

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION SCAPEGOAT

The diversity visa program is far from the main terror threat.

By The Editorial Board
November 1, 2017

Law enforcement continues to investigate Tuesday's terror attack in which a 29-year-old from Uzbekistan used a truck to murder eight pedestrians in lower Manhattan. So, it's unfortunate and counterproductive that President Trump's first instinct has been to politicize the tragedy by blaming – what else? – immigration.

The President apparently got a scoop early Wednesday that the alleged terrorist Sayfullo Saipov was admitted to the U.S. in 2010 under the State Department's diversity visa lottery. He then shot off a barrage of tweets blasting the lottery, which he called a "Chuck Schumer beauty," singling out the Senate Democratic leader. "We are fighting hard for Merit Based immigration, no more Democrat Lottery Systems. We must get MUCH tougher (and smarter)," Mr. Trump tweeted.

Later in the day he again attacked the visa program, and in an aside lashed chained migration that benefits relatives of U.S. citizens and green card holders. While we're all for better vetting of immigrants, and monitoring of terror risks, the sad reality is that a radicalized U.S. citizen could also have committed the attack.

Congress established the diversity lottery as part of the Immigration Act of 1990 – which Mr. Schumer cosponsored along with several Republicans – to diversify the pool of immigrants. Chained family migration favors countries in Latin America while a disproportionate number of Chinese and Indians have immigrated on employer-sponsored visas.

Each year, 50,000 visas are awarded at random to immigrants from countries whose admissions totaled fewer than 50,000 over the preceding five years. Lottery winners make up less than 5 percent of the total legal immigrants. Applicants must have graduated from high school or have at least two years of formal training in an occupation. Initially, most visas went to European countries, but Africa has lately been soaking up the most.

While it would make sense to substitute the diversity lottery for more guest-worker visas, restrictionists aren't interested in this trade. The Gang of Eight bill that passed the Senate in 2013 would have replaced the diversity lottery with more employer-sponsored visas, but the bill stood no chance in the House. Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton has proposed eliminating the lottery as part of a bill to shrink legal immigration by half.

In any event, reducing immigration or improving background checks wouldn't have prevented the New York attack or many of the other two dozen or so Islamist-motivated attacks since 2001. Testimony from Mr. Saipov's former acquaintances suggested that he didn't come to the U.S. radicalized and that he became emotionally disturbed over time.

The Tsarnaev brothers who bombed the Boston marathon immigrated as kids from Kyrgyzstan after their parents received political asylum. The security guard Omar Mateen who shot up a night club in Orlando was American-born. So was San Bernardino shooter Syed Rizwan Farook, though his wife and collaborator was a legal immigrant.

Police have found evidence that Mr. Saipov had some allegiance to Islamic State, and his truck rampage followed the ISIS playbook. Yet John Miller, the New York Police Department's counterterrorism chief, says Mr. Saipov hadn't been investigated by his department or the FBI. Mr. Miller has often told us that his nightmare cases are self-radicalized individuals who only appear as a threat when they attack.

More than an immigration crackdown, the Saipov case might call for better monitoring of terror websites and groups that are more likely to be radicalized. We're also with Mr. Trump – and Senator John McCain – in suggesting that Mr. Saipov should have been interrogated at length before he was read his Miranda rights. The first priority is preventing future attacks and breaking any terror networks.

Perhaps we will learn that Uzbekistan is a terror breeding ground from which immigrants need special vetting. But the Commander in Chief in particular should wait for answers before jumping to policy conclusions or exploiting immigration fears.