

# The Curious Immigration Lottery

by Steve Sailer

One of the U.S. government's more obscure yet curious programs received some unwanted publicity on the Fourth of July when Egyptian immigrant Hesham Mohamed Hadayet killed two Jews at the Israeli El Al Airline counter of Los Angeles International Airport.

Hadayet had been scheduled for deportation in 1997, but was allowed to remain in America when his wife's application to receive a coveted "green card" for permanent residency was randomly drawn by the State Department from the millions of applicants to the annual Diversity Visa Lottery.

What is this Diversity Visa Lottery that so few Americans have heard of, yet is of such avid interest around the world that anti-government riots raged in the impoverished African country of Sierra Leone in 1997 when 5,000 lottery applications mailed by locals were found floating in the Freetown harbor?

In the latest drawing, 8.7 million

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foreigners filed free applications. Permanent residency visas will then be handed out to 50,000 individuals from 167 countries. (That's 174 applications per green card granted.) The lottery accounts for about 7 percent of all legal immigrants to the United States.

According to New York City immigration lawyer Richard Madison, "The purpose of the diversity lottery is to make the immigrant population of the United States more varied." Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies, who advocates abolition of the program, said, "The lottery is premised on the belief that America needs immigrants as such — not people with relatives here, or with job offers, or fleeing persecution — just more random people."

The program allows more immigration from countries that don't send America large numbers of immigrants through the normal channels of family reunification (which accounted for 72 percent of all immigrants in 1998), employer sponsorship (12 percent, which includes the employee's spouses and children), and refugee status (8 percent).

When the 1965 immigration law opened the new era of mass immigration, a few Asian and Latin American countries quickly came to dominate the flow of immigrants. Those early arrivers, in turn,

brought in their relatives who eventually brought in their relatives — what's called "chain migration." This left very little opportunity for people from countries that hadn't gotten in on the system early to qualify to immigrate.

Oddly enough, the diversity lottery originated as a way to bring more whites to the United States. White ethnic politicians in America felt that their distant relatives in Europe had been squeezed out by chain migration from the Third World. So, natives of the 14 largest sources of legal immigrants — such as Mexico, India and China — are banned from participating. In particular, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., saw a diversity lottery as a way to boost the number of legal Irish immigrants.

Krikorian explained, "It was cooked up in the 1986 law to provide a way to amnesty Irish illegal aliens, since the main amnesty in that law primarily benefitted Mexicans. In fact, to this day the lottery is often referred to by congressmen and their staff as 'The Irish Program.' But as the program evolved, and as there were fewer and fewer Irish illegals, its emphasis changed, and it's now more accurately described as the Middle Eastern, East European and African program."

Only 331 visas were awarded to Irish applicants this year. Requirements for qualifying are

fairly minimal. To be eligible to win permanent residency, a high school diploma is required. Failing that, the lucky winner can still get by with “two years of work experience ... in an occupation that requires at least two years of training or experience.” Winners also must undergo a physical exam and a background police check.

Interestingly, this program run by the State Department increases immigration from the seven countries that the State Department has declared “state sponsors of international terrorism” — Iran (768 visas this year), Iraq (71), Syria (62), Libya (61), Cuba (529), North Korea (four) and Sudan (1,297).

It also awards permanent residency to the natives of two countries that are the prime sources of al Qaida — the network of suspected terrorists: Saudi Arabia (38) and Egypt (1,551). Other participating countries with active Islamist terrorist elements include Algeria (834), Lebanon (62) and Yemen (45).

The overwhelming majority of the winners of the lottery are not terrorists, of course. Ellie Azoulay of the American Immigration Center, a business that checks and submits lottery applications for \$40, described two winners he knows personally. “One is my own mother, who won the DV1998 lottery program.”

“The other,” he continued, “is a friend who won the DV1999 lottery — a degreed academic professional, who came over to the USA as soon as her visa was issued. Since she has been in this country, she has been working and

studying to finish her doctorate degree at a local university. She also works full time at a pharmaceutical company, and has a weekend job to pay for her schooling. They are both hard-working, honest individuals.”

Despite the enormous number of applications received annually, the government makes no attempt to skim the cream off the top. The lottery truly is a lottery. Rather than try to choose those applicants whose skills would most benefit America, the government simply draws blindly.

Judith Golub, a spokeswoman for the American Immigration Lawyers Association, defended the arbitrariness of the selection process, saying, “Maybe it serves to reflect who we are as a nation. This country has always valued diversity.”

Of course, it’s not logically necessary for the program to be a lottery for it to maintain its current commitment to diversity. The government could simply keep the present national quotas and just fill them with the highest potential applicants out of all those applying from each particular country. While Americans sometimes seem uncomfortable choosing among immigration candidates, Canada uses a point system to try to identify those would-be immigrants who possess the “human capital” to most benefit Canada as a whole. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Elinor Caplan explained, “Independent skilled immigrants (the largest single class of those admitted to Canada) are selected on the basis of their potential contribution to Canada’s

economic and social well-being.”

In fact, potential immigrants to Canada can quickly determine whether they are desirable enough to qualify for an interview with a Canadian immigration officer. They need only visit the official immigration Web site at [cic.gc.ca](http://cic.gc.ca) for about 15 minutes. There they can answer nine questions about themselves involving qualifications such as education, profession, age and language. Those scoring at least 60 out of 100 can advance to the second stage of Canada’s immigrant selection process.

America’s refusal to choose non-randomly among diversity visa applicants appears costly. A National Academy of Sciences study found that immigrants with below a high school education cost the country \$90,000 net over their lifetimes, while those with the equivalent of a high school education cost the United States \$30,000. But immigrants with a college education or more brought a net benefit to the nation of \$100,000.

By this calculation, over the course of a decade, the lifetime opportunity cost of admitting 500,000 high school graduates rather than the same number of college graduates would be \$65 billion. Others don’t want to just reform the diversity visa lottery. Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Colo., the head of the fast-growing Immigration Reform Caucus, has called for abolishing the diversity visa lottery.

Krikorian agreed. “The sooner the lottery is abolished the better,” he argued. “There’s no need for it; no constituency for it; and it’s

harmful. “Not only does it plant the idea of immigrating to the United States in the minds of people who had not previously considered it,” Krikorian went on, “but those who succeed create brand-new

immigration chains from places which didn’t use to send immigrants. No one wakes up in Uruguay and says, “Today, I will move to Hoboken!” People only go to places where they already have

friends or relatives. Any kind of lottery creates more networks of this kind, guaranteeing future illegal immigration from places that had no previous ties to the United States.”•