

A CONGRESSIONAL GUIDE TO IMMIGRATION

Answers to the Tough Questions

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About Us



The Immigration Policy Center (IPC) is the research arm of the American Immigration Law Foundation (AILF). IPC was established in 2003 with the mission to provide policymakers, academics, the media, and the general public with access to accurate information about the effects of immigration on the U.S. economy and society. The IPC attracts nationally recognized scholars as research fellows and guest authors, and publishes timely reports on the role of immigrants and immigration policy. Together, the IPC director, fellows, and staff have been a major voice in the national debate on immigration. They have testified before Congress and regularly serve as experts on immigration law and policy issues for members of the media. The Immigration Policy Center is a non-partisan organization that neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for office.

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO IMMIGRATION

Comprehensive Immigration Reform



The current immigration system is outdated and broken. Americans are justifiably frustrated and angry. The problem is complex, and a comprehensive, national solution is necessary. Politicians who suggest that the U.S. can deport its way out of the problem by removing 12 million people are unrealistic. The U.S. needs a fair, practical solution that addresses the underlying causes of undocumented immigration and creates a new, national legal immigration system for the 21st century.

- **Immigration reform must be rational, practical, and tough:** It is unacceptable to have 12 million people in our country living outside the legal system. To secure the border we must hire sufficient numbers of Border Patrol agents, use technology wisely, and prosecute those who exploit immigrant labor and those who profit from smuggling. Additionally, undocumented immigrants should be required to come forward to legalize their status, pay taxes, learn English, and pass criminal background checks.
- **Efforts simply to deport are often political games, not serious policy proposals:** Over the past decade, billions of dollars have been spent on [immigration enforcement](#). The [annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol](#) has increased 332% and the number of Border Patrol agents increased 276 % since FY 1993, yet the undocumented population has tripled. Billions in taxpayer dollars are wasted every year when we attempt to spend our way out of the problem rather than solve it.

- **A majority of Americans favors realistic reform over unachievable rhetoric:** Polls consistently find that Americans support a tough but comprehensive solution for those here illegally over an enforcement-only immigration policy. According to [polls](#) of the general election voters conducted for America's Voice by Lake Research Partners and Benenson Strategy Group, 57% of all voters and 74% of Latino voters supported comprehensive immigration reform as opposed to enforcement-only measures, and 67% of all voters and 71% of Latino voters believe that illegal immigrants "should be required to register and become legal," rather than leaving the country or being allowed to stay only temporarily. Furthermore, 67% of both Obama and McCain voters supported legalization. Finally, 55% of voters in general, and 61% of Latino voters in particular, believe that although it is not the single highest priority, immigration reform should be a high priority for the new Congress.
- **The public sees comprehensive immigration reform as consistent with, not working against, our nation's economic recovery:** Nationwide, 62% of voters said "We would be better off if people who are in the United States illegally became legal taxpayers so they pay their fair share," vs. 21% who said "We would be better off if people who are in the United States illegally left the country because they are taking away jobs that Americans need." Swing district voters agreed, supporting the former statement over the latter by a 66-23% margin.
- **The best way to solve the problem is to face reality:** Undocumented immigrants are integrated members of our families and communities. Nationwide, undocumented immigrants comprise [5% of the workforce](#), and in states like Arizona, it's double. In certain sectors like agriculture and construction, undocumented workers comprise up to 25% of the workforce. Nationwide, there are approximately [3 million U.S.-citizen children](#) with at least one undocumented parent, and policies that target their parents have grave effects on the children. [Approximately 60%](#) of undocumented immigrants have been in the U.S. longer than eight years. The vast majority of undocumented immigrants are simply here to work. Immigrants who work, pay taxes, do not commit crimes, and want to be Americans should be required to come forward and register for legal status.
- **First and foremost, the United States needs a legal immigration system that secures our borders, strengthens our economy, and supports our communities:** The most practical and realistic way to reduce undocumented immigration dramatically is to bring U.S. immigration policy in line with economic and social realities. Lawmakers should require undocumented immigrants already living in the United States to apply for legal status and devise immigration policies that are responsive to labor demands and ensure fair wages and good working conditions for *all* workers, both native and foreign-born. Finally, lawmakers should address the delays and restrictions that impose unreasonably long waiting times on hardworking families seeking to join close loved ones in the U.S.

Immigration Reform and the Current Economy

In this economic downturn, many may argue that immigration reform is not a priority. However, reforming our broken immigration system is an important part of improving our economy. Currently, unscrupulous employers are able to exploit undocumented workers and create unfair competition by violating labor laws and paying sub-minimal wages. This is harmful to U.S. businesses and U.S. workers. Our immigration system needs to work for all Americans, not just for those employers looking for low-cost labor. We need to recognize that it would be far better if immigrant workers were here legally and could exercise the same rights on the job as native-born workers. Leveling the playing field for both workers and employers by legalizing all workers and enforcing labor laws against bad-apple employers will eliminate unfair competition and improve the wages and working conditions of all workers. Putting immigrant workers in the formal economy and higher wages will increase tax revenues and consumption.

