

# Immigration & American Strength

The American immigration system must enable us to be the most innovative country in the world while maintaining our security. We should welcome the best and brightest from around the world to America and keep out those few who would do us harm. This requires building a common-sense immigration system regular people can use and attracting entrepreneurs and risk-takers from other countries to study and create jobs in the United States.



So what should we do? We need to create a common sense immigration process that accomplishes three aims: 1) Lets in people who will contribute to America, 2) Creates a system with legitimate, legal ways to enter, and strong border controls, so regular people



If you read only one thing

## Five Strategic Needs for Immigration

- Encourage legal immigration by students, entrepreneurs, and others who want to create jobs or work hard and make America great.
- Focus security on all of our borders, airports, and sea ports—not just the southwest.
- Focus law enforcement efforts only on those who pose a danger to public safety or national security.
- Bring people out of the shadows so we know who is in our country.
- Create a common-sense immigration process is to give aspiring citizens a way to earn legal status, which may include going to the back of the line, learning English, and contributing to America.

aspiring to be Americans don't resort to illegal means, and 3) Addresses immigrants aspiring to citizenship who are already in our country, but are in the shadows because they lack legal status.

## Key Issues

**Immigration is not about keeping people out. It's about keeping America strong, competitive, and true to our founding values.** America is a unique country. As Americans, we are not defined by how we look or where we were born: we are defined by our commitment to our country and our founding values of freedom, equality, and hard work. For two hundred years, America has shown that we are strongest when we have hardworking new immigrants contributing to our communities. We benefit when the best and brightest, and those most willing to move and take risks, choose to come to our country to contribute to America.

**The vast majority of immigrants come to America to work hard and create better lives for their families.** Millions of immigrants come here through legitimate, legal processes. Many are job-creators, keeping America on the cutting edge of innovation and benefitting our economy. A study conducted in 2012 showed that immigrant inventors played a role in producing more than 75% of the patents awarded the previous year at America's top research universities.

**Immigration makes America stronger and richer.** Immigrants currently contribute tens of billions annually to the economy. 40% of America's Fortune 500 companies were started by immigrants, as were



## Key Fact

Voters are focused on two things:  
Security and Fairness

“Security” speaks to the sensible center’s worry that new American immigrants are lawbreakers.

“Fairness” messaging helps avoid a culture of fear around immigration — and it brings the discussion back to progressive strengths.

nearly half of the top 50 venture-backed start-ups in the U.S. Immigration also results in other gains for the existing native-born population. Immigrants who become naturalized citizens tend to have high levels of education and to work in growth fields such as engineering. Foreign students and entrepreneurs create jobs in America and enable us to maintain world-class status in many areas, particularly science and technology. While immigrants age 25 and above make up about 23% of our population, they constitute about 33% of all engineers. Immigrants also come to America with cultural and language skills that our military and intelligence services need to keep America safe.

**Our current immigration system is a failing patchwork of overregulation and incoherent policies.** We have unrealistic and outdated visa caps on countries based on a decades old system – closing off the opportunity for legitimate immigration, and making it almost impossible for people with the bad luck to have been born in certain countries to visit or contribute to America. Our current system should also prioritize and incentivize the entrepreneurs who will create jobs. Those currently striving for citizenship face a maze of regulations nearly impossible to navigate; in reality, there isn't any "line" to get into to become a participating American. In large part because of this broken system, there are approximately 11.5 million people here without legal status, but who aspire to play by the rules and become American citizens – they need a path forward to get out of legal limbo and to earn citizenship.

**Having 11.5 million of people living in legal limbo is bad for security.** Most aspiring Americans do not pose any security risk. Instead, when millions of these otherwise law-abiding people are stuck in the shadows, they are often afraid to report crimes or appear as witnesses in criminal



## In 30 seconds...

### Why Not a Wall?

- While a wall creates a physical obstacle, it won't keep out those who are most determined to enter—particularly terrorists, who will exploit other borders in the north as well as shipping port entries.
- Drug dealers and criminals have already tunneled under existing border fences. And the majority of illegal drugs actually get here undetected through official points of entry.
- The U.S. government has already spent over \$1 billion on the existing border "fence," which includes 10,000 ground sensors and thousands of night-vision cameras.

cases, letting actual criminals go free. Moreover, it is harder for law enforcement officials to identify the real threats: those with criminal records or potential involvement with terrorism. Lack of legal status also enables unscrupulous businesses to exploit these workers. Too many businesses and employers avoid playing by the rules, exploiting aspiring citizens and undercutting the wages of other American workers.

