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Trends in Migration Across the U.S./Mexico Border

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Abstract

Group research on immigration trends on the U.S./Mexico border and the relationship with conservation in that area.

Trends in migration across U.S./Mexico border



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DISCUSSION

What has caused human migration corridors on the United States/Mexican border to shift to more remote places, and what ecological impacts has this shift caused?

We explored this question due to the shifting politics that have forced non-citizens to migrate through fragile and dangerous places in the desert ecosystem. The border between the United States and Mexico has been a place of contention and change for many years. Unequal economic opportunities between the two nations have prompted migration. Unfortunately, the plants and animals that reside in these areas have become acutely adapted to their conditions and can be drastically affected by this migration. These issues revolve not only around biodiversity but also around water scarcity and binational cooperation concerning conservation

Brief History of the Border

1845—The United states annexed the republic of Texas, which Mexico still claimed.

1846—The Mexican-American war starts.

1848—The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed ending the Mexican-American war. As a result Mexico ceded 55% of its northern territories to United States, abandoned any lingering claims to Texas.

1882—The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, the first law against specific ethnic groups immigrating.

1911—The first border fence was erected by the Bureau of Animal Industry to keep cattle from crossing the border and spreading tick born illnesses to cattle in the United States.

1917—The Immigration Act of 1917 was passed. Exclusions based on health and literacy.

1924—The Immigration Act established quotas on the amount of any single nationality entering the United States. The Border Patrol was created two days later.

1942—Shortages in labor associated with the second world war prompted the signing of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, or the Bracero Program encouraging worker to come and work in the United States. Many immigrants who did not qualify came illegally and were hired by farmers who wanted to keep costs down.

1954—Operation Wetback saw the deportation of supposed “wetbacks” in states along the border.

1986—The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) established penalties for employers who hired unauthorized immigrants. It also granted temporary residency and the possibility of citizenship for agricultural workers who have been working for at least 90 days.

1990s—Operations Hold-the-Line (El Paso), Gatekeeper (San Diego) and Safeguard (Arizona). Border patrol agent numbers were drastically increased in an effort to apprehend people crossing the border illegally.

2006—Secure Fence Act was enacted in a reaction to the September 11, 2001 attacks. It authorized the extending of physical and technological barriers in an attempt to reduce the entries of terrorists, instruments of terror and narcotics.

2016—Donald Trump runs for president, and is elected, on a platform of building a continuous wall across the entire length of the US/Mexico border

How have these shifting trends affected the ecology of the area?

Increased Militarization

In the 1990's the approach the immigration officials had to illegal immigration changed.

- Emphasis moved from deporting those already in the United States.
- Moved to stopping people from entering.
 - Increased Border Patrol agents.
 - New technology like underground sensors and infrared cameras.
- Military Style maneuvers to reduce places immigrants could cross.
 - Operation Hold-the-Line (El Paso).
 - Operation Gatekeeper (San Diego).
 - Operation Safeguard (Arizona).

The result was a move in migration corridors.

- Moved to arid remote areas.
- New corridors are dangerous and increase the risk of death.
- Remote areas are fragile ecosystems.
 - Disruptions of threatened animals like the Sonoran pronghorn and ocelot have increased.
 - Refuse left by migrants pollutes fragile environments.

Sonoran Desert as a Fragile Ecosystem

Desert Ecology

- Although the desert is “hot and poky,” the ecosystem itself is extremely adapted to the climate and very fragile.
 - Water is a scarce resource, which cannot be infiltrated and polluted.
- The Sonoran desert region supports an immense variety of flora and fauna.
 - Sonoran pronghorn, Saguaro cacti, desert frogs, etc.
- In order to protect these species, protected areas and parks were made within the desert.
 - Migrant communities are forced in to these areas, often bringing invasive species, disease, and disrupting wildlife habitats.

Climate Change and Politics

- Water scarcity is increasing as rainfall decreases and drilling in to groundwater aquifers increases
- Invasive species continue to increase in numbers within the desert
- Funding for desert parks is minimal
- Border wall construction began in flat areas of desert, leaving the mountainous and biodiverse areas exposed
 - pushes migrants through these rough terrain where they must impede on natural environment to survive

Conservation at the Border

Mid-1900's

- Conservation policy lacked binational cooperation and focused mainly on hazardous waste management. There was a lack of formal policy that aimed to deal with air quality and biodiversity problems.