- **Leveling the playing field will benefit U.S. workers and the U.S. economy.** We need to ensure that undocumented immigrants come forward, pay a fine, undergo background checks, and get on a path to earning legal immigration status and citizenship. This will put more workers and employers on the tax rolls, level the playing field for all workers and law-abiding employers, and stabilize communities and families.
- **Legalization raises wages for all U.S. workers.** The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) resulted in the legalization of more than 2.7 million undocumented immigrants within five years. A 1992 survey by the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) on the “Characteristics and Labor Market Behavior of the Legalized Population Five Years Following Legalization” found that legalized workers saw a 15% mean hourly wage increase. The mean hourly wages of U.S. workers grew by even more than that of the legalized workers. Increased wages means increased consumption and tax revenue.
- **We need to enforce labor laws against unscrupulous employers and prevent unfair competition and the exploitation of workers.** For years, the Bush Administration targeted immigrant workers in large-scale immigration raids and gave a free pass to employers who violate labor laws. This approach was expensive and ineffective. A new Congress and a new Administration needs to put workers first, and punish abusive employers who violate immigration and labor laws to widen their profit margins and undermine their competitors.
- **The economy will eventually improve, and immigration helps to expand the U.S. economy:** A [2007 report](#) from the White House Council of Economic Advisers concluded that **immigration increases the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by roughly \$37 billion each year** because immigrants increase the size of the total labor force, complement the native-born workforce in terms of skills and education, and stimulate capital investment by adding workers to the labor pool.

- **Immigration raises wages for most Americans:** According to a [2006](#) study by Giovanni Peri, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of California, Davis, immigration has increased the average wages of all native-born workers. Peri found that between 1990 and 2004, the roughly 90% of native-born workers with at least a high-school diploma experienced wage gains because of immigration ranging from 0.7% to 3.4%, depending on their level of education.
- **Immigrant purchasing power is enormous—and growing:** According to the [Selig Center for Economic Growth](#) at the University of Georgia, Latino buying power totaled \$862 billion in 2007 and is expected to increase to \$1.2 trillion by 2012, while Asian buying power totaled \$459 billion in 2007 and is expected to increase to \$670 billion by 2012.
- **Immigrant businesses employ millions of workers:** The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2002, 1.6 million [Hispanic-owned firms](#) provided jobs to 1.5 million employees, had receipts of \$222 billion, and generated payroll of \$36.7 billion. The same year, 1.1 million [Asian-owned firms](#) provided jobs to 2.2 million employees, had receipts of \$326.4 billion, and generated payroll of \$56 billion.

Immigration Enforcement

For more than two decades, the U.S. government has tried without success to stamp out undocumented immigration through enforcement efforts at the border and in the interior of the country, without fundamentally reforming the broken immigration system that spurs undocumented immigration in the first place. While billions upon billions of dollars have been poured into enforcement, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has increased dramatically.

- **Taxpayer dollars being misused to sound tough:** The annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol stood at \$1.6 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2006—an [increase of 332% since 1993](#). The number of Border Patrol agents grew to 14,923 in FY 2007—an increase of 276% since FY 1993. Under the Bush Administration’s proposed budget for FY 2009, that number would increase to 20,000.
- **We can’t deport our way out of this problem:** For years the U.S. government has attempted to use employer sanctions, border walls, worksite raids, and other deportation-only measures to stop undocumented immigration, but the [undocumented population](#) of the United States has *tripled* in size, from roughly 3.5 million in 1990 to 12 million in 2006.
- **Forget enforcement—it’s the economy, stupid:** Some are saying that increases in immigration enforcement are working, and the undocumented population of the U.S. is declining. However, [most researchers agree](#) that undocumented immigration to the United States is driven largely by economics. According to a [June 2008 report](#) by Wayne Cornelius, Director of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California-San Diego, “undocumented migration clearly responds to changing U.S. economic conditions, with steep increases in the flow toward the end of expansion phases of the business cycle and significant decreases during economic downturns. Moreover, the pattern of undocumented migrants responding to economic conditions rather than policy decisions has continued during the border enforcement build-up that began in 1993.”
- **America needs leaders to secure the border and restore the rule of law:** The most practical and realistic way to reduce undocumented immigration dramatically is to bring U.S. immigration policy in line with economic and social realities. Such a policy must include the following elements: a tough but fair program for those here illegally; a realistic legal immigration framework that protects U.S. workers while providing needed labor to American businesses; and controlled but reasonable limits on family immigration which encourage unification of families and stable communities. The undergirding of such an immigration regimen is enforcement at the border and the workplace which is strong and sensible.

Worksite Enforcement

According to the [Pew Hispanic Center](#), approximately 5% of the American labor force is undocumented. In fact, the influx of undocumented immigrants accounted for about half of the growth in the U.S. labor force over the last decade. While worksite enforcement is an obvious component of immigration reform, as a stand-alone tactic it is insufficient, ineffective, and highly disruptive to communities of newcomers and natives alike.

