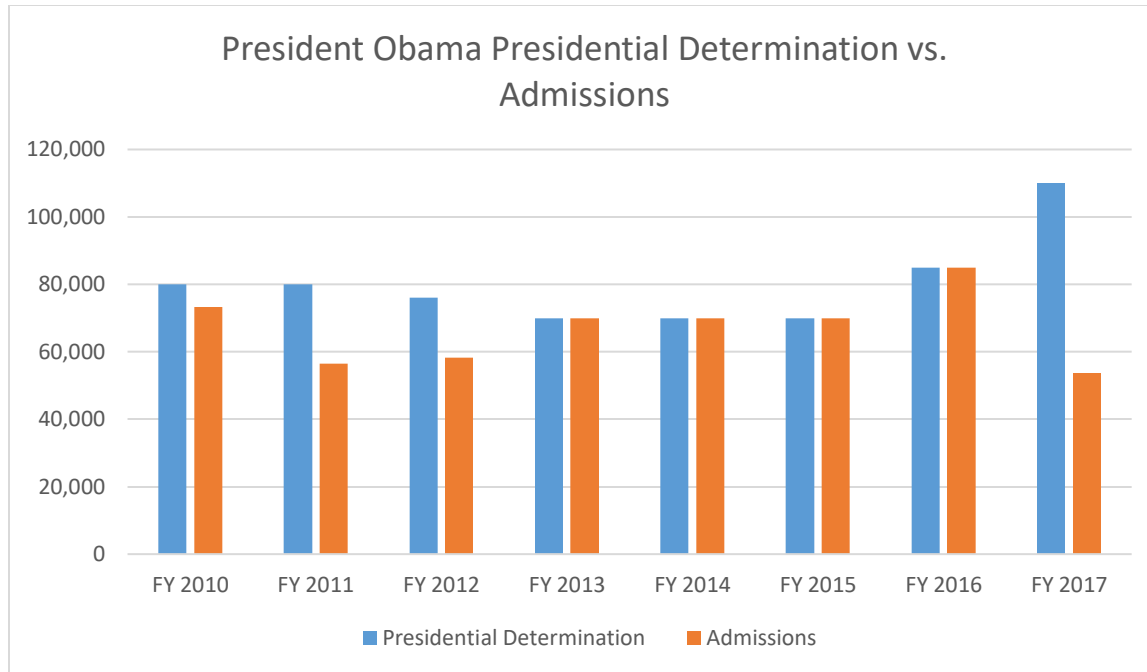


Figure 1: Data retrieved from the Congressional Research Services⁵⁶

Policy under Trump

The current President Donald Trump came into office in 2017 as a member of the Republican Party. From the start of his Presidential campaign in 2015, he ran on a strong anti-immigrant platform in which one of his main promises on the campaign trail was that if he were to be elected he would build a wall on the United States' southern border with Mexico and would require the Mexican government to pay for it.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Bruno, Andorra. *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*. 23rd ed., Congressional Research Service, 2018, pp. 1–14, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*.

⁵⁷ Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

He also called for a crackdown on illegal immigrants as well as refugees and specifically targeted Muslim immigrants and associating Islam with terrorism, perpetuating Islamophobia.⁵⁸ Posted on President Trump's website when he was on the campaign trail was a statement in regards to Muslim immigration which stated,

“Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on...Until we are able to determine and understand this problem and the dangerous threat it poses, our country cannot be the victims of horrendous attacks by people that believe only in Jihad, and have no sense of reason or respect for human life.”⁵⁹

Not only was the shift in policy drastically different than what was seen under the Obama Administration, but the language and rhetoric used by President Trump, prior to taking office and continuing into his presidency expresses a hostility and distrust of immigrants and refugees.

Soon after taking office, in January 2017, President Trump issued Executive Order 13769 entitled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States”, but became widely known in the media as the “Muslim Ban.”⁶⁰ This Order attempted to halt all travel for 90

⁵⁸ Gorsevski, Ellen, Clarke Rountree, and Andrée E. Reeves. "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents."

⁵⁹ Wang, Christine. “Trump Website Takes down Muslim Ban Statement after Reporter Grills Spicer in Briefing.” *CNBC*, CNBC, 8 May 2017, www.cnbc.com/2017/05/08/trump-website-takes-down-muslim-ban-statement-after-reporter-grills-spicer-in-briefing.html.