Late 1900's

- Public Concern increases
- La Paz agreement produces bilateral executive agreements to deal with sewage, air quality, and hazardous waste.
- NAFTA (1994) provides a new commitment to environmental management and a plan to strengthen binational capacity for problem solving
- US-Mexican Integrated Border Environmental Plan (IBEP)
 - Increases funding for environmental remediation along the border
 - computerized tracking of transboundary movement
- Commission on Environmental Cooperation
 - Environmental protection in tri-national region
 - Enforcement of national environmental regulations

Other agencies formed in the 2000s

- Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC)
- North American Development Bank (NADBANK)
- Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC)

Prevention through Deterrence

- Between 1998 and 2018, 7,505 people's remains were found in the desert.
- Why would migrants attempt to cross through a protected (and dangerous) desert area when there are seemingly easier and less dangerous paths?
 - The US government made it impossible for migrants to find another suitable location to cross by their Prevention through Deterrence policies in the early 1990's.

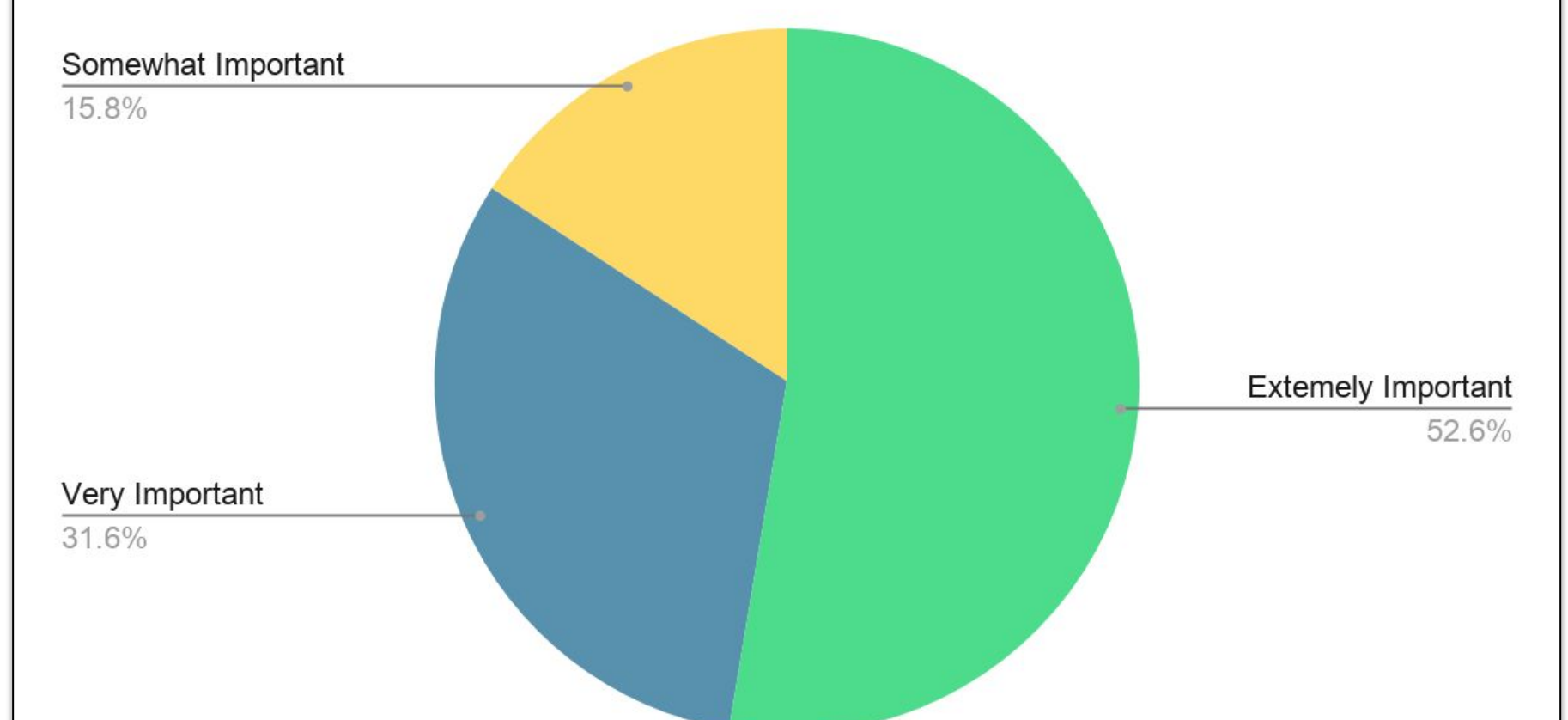
“Our encounter with both natural and unnatural environment exposes the way in which the physical landscape is transformed into a deadly weapon vis-a-vis border militarization and enforcement” (Wheatly, 2020)