- **Employers are more likely to be struck by lightning than be fined for hiring undocumented workers:** According to the *Washington Post*, [in 2004](#), just three employers were fined for breaking immigration laws. In [2007](#), after promising to make employer enforcement a priority, the Administration found only 92 employers to arrest and 17 to fine. While the Administration cites a record number of workplace arrests in 2007, 98% were of workers and only 2% were employers. In the last eight years, the Bush Administration has slashed the number of agents charged with enforcing labor laws. Right now the Administration dedicates just one wage and hour enforcement agent to every 200,000 workers.
- **Bad-apple employers rig the system:** In 1986 Congress began requiring employers to ask new hires for documents establishing their eligibility to work legally. Employers fulfill their legal requirement as long as the documents appear facially valid. Since then, bad-apple employers have been either knowingly hiring undocumented workers with the confidence that there is little probability they will be caught, or accepting documents at face value and unwittingly hiring unauthorized workers. In the meantime, many responsible and law-abiding employers lose good, but unauthorized, workers.
- **Postville is the poster bad-child:** The raid in [Postville, Iowa](#) in May 2008 clearly illustrated how some unscrupulous employers have been able to exploit vulnerable workers and violate labor laws. Agriprocessors has been accused of sexual harassment, wage and hour violations, safety violations, and hiring children as young as 13. ICE interrupted ongoing investigations by state agencies and rounded up and deported potential witnesses. This is harmful to all American workers who see their wages and working conditions deteriorate as a result, and to the law-abiding employers who simply can't compete with cheap unauthorized labor.
- **Raids rock the community but don't stop illegal immigration:** As the Mayor of Postville said of the May raid, "We didn't need this. It literally blew our town away." Raids tear parents from their children and people from their communities. A [study of three raid sites](#) found that, together with 900 adults, about 500 children were impacted, with a large majority being U.S. citizens. Raids also leave local economies devastated when workers and consumers are forced to leave.
- **We need practical and tough solutions:** We cannot expect to use raids to deport 12 million people, and we cannot deny employers the workers they need until there are legal channels to bring them to the U.S. We need a new immigrant worker program that provides visas for workers who can fill U.S. labor needs, while protecting U.S. workers and businesses from the unscrupulous employers who exploit vulnerable immigrant labor at the expense of U.S. workers.

Electronic Employment Verification Systems (EEVS)

E-Verify is a small, national, voluntary electronic employment verification system. Currently, about 60,000 employers of the over 7 million in the US—less than 1%—are signed up to use E-Verify. Making E-Verify mandatory would require a 13,000% increase in the number of users in a very short period of time. Efforts to expand the program are popular but shortsighted. E-Verify is fraught with errors, overwhelms the federal agencies responsible for it, and could result in hundreds of thousands of U.S. workers being denied work.

- **Americans asking the government for permission to work:** A mandatory electronic employment verification system would require every job seeker, in the U.S.—including U.S. citizens—to seek the government’s permission and approval to work.
- **Expecting the government to get it right:** The Social Security Administration estimates that 17.8 million of its records contain [discrepancies](#) related to name, date of birth, or citizenship status, with 12.7 million of those problem records pertaining to U.S. citizens. This implies that as many as 1 in 25 new hires could be erroneously flagged as ineligible to work. These errors mean that thousands of U.S. citizens and legal workers could be denied work because of a government error.
- **EEVS’ price tag:** The [Congressional Budget Office](#) (CBO) found that the SAVE Act (proposed EEVS legislation) would *decrease* federal revenues by \$17.3 billion from 2009 to 2018 because it would result in an increase in the number of people working in the underground cash economy, outside the tax system. At the same time, it would *increase spending* by over \$23 billion, resulting in a whopping price tag of over \$40 billion over the next 10 years. CBO also estimated that SAVE would cost U.S. employers over \$136 million to comply in at least one of the first five years the mandates are in effect.
- **AARP steps into the fray:** Scores of organizations, including the [American Association of Retired Persons \(AARP\)](#), have serious concerns about overloading the Social Security Administration with new mandates. If E-Verify were mandatory, SSA would see an estimated 3.6 million extra visits or calls to SSA field offices by Americans trying to fix errors in their records so they can work. With Americans already waiting [up to 500 days](#) for a disability claim decision and 78 million Baby Boomers soon to be eligible for retirement benefits, the SSA can’t become a required stop for millions of frustrated Americans unable to work because of government database errors.

Immigrants and Public Benefits

Many Americans fear that immigrants disproportionately use welfare or public benefits. Some believe that immigrants are eligible for special benefits that Americans cannot receive. The fact is that undocumented immigrants are not eligible for most public benefits and do not use them surreptitiously. Legal immigrants are also restricted from receiving many benefits. All immigrants pay taxes to fund welfare programs, but are not eligible to reap the benefits of many of them.

- **Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal public benefits:** This includes [income supplements](#)—e.g., Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)), health care (Medicaid and Medicare), and food stamps.
- **Legal immigrants face tough restrictions in accessing public benefits:** Federal law also imposes [harsh restrictions](#) on legal immigrants' eligibility for public benefits. Most documented immigrants cannot receive federal Medicaid, TANF, food stamps, or SSI during their first five years or longer in the U.S., regardless of how much they have worked or paid in taxes.
- **Immigrants use less health care on average than U.S. citizens:** Low-income immigrants are less likely to receive public benefits than are U.S. citizens. Immigrants do not come to the U.S. to receive public benefits, and once they are here, they [do not disproportionately use public benefits](#). According to a study in the American Journal of Public Health, [immigrants do not impose a disproportionate financial burden](#) on the U.S. health care system – per capita total health care expenditures of immigrants were 55% lower than those of U.S.-born persons. Further restricting immigrants' access to benefits is not a solution to our immigration problems.
- **Ensuring that immigrants have the same access to essential services will improve public health and the wellbeing of all people living in the U.S., not just immigrants:** It is important that all people receive basic health care because immigrants are in our neighborhoods, our schools, and our churches. It is in the interest of [public health](#) that everyone receive basic immunizations and other basic care.
- **Immigrants pay taxes into the system that funds public services:** The majority of undocumented immigrants pay federal and state income taxes, Social Security taxes, and Medicare taxes. And all undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes and property taxes. Many studies have found that undocumented immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits. The [National Research Council](#) estimated in 1997 that “the average immigrant pays nearly \$1,800 more in taxes than he or she costs in benefits.” [Recent state-level studies](#) have found that immigrants contribute more to the economy than they take out.