⁶⁰ Diehl, Kevin A. 2018. “International Passenger Transportation: Status of the Refugee-Related

days from seven countries: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen while the policies for travel from these nations, as well as the risks posed were reviewed.⁶¹ The refugee system for FY 2018, was targeted by this Order as well as the annual allotment for refugees was cut by more than half, from 110,000 to 50,000, admittance of Syrian refugees was barred indefinitely, and the systems for admitting refugees was suspended for 120 days.⁶² Many observed that the seven countries explicitly targeted within this Order were all countries where the majority of the population were Muslim, leading to the Order being dubbed the “Muslim Ban”. Many courts responded to the issuance by blocking the Order from taking effect and challenging the Constitutionality of such an order.⁶³ It took the Trump Administration revising three different versions, before the third was upheld by the Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision.⁶⁴

Passenger Transportation Ban After Fourth Circuit Opinion.” *Journal of Transportation Management* 28 (1): 25–33. doi:10.22237/jotm/1530403440.

⁶¹ Diehl, Kevin A. 2018. “International Passenger Transportation.”

⁶² Diehl, Kevin A. 2018. “International Passenger Transportation.”

⁶³ “Trump Travel Ban: What Does This Ruling Mean?” *BBC News*, BBC, 26 June 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39044403.

⁶⁴ “Trump Travel Ban: What Does This Ruling Mean?”

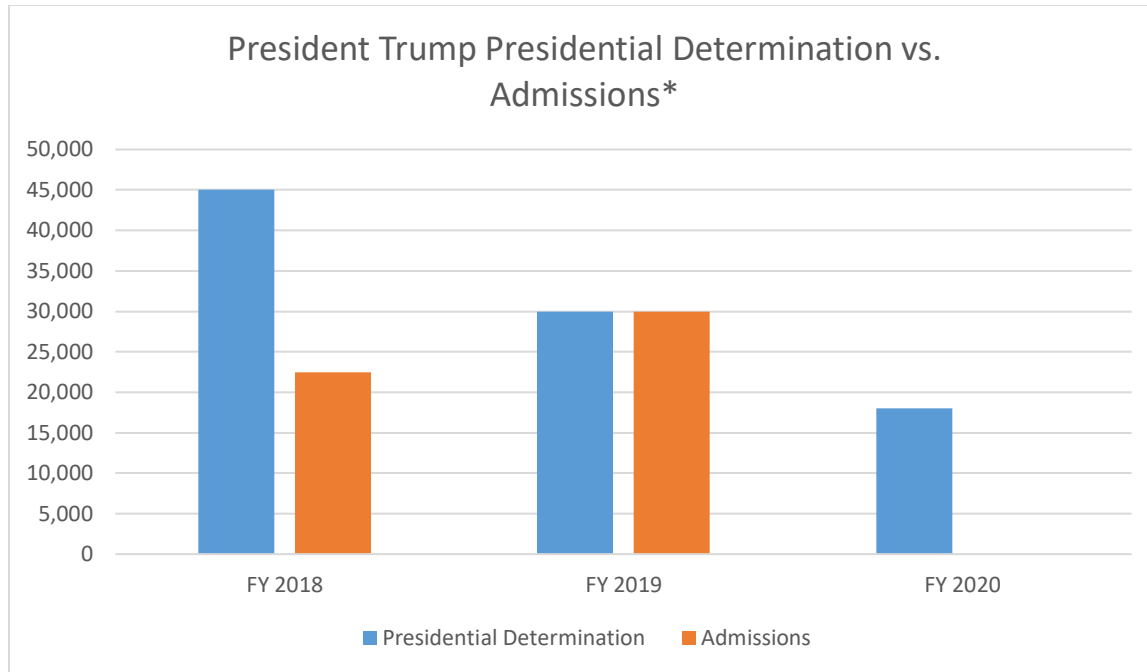


Figure 2: Data retrieved from the Congressional Research Service and the Migration Policy Institute. *FY 2020 is incomplete as the fiscal year is still in progress.⁶⁵⁶⁶

Every year in which President Trump has been in office the Presidential Determination has been cut drastically compared to the previous Obama Administration. Between Fiscal Year 2017 and 2019 the number of admitted refugees went from 53,716 under President Obama to 22,491 under President Trump.⁶⁷ The Executive Order that was issued soon after President

⁶⁵ Bruno, Andorra. *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*.