The Survey

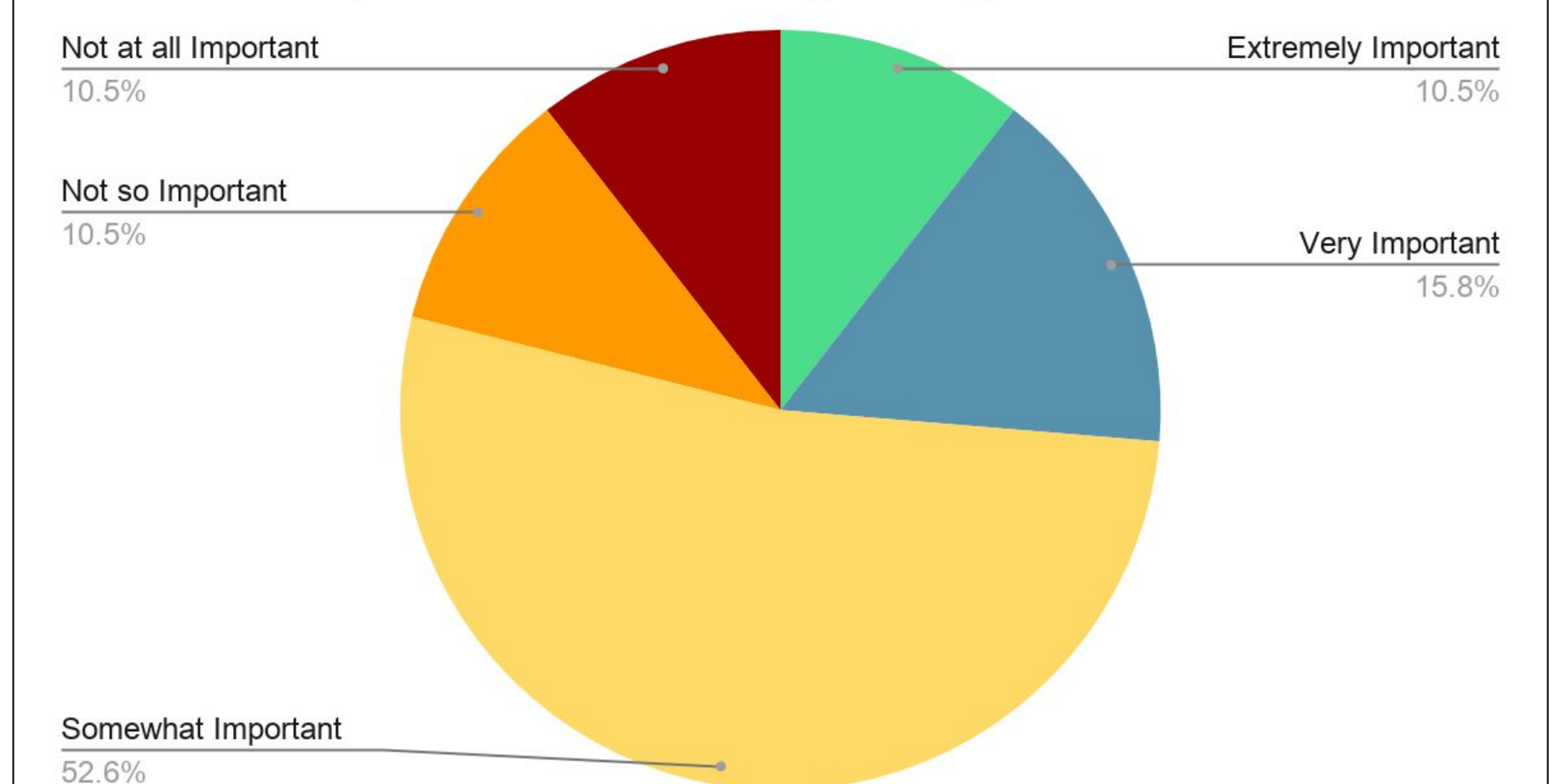
We conducted a survey that received nineteen responses from individuals with various backgrounds and political preferences. The purpose of this survey was to see the way non-environmental studies students view priorities and effects of illegal immigration and conservations on the US and Mexico border. While most found both illegal immigration and conservation to be important, the majority believes that conservation should take priority between the two when addressing issues on the border.