Undocumented Immigrants and Taxes

As the debate over illegal immigration continues to rage, some pundits and policymakers are claiming that unauthorized immigrants do not pay taxes and rely heavily on government benefits. Neither of these claims is supported by the facts. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, undocumented men have workforce participation rates that are higher than other workers, and all undocumented immigrants are ineligible for most government services, but pay taxes as workers, consumers, and residents.

- **Like the rest of us, [undocumented immigrants pay taxes](#):** Between one-half to three-quarters of undocumented immigrants pay federal and state income taxes, Social Security taxes, and Medicare taxes. All undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes (when they buy anything at a store, for instance) and property taxes (even if they rent housing).
- **Undocumented immigrants pay into Social Security, but do not collect:** The [Social Security Administration \(SSA\)](#) has concluded that undocumented immigrants “account for a major portion” of the billions of dollars paid into the Social Security system under names or Social Security numbers that don’t match SSA records; payments from which immigrants cannot benefit while undocumented. As of October 2005, the reported earnings on which these payments are based—which are tracked through the SSA’s Earnings Suspense File (ESF)—totaled \$520 billion.

State Studies Analyze Undocumented Tax Contributions

- **TEXAS:** A 2006 study by the [Texas State Comptroller](#) found that “the absence of the estimated 1.4 million undocumented immigrants in Texas in fiscal 2005 would have been a loss to our gross state product of \$17.7 billion. Undocumented immigrants produced \$1.58 billion in state revenues, which *exceeded* the \$1.16 billion in state services they received.”
- **OREGON:** A 2007 study by the [Oregon Center for Public Policy](#) estimated that undocumented immigrants in Oregon pay state income, excise, and property taxes, as well as federal Social Security and Medicare taxes, which “total about \$134 million to \$187 million annually.” In addition, “taxes paid by Oregon employers on behalf of undocumented workers total about \$97 million to \$136 million annually.” As the report goes on to note, undocumented workers are ineligible for the Oregon Health Plan, food stamps, and temporary cash assistance.
- **IOWA:** A 2007 report from the [Iowa Policy Project](#) concluded that “undocumented immigrants pay an estimated aggregate amount of \$40 million to \$62 million in state taxes each year.” Moreover, “undocumented immigrants working on the books...and their employers also contribute annually an estimated \$50 million to \$77.8 million in federal Social Security and Medicare taxes from which they will never benefit. Rather than draining state resources, undocumented immigrants are in some cases *subsidizing* services that only documented residents can access.”

Immigrants and Crime

The persistent myth that immigrants are more prone to criminality than the native-born continues to circulate viciously among politicians, commentators, and the public despite a century's worth of contrary evidence that immigrants are *less* likely than the native-born to be in prison, and that high rates of immigration are *not* associated with higher rates of crime.

- **Immigrants are five times *less* likely to be in prison than the native-born:** A [2007 study](#) by University of California-Irvine sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut found that the 3.5% incarceration rate for native-born men ages 18-39 was five times *higher* than the 0.7% rate for immigrant men in 2000. The lower incarceration rates of immigrants compared to natives “holds true especially for the Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans who make up the bulk of the undocumented population.”
- **Undocumented immigration is NOT associated with higher crime rates:** Although the undocumented immigrant population doubled from 1994 to 2005, the [violent crime rate](#) in the United States declined by 34.2 % and the property crime rate fell by 26.4% during the same period. Border cities and other cities with large immigrant populations also experienced decreasing crime rates.
- **Crime is lowest in the states with the most immigrants:** According to a 2008 report from the conservative [Americas Majority Foundation](#), crime rates are *lowest* in states with the *highest* immigration growth rates. From 1999 to 2006, the total crime rate declined 13.6% in the 19 highest-immigration states, compared to a 7.1% decline in the other 32 states. In 2006, the 10 “high influx” states—those with the most dramatic, recent increases in immigration—had the lowest rates of violent crime and total crime.
- **[New Jersey](#):** An analysis of data from the New Jersey Department of Corrections and U.S. Census Bureau by New Jersey’s *Star-Ledger* in April 2008 found that “US citizens are twice as likely to land in New Jersey’s prisons as legal and illegal immigrants.” **In fact, “non-U.S. citizens make up 10% of the state’s overall population, but just 5% of the inmates in prison.”**
- **[California](#):** Foreign-born adults in California have lower incarceration rates than their native-born counterparts. According to a June 2008 report from the Public Policy Institute of California, “the incarceration rate for foreign-born adults is 297 per 100,000 in the population, compared to 813 per 100,000 for U.S.-born adults. **The foreign-born, who make up roughly 35% of California’s adult population, constitute 17% of the state prison population, a proportion that has remained fairly constant since 1990.**”
- The argument that undocumented immigrants are “criminals” because they are “illegal” is highly misleading. “Unlawful presence” in the United States (such as overstaying a visa) is a civil violation of immigration law, not a criminal violation. “Entry Without Inspection” (entering the United States without authorization) is a misdemeanor. More importantly, neither of these offenses constitutes a threat to public safety—unlike crimes such as murder, assault, and robbery, all of which immigrants are much less likely to commit than natives.