**For the small number of people who are security risks, our top security imperatives are strong controls at ALL of our borders, and knowing who is here.** Every country needs to control its borders. But the southwestern border is not our main security problem – we need to secure all points of entry. The September 11th hijackers came to the U.S. through our airports with passports and visas, some valid and some invalid. Other terrorists have tried to enter through Canada. More than 40% of those in the U.S. currently without proper immigration status originally came here on legitimate visas and overstayed. Fences and guard towers are not the answer for real security; immigration security begins when someone requests a visa, comes into an airport, or crosses any point of entry. We need to invest in the people and technologies that process visas, monitor databases, and alert our security agencies when something isn't right.

## The Policy Landscape & Recommendations

**America must fix its immigration system so that there are**

**legitimate, secure, and simplified ways to enter.** We should welcome entrepreneurs, engineers, and those with advanced skill sets who want to contribute to America, and who aspire to become citizens. That means balancing priorities such as uniting families alongside our goals for growth and job creation. We must also adjust the outdated limits and quotas we place on individual countries. A viable immigration process requires legitimate, legal, and fair ways for people to come – from countries next door, as well as from far corners of the world – and contribute to the United States.

**Attempting to deport 11.5 million people is unrealistic, inhumane, and is an unpopular option with voters.** This approach wastes law enforcement resources and money. Attempting to deport every individual who has fallen out of status would cost about \$200 billion, and would enormously burden our nation’s law enforcement. Moreover, it splits up families and pushes people even further into the shadows. Recent polling shows that between 62% and 66% of voters—including a majority of independents—believe creating a common-sense immigration process should include a roadmap to citizenship for those already here. In a 2013 poll, only 17% of voters supported deporting all individuals who came to the U.S. illegally.

**Law enforcement officials should prioritize the real threats: people with criminal records and those who pose a national security threat.** We should avoid tying up local law enforcement officers with enforcing federal immigration policy. Tasking local police with inquiring about immigration status distracts officers from their number one priority: keeping local communities safe. As a report by the Major Cities Police Chiefs put it, a breakdown in trust “between the local police and immigrant groups would result in increased crime against immigrants

and in the broader community, create a class of silent victims and eliminate the potential for assistance from immigrants in solving crimes or preventing future terrorist attacks.”

**We must crack down on employers who break the law.** Employers who hire undocumented workers at below legal pay undercut the wages of other Americans and exploit the most vulnerable among us. It is not fair to our employers and businesses that do follow the law to allow those who break it to go unpunished. The federal E-Verify program, which allows employers to check potential employees’ immigration status against government records, offers a promising way forward. But we must also ensure that this technology is used responsibly, includes robust privacy protections, draws from accurate databases, and does not mistakenly flag citizens and Green Card holders.

**We need a roadmap to citizenship for the 11.5 million who are already here and live in legal limbo.** We must create a way for aspiring citizens to play by the rules and integrate into mainstream American society. Most Americans believe that earning citizenship should require learning English and undergoing a criminal background check; for those who entered the country and are currently out of status, it should also include a service component or other way to contribute to American society or civic life. For economic reasons, it may also make sense to create a targeted guest worker program for agricultural and other sectors that depend on seasonal workforces.

**The vast majority of Americans believe that young people who were brought here from abroad as children, and who wish to attend college or join the military, should be allowed to stay without fear of**

**deportation.** The Obama administration issued guidance in 2012 that defers deportation for two years for those who 1) are under age 30 and were brought here before age 16, 2) have lived here for at least 5 years, 3) are in school, are high school graduates, or are military veterans in good standing, and 4) have no criminal record. This allows young aspiring citizens to work legally and obtain driver's licenses—but only an act of Congress can provide a roadmap to citizenship, or even permanent residence.

**We should improve our refugee process, particularly prioritizing those who have risked their lives overseas by helping the U.S. military.** Many Iraqis and Afghans put their lives at risk by helping American military efforts, often as translators for our troops. As we continue to wind down these conflicts, some of these brave men and women remain at risk precisely because they helped us, and need to flee their countries. It is our moral obligation, and a veterans' priority, to ensure that our allies have safe haven in the U.S. if they need it. It is also a national security priority: if we do not do right by our Iraqi and Afghan allies, who will work for us the next time we need in-country support? We must make sure that visa applications of those who served alongside our troops, and those of their family members, do not get caught up in red tape. More generally, we must make sure our asylum process is fair and humane to refugees who have come here seeking freedom and safety.