Survey Results

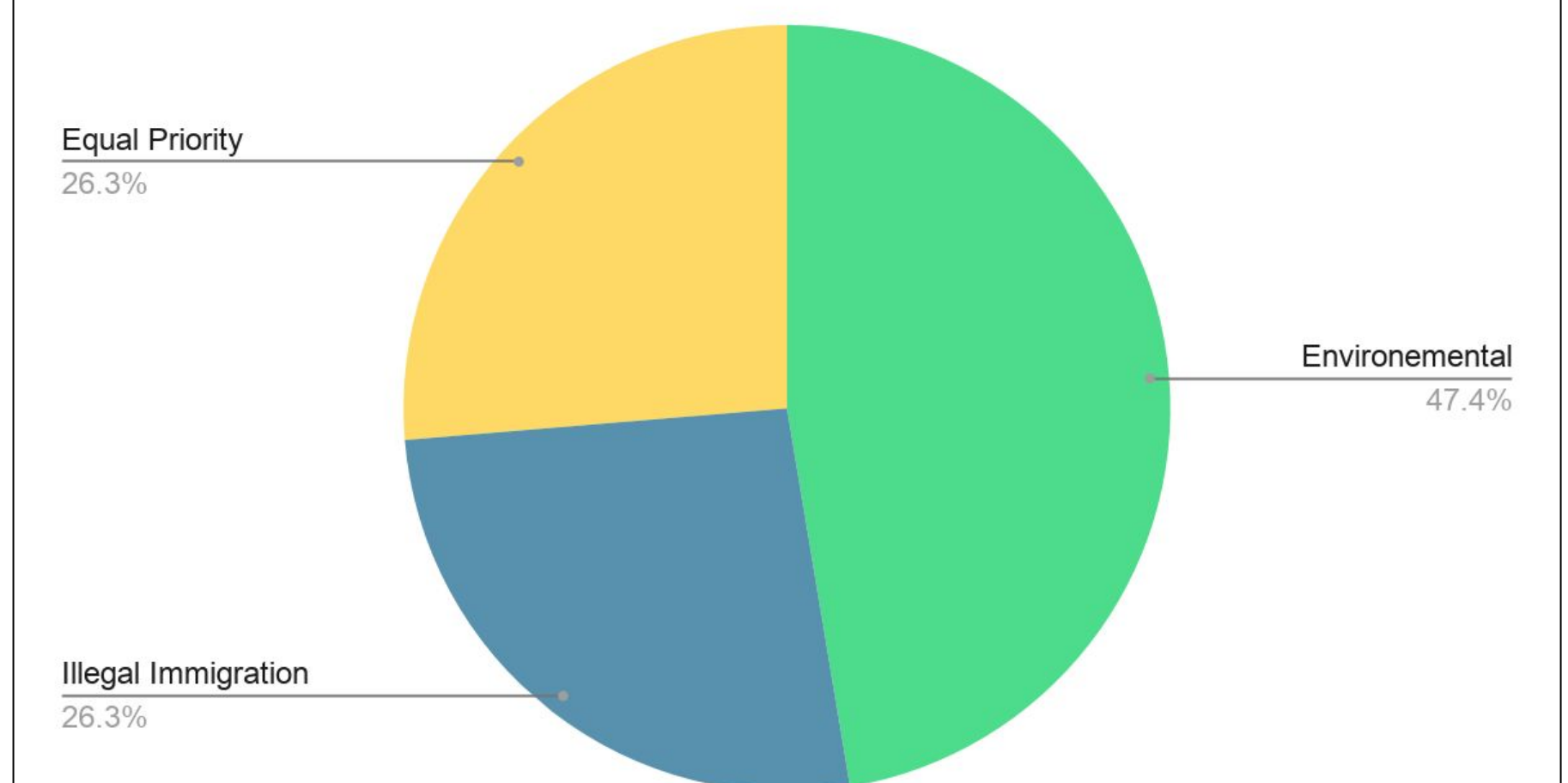
Personal Judgement on the importance of Environmental Conservation



Personal Importance of Limiting Immigration into the U.S.



What Takes Priority when Discussing Policy Changes



Personal Opinion on Illegal Immigration and How it Impacts the Environment