Local Police and Immigration Law Enforcement (287(g) agreements)

Recently there has been increased focus on state and local police agencies and their role in immigration enforcement. Currently, approximately 55 localities have entered into memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of DHS through the [287\(g\) program](#). The 287(g) program refers to the section of federal law created in 1996 that establishes a program for local police to be trained by ICE to enforce immigration law. Approximately 765 police and correctional officers had been trained as of July 2008. More than 80 localities have requested 287(g) training. Critics argue that policies that involve local police in the enforcement of federal immigration law lead to increased discrimination and racial profiling, stretch the limited resources of law enforcement, and erode—rather than promote—the trust between immigrant communities and the police, thus endangering public safety.

- **There is strong opposition to local police enforcement of immigration laws from across the spectrum:** Advocates for victims of domestic abuse, faith-based organizations, [conservatives](#), [immigrant rights groups](#), [elected officials](#), and [law enforcement officials](#) all agree that the state and local police should not be enforcing federal immigration laws.
- **When police enforce immigration laws, public safety decreases:** When police are turned into immigration agents, immigrants (legal and illegal) who are victims or witnesses of crime are fearful of cooperating with the police. This puts entire communities at risk.
- **When police enforce immigration laws, other crimes go uninvestigated:** Recent experience in [Maricopa County](#), Arizona, has shown that when police are highly invested in enforcing immigration laws, other crimes do not receive the attention they deserve, and response times to emergency 911 calls increase.
- **Enforcing immigration law is costly:** The federal government does not cover the costs of enforcing immigration laws. After only three months, Maricopa County had [a deficit of over \\$1 million](#). The [Prince William County](#), Virginia, jail spent nearly \$800,000 more than expected to hold suspected illegal immigrants during the last budget year. This money could be better spent on public safety.
- **When local police enforce immigration law it is likely to lead to racial profiling, discrimination, and costly litigation:** When local law enforcement gets involved in [immigration enforcement](#), particularly without proper training and oversight, people are often targeted for immigration enforcement on the basis of their accent or appearance. This can lead to serious violations of the civil rights of legal permanent residents and even U.S. citizens.

Why Don't Undocumented Immigrants Just Come Legally?

Many Americans wonder why undocumented immigrants do not come to the U.S. legally or simply “get in line” for permanent residency (a “green card”). In fact, the legal immigration system is grossly out of date and has not kept up with the labor demands of our economy. Our laws have not been updated in nearly 20 years, and there are only limited avenues available for legal immigration. The overly restrictive legal limits on green cards mean that virtually all undocumented immigrants have no alternative for legal entry into the U.S.

- **There is no “line” for the vast majority of undocumented immigrants:** Accusations that an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants—about 5% to 6% of the U.S. workforce—should simply “get in line” miss the point: **There is no “line” and the “regular channels” do not include them.**
- **Undocumented immigrants would rather come legally:** Many Americans think that undocumented immigrants want to be undocumented. However, [opinion surveys](#) of undocumented immigrants indicate that, if given a choice, 98% would rather live and work legally in the U.S. and would do so if they could. But most do not have the necessary family relationships to apply for legal entry, do not qualify as refugees unless they come from a handful of countries experiencing political unrest, and do not work in professions that currently qualify for a green card.
- **Getting a green card is easier said than done:** The ways to “come legally” to the U.S. are restricted to certain categories of people.
 - ***Employment-based system out of synch with America’s needs:*** The number of green cards is limited to **5,000 per year for the entire United States** for less-skilled workers such as landscapers, hotel workers, and construction workers. This grossly insufficient number of green cards for workers in these types of jobs is the crux of the illegal immigration problem in the U.S.
 - ***Family immigration is highly restricted:*** U.S. citizens and green-card holders who meet strict eligibility requirements can petition to bring in certain eligible foreign-born family members. However, there are numerical limits on most family categories, and demand is typically higher than the number of available green cards. This results in significant backlogs for most family members hoping to enter the U.S. legally, with immigrants from some countries waiting decades for entry.
 - ***Refugees:*** Persons who can prove a “well-founded fear of persecution” may, in some cases, be granted political asylum or refugee status. However, the burden of proof is high and the process is rigorous. An immigrant does not qualify as a refugee because of poverty or difficult economic conditions in his or her home country.

Immigrant Integration

Many Americans are concerned that immigrants do not learn English, are living in isolated enclaves, and will not integrate into U.S. society. These are the same fears that Americans have harbored for centuries when confronted by each new wave of immigrants to the U.S. However, research shows that today's immigrants are integrating into U.S. society, just as the generations of immigrants before them. They, and their children, learn English, buy homes, intermarry, become U.S. citizens, and otherwise become part of the nation's social fabric.