⁶⁶ Migration Policy Institute. "U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present." *Migration Policy Institute*, 16 Mar. 2020, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united.

⁶⁷ Bruno, Andorra. *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*. 23rd

Trump's inauguration that restricted the refugee resettlement program paved the way for continued cuts to the immigration system broadly and the attack on the refugee system.

Policy under Harper

Prime Minister (PM) Stephen Harper of the Conservative Party of Canada was in power from 2006 to 2015. During the 2015 Federal Election, immigration was a major topic of discussion for the candidates. The refugee crisis took center stage during the campaign after an image of a dead three-year-old that had washed up on a Turkish beach was circulated in the news globally and it was discovered that the child and his family were trying to reach Canada to be reunited with family.⁶⁸ The growing attention to the plight of Syrian refugees as a result of this media attention pushed PM Harper to make promises that if he were to be reelected he would increase the number of Syrian refugees resettled in Canada.⁶⁹ In many ways the immigration policy, broadly, that was instituted by the government under PM Harper took a more open approach to admitting people, than what was normally associated with his conservative views.⁷⁰ Yet, towards the end of the campaign cycle the rhetoric used to discuss Muslim immigrants, had Islamophobic tones, which did not sit well with more liberal voters, contributing to his loss to

⁶⁸ Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies since 1945."

⁶⁹ Omidvar, Ratna. "The Harper Influence on Immigration." In *The Harper Factor: Assessing a Prime Minister's Policy Legacy*, edited by Ditchburn Jennifer and Fox Graham, 179-95. Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University

⁷⁰ Omidvar, Ratna. "The Harper Influence on Immigration."

current PM Justin Trudeau.⁷¹ Similar to how President Trump in the U.S. linked the threat to national security from terrorists to immigrants and refugees from certain countries, PM Harper was known to draw a similar connection between immigration and security measures to keep Canada safe which influenced the policies he supported and felt would be the most beneficial for the Canadian people.

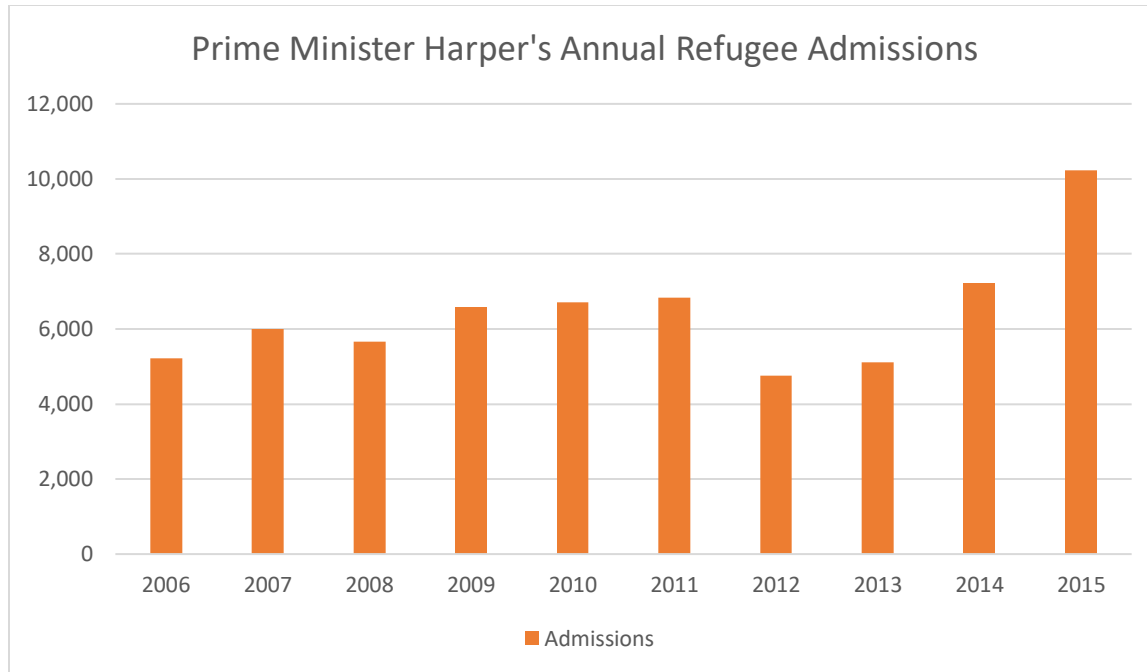


Figure 3: Data retrieved from the UNHCR, refugee is considered as a person who has departed for the country of resettlement.⁷²

Policy under Trudeau

While the Syrian Civil War was ongoing well before, current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party took office in 2015, the Syrian refugee crisis became a key political battle during the 2015 elections for Prime Minister.⁷³ During campaigning, Trudeau promised

⁷¹ Omidvar, Ratna. "The Harper Influence on Immigration."

