

Visa Lottery and National Security

The random nature of the visa lottery program is a national security vulnerability.

Usually, immigrant visas are issued to foreign nationals that have an existing connection with a family member lawfully residing in the United States or with a U.S. employer. These types of relationships help ensure that immigrants entering our country have a stake in continuing America's success and have the advanced skills to contribute to our nation's economy. However, under the visa lottery program, visas are awarded to immigrants at random with no such safety precautions.

Other vulnerabilities include...

- The lottery draws from nations that are state sponsors of terror.¹
- The visa lottery lacks the ability to confirm identities or qualifications of applicants.²
- The lottery has been exploited by human traffickers and the modern slave trade.³

Examples of exploited vulnerabilities:

- A 2002 terrorist attack at the Los Angeles International Airport was carried out by a man who had been denied asylum by the United States but was later issued a green card after his wife won the lottery.⁴
- For at least 3 years (2004-2007), a visa-application center in Casablanca used marriage fraud and the lottery to funnel otherwise ineligible persons into the United States.⁵
- A 5-year human trafficking operation (2002-2007) used the visa lottery to lure women and girls as young as ten years old into modern-day slavery.⁶
- A 2017 terrorist attack on a New York City bike path was carried out by a man who was selected at random by the visa lottery to receive a green card to live in the United States.⁷

¹ Amending the Immigration and Nationality Act to Eliminate the Diversity Visa Lottery immigrant Program: Prepared for the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement, 112th Congress (2011) (testimony of Janice Kephart, National Security Policy Director for the Center for Immigration Studies) <https://cis.org/Testimony/Amending-Immigration-and-Nationality-Act-Eliminate-Diversity-Visa-Lottery-immigrant>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "FBI, Justice: El Al attack was terrorism," CNN, April 12, 2003 <https://www.cnn.com/2003/US/West/04/12/airport.shooting/> (accessed December 7, 2023)

⁵ Stefanie Cohen, "A Mrs. is just a Ms. in Casablanca visa scheme," New York Post, April 30, 2007, <https://nypost.com/2007/04/30/a-mrs-is-just-a-ms-in-casablanca-visa-scheme/> (accessed December 7, 2023)

⁶ Joe Ryan, "Woman in Newark, East Orange human trafficking case found guilty on all counts," New Jersey Star-Ledger, Oct. 15, 2009, https://www.nj.com/news/2009/10/jury_finds_woman_in_newark_eas.html (accessed December 7, 2023)

⁷ Jonathan Dienst, Tom Winter, Tracy Connor and Jon Schuppe, "Sayfullo Saipov's Path from Immigrant Trucker to Suspected Terrorist," NBC News, November 1, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/nyc-terrorist-attack/sayfullo-saipov-s-path-immigrant-trucker-accused-terrorist-n816331> (accessed December 7, 2023)