- **Immigrants are learning English:** The [U.S. Census Bureau](#) found that 92% of all people in the United States spoke English "very well" in 2006. In immigrant communities, mastery of English increases dramatically from generation to generation. According to recent surveys by the [Pew Hispanic Center](#), only 23% of adult Latino immigrants report that they speak English "very well," but this figure rises to 88% among their adult children. Among Latino adults who are third generation or higher, 94% speak English "very well."
- **More immigrants are taking the oath and becoming U.S. citizens:** According to the [Office of Immigration Statistics](#), large and increasing numbers of immigrants are becoming U.S. citizens. The number of naturalizations has grown from an average of 120,000 per year in the 1950s and 1960s to 630,000 per year between 2000 and 2007. Roughly 1.4 million immigrants applied for naturalization last year alone. However, would-be citizens must now wait up to 14 months for their naturalization applications to be processed. Many immigrants who applied for citizenship in the summer of 2007, hoping to vote in the November elections, will not be able to do so because their applications still have not been processed.
- **There is nothing more American than a 30-year mortgage:** Homeownership is a key indicator of entry into the American middle class. Studies have shown that rates of homeownership rise among immigrants the longer they are in the country. Research by [Dowell Myers](#), a prominent demographer at the University of Southern California, found that in 2005, Latino immigrants in California who had been in the U.S. for 30 years or more had a 65% homeownership rate, compared to 16% among those who had been here for less than 10 years.

Immigration and the Environment

Some commentators argue that immigration contributes to “over-population” in the U.S. and therefore causes more pollution, greater consumption of scarce resources, and more damage to the environment. This argument not only ignores the economic forces that drive immigration, but also misses the fundamental point that “over-population” is not the cause of U.S. environmental woes. Solving our environmental problems isn’t as simple as curbing immigration to the U.S. Ultimately, immigrants are not the problem—the U.S. [lifestyle](#), our systems of production and consumption, and the policies that shape them are. We need real, rational solutions and leadership on environmental issues, not scapegoats.

- **“Over-Population” is *not* what damages the U.S. environment:** Levels of environmental destruction and resource consumption are not directly related to population size, even in countries such as the U.S. and those of the European Union (EU) that have similar standards of living. Rather, they are conditioned by a wide range of factors, such as the degree to which a society depends upon polluting and non-renewable fossil fuels; utilizes pollution-reduction technologies; develops systems of mass transit to minimize individual automobile use; uses plastics and other non-biodegradable materials in manufacturing and packaging consumer goods; recycles potentially recyclable materials; and controls agricultural run-off into waterways.
- **A few people can pollute a lot, or a lot of people can pollute a little:** According to the [World Resources Institute](#), in 2000 the U.S. was home to 30.9% fewer people than the nations of the EU-15, yet consumed 50.5% more energy and produced 70.6% more “greenhouse gases,” such as carbon dioxide (CO₂). Even though the U.S. contained only 4.6% of the world’s population, it accounted for 21.1% of global energy consumption and generated 19.2% of all greenhouse gases. The problem is not the number of people in the U.S.; rather, the problem is the way the U.S. produces goods and consumes resources.
- **Blaming immigrants for climate change suggests that less-developed countries should stay that way:** According to those who blame immigrants for our environmental woes, immigrants would ultimately produce less CO₂ if they just remained in their less-industrialized (and therefore less-CO₂-emitting) home countries. Based on this logic, illegal immigration isn’t the problem, increased wealth and international development are.
- **The U.S. isn’t a [lifeboat with limited resources](#) that will sink with too many people:** When it comes to the [global warming crisis](#), we’ll all sink or swim together.

SURVIVING IMMIGRATION INTERROGATIONS:

Quick Responses to the Toughest Questions

Solving Illegal Immigration:

Q: *What are you going to do about illegal immigration?*

A: Immigration reform must be tough, practical, and smart. It is unacceptable to have 12 million people in our country living outside the legal system, and Americans know we can't deport 12 million people to solve the problem.

America wins when we face reality and take action on immigration. Realistic solutions require U.S. not only to secure the border, but to crack down on employers who operate outside the law and smugglers who profit from our broken immigration system. Reform won't work, however, unless we address the 12 million immigrants living here without legal status. We must require them to come forward to legalize their status, pay back taxes, learn English, and pass criminal background checks.

America needs a legal immigration system that secures our borders, strengthens our economy, and benefits our communities. We need a realistic, legal immigration framework that protects U.S. workers while providing needed labor to American businesses. Reasonable limits on family immigration would encourage the unification of families and the building of stable communities. The foundation for this kind of immigration system is strong and sensible enforcement at the border and the workplace.

Border Control:

Q: *How will you control the border?*

A: Securing our border is vital for national security, but we can't deport our way to safety. We must supply adequate manpower and groundbreaking technology to secure the border, but we can't be lulled into thinking that enforcement alone will control the border. Walls, raids, and billions of dollars spent at the border aren't stopping illegal immigration. The annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased 332%, and the number of Border Patrol agents has grown 276%, since 1993. But the undocumented population of the United States has *tripled* in size, from roughly 3.5 million in 1990 to 12 million today. America needs leaders who will move beyond the deportation-only mentality and implement *real* solutions to secure the border and the restore the rule of law.