⁷² United Nations. "Resettlement Data Finder." *UNHCR News*, 31 Mar. 2020, rsq.unhcr.org/en/.

⁷³ Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies

since 1945."

that if he were to be elected that he would resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada.⁷⁴ After being elected, between November 2015 and December 2016, the Trudeau led government was able to provide resettlement to 37,404 refugees from Syria.⁷⁵ In 2018, to relieve the financial stress on newly settled refugees, the Immigration Loan Program was amended to alter the time that an immigrant was able to remain in the country prior to making payments towards their loan from 30 days, to one year.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies since 1945."

⁷⁵ Gélinas-Faucher, Bruno, and Delphine Nakache. "Canadian Immigration and Refugee Policies since 1945."

⁷⁶ "Ottawa Restructures Canadian Immigration Loans Program." *Canada Immigration and Visa Information. Canadian Immigration Services and Free Online Evaluation.*, 7 Feb. 2020, www.immigration.ca/ottawa-restructures-canadian-immigration-loans-program.

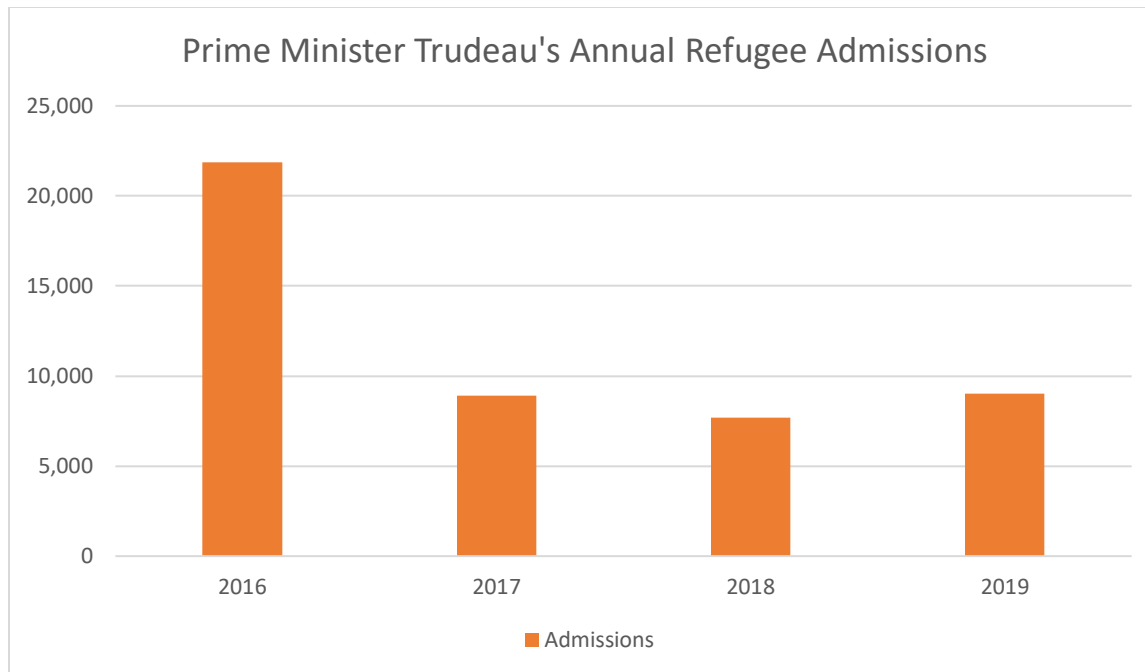


Figure 4: Data retrieved from the UNHCR, refugee is considered as a person who has departed for the country of resettlement.⁷⁷

While many of the policies that were implemented during PM Harper's time in office have been continued by the new government, PM Trudeau did make one major change that the Conservative Party was unwilling to make. PM Harper had previously cut the funding that Canada was providing to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) after speculation that it was providing support to Hamas, which Canada recognizes as a terrorist organization.⁷⁸ Once PM Trudeau was elected his International Development Minister stating that Canada would provide \$25 million to UNRWA for the support of Palestinian

⁷⁷ United Nations. "Resettlement Data Finder."