## Key Players

**The Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** DHS guards U.S.



### Key Fact

The Department of Defense reported that, as of June 2010, there were 16,500 non-citizens serving in the U.S. military, many of whom enlisted as part of their path to citizenship.

borders, identifies illegal substances being smuggled into the country, and apprehends individuals who attempt to enter the U.S. illegally.

**U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** ICE is within the Department of Homeland Security. It enforces worksite laws and identifies, detains, and removes individuals who are here without proper authorization. Much of our immigration policy depends upon how ICE defines its enforcement priorities—particularly by focusing on those who have committed crimes or pose a threat to national security.

**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)** Within the Department of Homeland Security, USCIS processes visa petitions, naturalization petitions and asylum and refugee applications.

**U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)** Also within the Department of Homeland Security, CBP patrols the borders and conducts inspections at border crossings.

**The Department of Defense** The National Guard is state-run, though when the President sends National Guardsmen to patrol the border—as President Obama has done—they fall under the authority of the Department of Defense.

**The Department of State** The State Department reviews and processes the applications of those seeking visas to travel to the U.S., and also processes refugee requests. The Department of Homeland Security, however, makes the final determination on admissions.



**The Department of Justice** The Justice Department oversees the U.S. immigration court system.

**The Department of Labor** The Labor Department coordinates with the Department of Homeland Security on temporary worker visa programs.

**State and local governments** State and local governments play an important role in our national immigration policy. In general, a state cannot pass a law that undermines federal policy or takes enforcement discretion away from the federal government. That is why the Supreme Court struck down much of Arizona's harsh new immigration law in 2012. At the same time, the federal government cannot force state and local officials to carry out immigration enforcement. State and local officials can prioritize community safety by directing officials not to expend time and money inquiring about the immigration status of local residents.

## Going Deep: Background & Context

**Immigration has always made America stronger.** For centuries, people from all over the world have been coming to America in search of new opportunities and a better life. By attracting some of the hardest working and most entrepreneurial individuals from every country, we have expanded our economy and become stronger as a nation. America has always found a way to balance the pressures of absorbing large numbers of new Americans with a policy of continuing to welcome others

from abroad.

**In 1986, Congress passed and President Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).** IRCA provided for more robust border protection and was written to crack down on employers who hired individuals without the proper immigration status to work legally. Though the border protection mandate was implemented, enforcement on employers remained limited. It also provided a roadmap to legitimate status for those who had been living in the U.S. since before 1982. This process required relevant individuals to pay a filing fee, to demonstrate good moral character and knowledge of American civics, and to learn English. The law also contained provisions concerning seasonal agricultural workers.

**We already spend billions of dollars and tremendous resources on border enforcement.** Spending on border security has increased 10-fold since 1993, to about \$3.6 billion per year, including over \$1 billion on a border “fence” that includes motion sensors and infra-red cameras. The Obama administration has also deported almost two million people in the past five years; each deportation costs the U.S. government an average of about \$23,000 – including costs of apprehension, detention, deportation proceedings, and transportation. Despite these record levels of resources, however, border defense and deportation alone cannot solve all the challenges we face, and they certainly cannot harness the opportunities that creating a common-sense immigration process would bring for all Americans.

**Attempts at fixing the immigration system have failed in the past, but most Americans want comprehensive immigration reform.** In 2006,



## US Population

- Native born: 269 million
- Legal immigrants: 28 million
- Immigrants currently out of status: 11.5 million

**Every month, 50,000 U.S.-born Latinos turn 18 and become eligible to vote.**

both chambers of Congress passed bills but could not agree upon a final bill to send to the President. Further attempts in 2009 never solidified.

**Creating a common-sense immigration process is a priority.** In June 2013, the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill drafted by the bipartisan “Gang of Eight.” Senator Lindsey Graham (R- SC) extolled that “this bill reduces our deficit by \$890 billion. It’s good for the economy. This bill is good for our national security. As to the 11 million, they will have an earned, hard pathway to citizenship” and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) declared that “we are moving forward because we believe in a bipartisan way this is so vital for America. We have a good bill.” But the Republican-controlled House declined to take up the bill. In his 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama renewed the call for Congress to for Congress to “fix our broken immigration system.”

68% of Americans support a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in the United States today, and 54% of Americans prioritize a path to citizenship over border security, according to February 2014 polls from Fox News and CNN, respectively. This may result in renewed pressure on the House of Representatives to take up immigration reform in the future.