Worksite Raids:

Q: *Why shouldn't we just raid worksites, deport the illegals, and fine the employers?*

A: Cracking down on unscrupulous employers is a start, but politicians who tell you that we can use raids to deport 12 million people aren't being honest. We need a new vision of worksite enforcement that emphasizes enforcing labor laws so that bad-apple employers don't continue to get away with exploiting their workers. In 2007, after promising to make employer enforcement a priority, the Bush Administration found only 92 employers to arrest and 17 to fine. While the Administration cites a record number of workplace arrests in 2007, 98% were workers and only 2% employers. At the same time, in the last eight years, the Bush Administration has slashed the number of agents charged with enforcing labor laws, and right now the Administration dedicates just one wage-and-hour enforcement agent to every 200,000 workers.

Raids can end up doing more harm than good. As the Mayor of Postville, Iowa said of the May 2008 raid of the Agriprocessors meatpacking plant by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “We didn’t need this. It literally blew our town away.” The raid in Postville clearly illustrates a much larger problem—how unscrupulous employers have been able to exploit vulnerable workers and violate labor laws. Agriprocessors has been accused of sexual harassment, wage-and-hour violations, safety violations, and hiring children as young as 13. ICE interrupted ongoing investigations by state agencies and rounded up and deported potential witnesses.

We can’t deny that current legal channels for immigration to the U.S. aren’t sufficient to provide many employers with the workers they need. We need a new immigrant worker program that provides visas for workers who can fill U.S. labor needs, while protecting them from unscrupulous employers who exploit vulnerable immigrants to undermine wages and working conditions for all workers.

Immigrants and the Economy:

Q: *Should we pass immigration reform while we’re in an economic downturn?*

A: In this economic downturn, many may argue that immigration reform is not a priority, but reforming our broken immigration system is an important part of our economic recovery. Currently, many undocumented workers are working in the underground economy, and unscrupulous employers are able to exploit undocumented workers and create unfair competition by violating labor laws and paying sub-minimal wages. We need to make sure everyone working in the U.S. is working legally, and we need to enforce labor laws against employers who undercut U.S. workers and exploit undocumented workers. Leveling the playing field for both workers and employers will eliminate unfair competition and improve the wages and working conditions of all workers. Putting immigrant workers in the formal economy and higher wages will increase tax revenues and consumption.

Immigrants and Taxes:

Q: *Is it true that illegal immigrants don’t pay taxes and drain our economy?*

A: As Ben Franklin said, “Nothing is certain but death and taxes.” Like the rest of us, undocumented immigrants pay taxes on their property and anything they buy. About half of them have taxes taken out of their paychecks, but because our immigration system is dysfunctional, these taxes are paid under false Social Security numbers. We need a new regimen in which we know who is paying taxes and can ensure that no one is getting a free ride. The only way to do that is to pull undocumented immigrants out of the shadows and get them on the right side of the law.

Three state-level studies have found that undocumented immigrants pay more in taxes than they use in benefits. In **Iowa**, undocumented immigrants pay an estimated \$40 to \$62 million in state taxes, while they and their employers contribute an additional \$50 to \$77.8 million in federal, Social Security, and Medicare taxes from which they will never benefit. In **Oregon**, undocumented immigrants—who are not eligible for any state benefits—pay between \$134 and \$187 million in taxes each year. Finally, in **Texas**, the State Comptroller found that, without undocumented residents, the gross state product in 2005 would have been \$17.7 billion *less*.

Immigrants and Crime:

Q: *Aren't a lot of immigrants criminals?*

A: **Any criminal, foreign or native, must be punished, but don't assume all immigrants are bad guys.** Americans are justifiably concerned about crime in their neighborhoods, and immigration restrictionists are quick to point the spotlight at cases in which immigrants have committed horrible crimes. Anyone who commits a crime should be punished, but there is ample evidence that immigrants are *less* likely than the native-born to be in prison, and high rates of immigration are *not* associated with higher rates of crime. In fact, the incarceration rate for native-born men age 18-39 was five times *higher* than for immigrant men in 2000.

Recent studies in two immigrant-rich states, New Jersey and California, reached similar conclusions. In New Jersey, U.S. citizens are twice as likely to land in prison than either legal or illegal immigrants. And in California, foreign-born adults have lower incarceration rates than their native-born counterparts.

Immigrants and Integration:

Q: *Why aren't the new immigrants assimilating like our ancestors did?*

A: **Learning English, swearing allegiance, and buying homes—what could be more American?** Roughly 92% of all people in the United States spoke English “very well” in 2006. Immigrants know the ticket to success in this country is speaking English, and that's why sociologists have dubbed America the “language grave-yard.” Large and increasing numbers of immigrants are also becoming U.S. citizens. Roughly 1.4 million immigrants applied for naturalization last year alone (in the 1960s the annual average was 120,000). Finally, rates of homeownership—a key indicator of entry into the American middle class—rise among immigrants the longer they are in the country.

We need integration policies for the new century. As our communities become more diverse, we need to facilitate the quick integration of newcomers. Right now, there are long lines to get into English classes—immigrants want to learn English, but we need more teachers and resources to help them do so. Plus, citizenship backlogs are unacceptably long—14 months in some places. We need to encourage all eligible immigrants to become U.S. citizens, and we must ensure that the Department of Homeland Security can process their applications accurately and rapidly. One huge impediment to integration is lack of legal status. It's harder to integrate when you don't have papers. If we require all undocumented immigrants to legalize their status, and if we reform our immigration system so that all immigrants are here legally, it will be easier for them to integrate into U.S. society.