⁷⁸ Grant, Laura, and Taryn Husband-Ceperkovic. "Canada and the Middle East." In *Canada and the Challenges of International Development and Globalization*, edited by Masaeli Mahmoud and Munro Lauchlan T., 350-54. University of Ottawa Press, 2018. Accessed April 3, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8j6b1.32.

refugees.⁷⁹ While the Harper government had withheld this financial support for strategic political goals, the Trudeau government chose to see this as a necessary humanitarian step.

Comparison of U.S. and Canadian Policies (2008-present)

While the United States leadership shifted from a liberal leader to a conservative one during the refugee crisis, in Canada leadership shifted from the hands of the conservative to that of a liberal. With this change of leadership also came a change in how immigration and refugee policy was talked about and conducted.

From 2006 to 2015, there was a PM who took a conservative approach to refugee resettlement, which accounts for low refugee resettlement in *Figure 3* from 2008 to 2016. After the leadership changed to PM who assumed a more liberal position, the number of refugees resettled began increasing, with the largest number resettled being immediately after Trudeau took office in 2016 as he followed through on his campaign promise of admitting a large number of Syrian refugees. The opposite was the case in the United States. From 2008 to 2016, the liberal President Barack Obama allowed for large numbers of refugees, and in particular Syrian refugees, to enter the country in 2016. After Obama was replaced with the conservative Trump there was a sharp decline in the number of refugees admitted as reflected in the Presidential Determination for each fiscal year. Between the two countries the policies pursued by PM Harper are comparable to the present policies being implemented by President Trump, just as the policies pursued by President Obama are comparable to those currently being implemented by PM Trudeau.

⁷⁹ Grant, Laura, and Taryn Husband-Ceperkovic. "Canada and the Middle East."

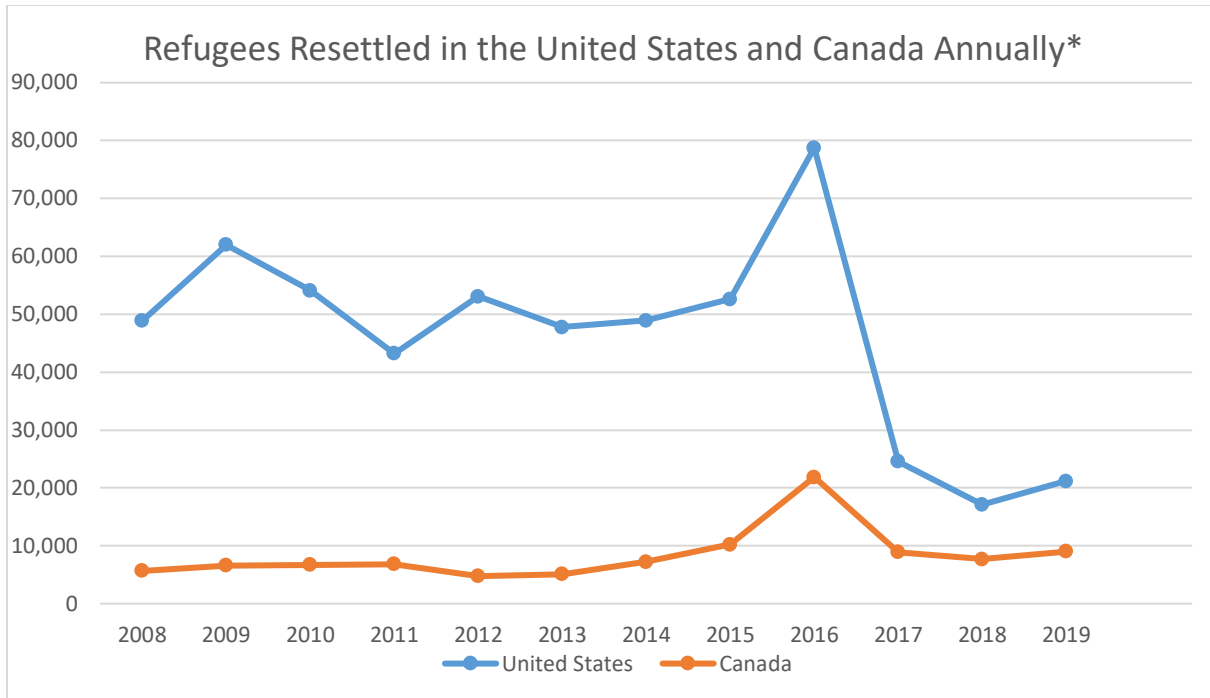


Figure 5: Data retrieved from the UNHCR, refugee is considered as a person who has departed for the country of resettlement.⁸⁰

