

## WSJ Print Edition

*There's little evidence that less immigration means more opportunities for Americans to work.*



## UPWARD MOBILITY

## Trump Secured the Border, So Where Are the Jobs?

Probably nothing will ever shake President Trump's belief that illegal immigrants steal job opportunities from Americans. Mr. Trump insists that our labor markets are zero-sum, meaning that a job taken by a newcomer is one fewer job available for someone already here. Yet it's worth noting that the past decade of fluctuating migration levels and unemployment rates seriously undermines that claim.

During that fateful debate with Joe Biden last year, Mr. Trump said that lax border security hurt all workers but was especially detrimental to the job prospects of blacks and Hispanics. "His big kill on the black people is the millions of people that he's allowed to come in through the border," Mr. Trump said of Mr. Biden. "They're taking black jobs now, and it could be 18, it could be 19 and even 20 million people. They're taking black jobs and they're taking Hispanic jobs."

Mr. Trump's most significant accomplishment since his return to the White House has been to gain control of the southern border, as he promised. According to the Department of Homeland Security, illegal entries in July dropped to the lowest level ever recorded for the second month in a row. Mr. Trump has succeeded where previous administrations of both parties fell short, none more so than the Biden administration, which treated illegal immigration as a Fox News fixation no one else cared about.

The Trump administration's efforts to track down and deport violent criminal migrants should likewise be applauded. There is too much homegrown crime already in the U.S. It's an abomination that Americans must also worry about being victimized by someone who isn't supposed to be here and who wasn't deported because local politicians in sanctuary jurisdictions refused to cooperate with federal immigration officials.

Still, Mr. Trump's claim that reducing illegal immigration would boost employment hasn't borne out. The economy added just 22,000 new jobs in August—well below forecasts. Monthly job creation over the past four months has averaged just 27,000. By contrast, monthly job gains last year averaged 167,000. Meanwhile the unemployment rate has risen to its highest level in nearly four years. If, as Mr. Trump maintains, less migration is a boon for U.S. workers, where's the payoff?

Unemployment hasn't simply risen in general. It's also up among young people, older workers and the groups Mr. Trump told us would gain the most from his immigration crackdown. "The racial gap in the labor market is widening," the Journal reported, citing Bureau of Labor Statistics data. The black unemployment rate has risen to 7.5%, the highest since October 2021. Economists consider rising unemployment among blacks "a potential warning sign for the broader labor market," according to the Journal, because black workers "are more likely to hold low-skilled or entry level jobs, which are often cut first when the economy weakens."

None of this will surprise anyone paying attention during Mr. Trump's first term as president. Border apprehensions are a proxy for migrant flows. When apprehensions rise, it means more people are entering the country illegally. In 2017, Mr. Trump's first year in office, apprehensions fell. But over the next two years they more than doubled before declining during Covid. Despite the uptick in illegal immigration, however, the unemployment rate for black and Hispanic workers prior to the pandemic fell to their lowest levels on record. Black poverty rates also hit record lows, and black wages rose at a faster rate than white wages.

As Mr. Trump likes to remind people, illegal immigration climbed even more dramatically during the Biden administration. Yet black unemployment fell to a new record low on Mr. Biden's watch. This recent history suggests that there is little connection between the presence of foreigners in the labor force and the job prospects of Americans, including black and Hispanic workers.

Outside Mr. Trump's imagination, the U.S. labor market isn't static. Employers added more than three million workers from 2017 to 2019, while the nation's unemployment rate declined in each of those years, eventually reaching a 50-year low. A growing economy is far more important than keeping foreign nationals out of the labor force. Additional workers are also additional consumers. They fuel demand for homes, refrigerators, car repairs and other goods and services, which often leads to additional capital investment and more hiring to increase output.

For the first time since 2021, the number of people looking for work exceeds the number of job openings. It's another sign that the labor market is softening and that the president's immigration and tariff policies aren't having the intended economic effect. If the White House doesn't do a better job of balancing border security and economic growth, things could get a lot worse before they improve.

*By Jason L. Riley*

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