

Increasing immigration was never the goal of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

- According to the [Pew Research Center](#), the bill's sponsors "praised the law for its fairness but downplayed its potential impact on immigration flows."¹
- The repeal of the national origin quotas was very popular, but the idea of increasing overall immigration [was not](#).²
- Concerns about ["the hidden mathematics of the bill"](#)³ were seen as a threat to passage and the Johnson administration advised advocates to repeat the message that the bill **"leaves the present authorized level of immigration substantially unchanged."**⁴
- [President Johnson](#) stayed on message to the end, declaring at the signing ceremony:

"This bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions....The days of unlimited immigration are past."⁵

- [Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach](#) concurred:

"This bill is not designed to increase or accelerate the numbers of newcomers permitted to come to America. Indeed, this measure provides for an increase of only a small fraction in permissible immigration."⁶

- [Senator Edward Kennedy](#) vowed:

"The bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of

¹ D'Vera Cohn, 2015. Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S., Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065, Chapter 1: The Nation's Immigration Laws, 1920 to Today. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/09/28/chapter-1-the-nations-immigration-laws-1920-to-today/>

² Jerry Kammer, 2015. The Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 Political figures and historic circumstances produced dramatic, unintended consequences. Center for Immigration Studies. <https://cis.org/Report/HartCeller-Immigration-Act-1965#52>

³ U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Committee on the Judiciary, Washington, D.C., February 10, 1965, pp. 681-687.

⁴ Steven M. Gillon, *That's Not What We Meant to Do: Reform and Its Unintended Consequences in Twentieth-Century America*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000, p. 168. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0393978664/centerforimmigra>

⁵ President Lyndon B. Johnson. Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York, October 3, 1965. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-signing-the-immigration-bill-liberty-island-new-york>

⁶ John B. Judis, 2018. The Two Sides of Immigration Policy. The American Prospect. <https://prospect.org/health/two-sides-immigration-policy/>

our society. It will not relax the standards of admission. It will not cause American workers to lose their jobs."⁷

- [Rep. Emmanuel "Manny" Cellar](#) (D-N.Y.), one of the bill's authors, had fought the national origin quotas since the 1920s, when he opposed the 1924 Act that put them in place. But Cellar also stressed that his bill would not increase the numbers:

"...the bill before you in no way significantly increases the basic numbers of immigrants to be permitted entry. We are not talking about increased immigration; we are talking about equality of opportunity for all peoples to reach this promised land."⁸

- Champions of the 1965 bill were primarily concerned with repealing the national origin quotas. The bill was viewed as a way to honor the late President [John F. Kennedy](#), who wrote in *A Nation of Immigrants* in 1958:

"We no longer need settlers for virgin lands, and our economy is expanding more slowly than in the 19th and early 20th centuries. ... [My proposals] will have little effect on the number of immigrants admitted. ... The clash of opinion arises not over the number of immigrants to be admitted but over the test for admissions."⁹

- The new preference system, which prioritized the chain categories over skill and education, was a result of a compromise with Democrat Michael Feighan (see [CIS panel](#), [Kammer](#), and The Atlantic's [Tichenor](#)).¹⁰ Feighan had very different concerns than Johnson, Kennedy, and Cellar,¹¹ but they all insisted that the bill would not increase the numbers.
- Steven Gillon, author of ["That's Not What We Meant to Do: Reform and Its Unintended Consequences in Twentieth-Century America."](#) reported that "neither Congress nor the White House had carefully analyzed the potential impact of the family preference system."¹²

⁷ Gillon

⁸ Statement of Hon. Emanuel Celler before the United States House Committee on the Judiciary, June 11, 1964. <https://tinyurl.com/4yh38mxu>

⁹ John F. Kennedy, 1958. *A Nation of Immigrants*. Harper Perennial. <https://www.amazon.com/Nation-Immigrants-John-F-Kennedy/dp/0061447544>

¹⁰ Jerry Kammer, 2015. Panel Transcript: 1965 Immigration Act 50 Years Later. <https://cis.org/Panel-Transcript-1965-Immigration-Act-50-Years-Later>

¹¹ Daniel J. Tichenor, "The Overwhelming Barriers to Successful Immigration Reform," The Atlantic, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/replicating-lbjs-immigration-success/483908/>

¹² Gillon