Canada is currently on a path of pursuing a more welcoming and open environment for both immigrants as a whole, but even more so for refugees. The United States under the current administration has turned away from the humanitarian policies of the prior administration and is rather attempting to close the borders and restrict the ability for immigrants and refugees to enter. The southern border with Mexico is being closely monitored, while the crackdown on undocumented immigrants is heightened, and the ability for refugees to be resettled in the United States is being restricted and limited more than ever before.⁸¹

⁸⁰ United Nations. "Resettlement Data Finder."

⁸¹ Alvarez, Priscilla. "US Sets a Refugee Cap of 18,000 for next Year -- a New Historic Low."

While the Obama Administration responded to the refugee crisis by opening the borders and allowing for more refugees to be resettled in the United States, the Trump Administration has gone in the opposite direction. The global refugee crisis has only gotten worse and the strain on the main host countries has become more noticeable. The rhetoric used by President Trump and PM Harper echoes what is being seen in many European nations as right-wing politics has become increasingly popular.⁸² One of the main drivers of right-wing politics is the refugee crisis and the perceived threat that opening the boarders and allowing more refugees in will have on the country. Most noticeably, Italy and Hungary have taken hard lines against both immigrants and refugees, while on the other side Germany under the guidance of Chancellor Angela Merkel had become a leader in refugee resettlement.⁸³

Under the leadership of PM Trudeau in 2018, Canada resettled the most number of refugees of all countries including the United States.⁸⁴ Prior to 2018, the U.S. had always

CNN. Cable News Network, September 26, 2019.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/26/politics/refugee-cap-historic-low/index.html>.

⁸² Omidvar, Ratna. "The Harper Influence on Immigration."

⁸³ Omidvar, Ratna. "The Harper Influence on Immigration."

⁸⁴ Radford, Jynnah, and Phillip Connor. "Canada Now Leads the World in Refugee

Resettlement, Surpassing the U.S." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 19 June 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/19/canada-now-leads-the-world-in-refugee-resettlement-surpassing-the-u-s/.

resettled the most refugees annually since the Refugee Act of 1980.⁸⁵ Canada also resettled a larger number of refugees per capita than the U.S. in 2018, as the U.S. resettled 70 refugees per million residents while Canada had the highest number globally with 756 refugees resettled per million residents.⁸⁶ Canada and the United States have had varying responses to the refugee crisis under two different leaderships each. Currently, the two countries are headed down different paths where the Canadian government is welcoming and willing to receive refugees while the United States is attempting to prevent large numbers of refugees from being admitted.

Conclusion

Is it unclear when this global refugee crisis will end, and even when it does there will always be refugees that need to be resettled. As the United States and Canada have taken the most responsibility for resettling refugees since 2011, looking at these countries' responses to the crisis helps provide guidance and precedent for other countries. The various political leaders in both Canada and the United States throughout the crisis have highlighted how the views of the individuals in power can have a direct impact on certain policy areas such as immigration and refugee policy. While the increased number of refugees and a newly appointed liberal-oriented leader has allowed Canada to become the global leader in refugee resettlement the United States is quickly falling behind as the conservative-oriented administration has hampered the ability for many potential refugees to resettle in the United States. This refugee crisis is not going to go

⁸⁵ Radford, Jynnah, and Phillip Connor. "Canada Now Leads the World in Refugee Resettlement, Surpassing the U.S."

⁸⁶ Radford, Jynnah, and Phillip Connor. "Canada Now Leads the World in Refugee Resettlement, Surpassing the U.S."

away anytime soon and the burden and strain being placed on the countries surrounding the refugee producing nations is only going to get worse. The goal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is to be able to take the pressure off these overcrowded and underfunded host countries and resettle some of the refugees in countries that can provide better conditions and resources than can be achieved in a refugee camp. There is always room for improvement and future immigration and refugee policies to address displaced persons would benefit from looking at the policies implemented by leaders in both the United States and Canada to determine future decisions to best provide support for global refugees.

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