Immigrants and Welfare:

Q: *Aren't immigrants using a lot of public benefits?*

A: **Immigrants are not the welfare queens that restrictionists would have you believe.** The truth is that undocumented immigrants are *not* eligible for most public benefits, and even legal immigrants are limited in what they can receive. Most *legal* immigrants cannot receive federal Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or food stamps during their first five years or longer in the United States—regardless of how long they have worked or how much they have paid in taxes. Even when they are eligible for certain programs, experts say that low-income immigrants are less likely to receive public benefits than are U.S. citizens.

Immigrants and the Environment:

Q: *I've heard immigrants are destroying the environment. Is that true?*

A: **Do we really think that it's immigrants who are driving SUVs and living in McMansions?**

Restrictionists like to point the finger at immigrants, saying that they contribute to population growth and damage the environment. What they don't tell you is that our impact on the environment is determined not just by our numbers, but by how we *use* resources—our systems of production and consumption and the policies that shape them. Immigrants are not the problem—the U.S. lifestyle, use of resources, and CO₂ emissions are the problem. We can't single out immigrants as a cause of increased CO₂ emissions in the United States. Using the restrictionists' rationale, we could choose any group of Americans—the wealthy, residents of a particular state, dog owners, accountants, redheads—and argue that eliminating that group would lower emissions. Curbing immigration is not a solution to our very real environmental problems. We need rational solutions to global climate change issues. Simplistically blaming them on immigrants is not productive.

Immigration Experts and Advocates

Where to Go for More Information

Immigration Policy Center

(www.immigrationpolicy.org)

Angela M. Kelley, Director, (202) 507-7511

Michele Waslin, Senior Policy Analyst (speaks Spanish), (202) 507-7521

Walter Ewing, Senior Researcher, (202) 507-7507

Andrea Nill, Communications and Research Associate (speaks Spanish), (202) 507-7520

General Immigration Policy Organizations

American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)

(www.aila.org)

Trade association for immigration attorneys.

Jeanne Butterfield, Executive Director, (202) 507-7600

Marshall Fitz, Advocacy Director, (202) 507-7615

George Tzamaras, Communications Director, (202) 507-7649

Annie Wilson, Communications Associate (202)-507-7653

America's Voice

(www.americasvoiceonline.org)

A communications and rapid response organization examining the politics of immigration.

Frank Sharry, Executive Director (speaks Spanish), (202) 463-8602

Paco Fabian, Communications Director, (202) 463-8602 x 305

Center for American Progress

(www.americanprogress.org)

Esther Olavarria, Senior Fellow & Director, Immigration Policy (202) 741-6361

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights/Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (www.civilrights.org)

Wade Henderson, Executive Director, (202) 466-3311

Rob Randhava, Immigration Policy Director, (202) 466-6058

Mistique Cano, Communications Director, (202) 263-2882

Maggie Kao, Press Secretary, (202) 466-3311

National Immigration Forum

(www.immigrationforum.org)

Ali Noorani, Executive Director, (202) 347-0040

Mary Giovagnoli, Advocacy Director, (202) 383-5984

Douglas Rivlin, Communications Director, (202) 383-5989 (dir) or (202) 441-0680

Katherine Vargas, Communications Associate, (202) 383-5987, (202) 641-5198

National Immigration Law Center

(www.nilc.org)

Marielena Hincapié, Director of Programs, Los Angeles, (213) 639-3900

Josh Bernstein, Director of Federal Policy, Washington, DC, (202) 216-0261

Rights Working Group

(www.rightsworkinggroup.org)

Jumana Musa, Policy Director, 202-296-2300 x114

Labor

UNITE HERE!

(www.unitehere.org)

Thomas Snyder, National Political Director, (202) 661-3670

María Elena Durazo, President, Local 11 (Los Angeles County Labor Federation), (Speaks Spanish) (213) 381-5611

United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)

(www.ufcw.org)

Jim Papian, Communications Director, (202)-255-3373

Scott Frotman, Communications Spokesman, (202)-664-7419

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

(www.seiu.org)

Eliseo Medina, International Executive Vice President, (Speaks Spanish) (210) 601-6524

Ali Jost, Media Specialist, (speaks Spanish) (202) 730-7159

Business Organizations

American Nursery & Landscape Association

(www.anla.org)

Trade association; member of the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC); member Agricultural Coalition for Immigration Reform.

Craig Regelbrugge, Senior Director of Government Relations, (202) 789-5980 x3013

Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC)

(www.ewic.org)

Umbrella business coalition supporting comprehensive immigration reform.

Laura Reiff, Co-Chair (Partner, Greenberg Traurig LLP), (703) 749-1372

John Gay, Co-Chair (VP, National Restaurant Association), (202) 331-5912

ImmigrationWorksUSA

(www.immigrationworksusa.org)

A pro-immigration business alliance focusing on state and local policies.

Tamar Jacoby, President and Editor, *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American* (Basic Books); (973) 744-6117

National Restaurant Association

(www.restaurant.org)

John Gay, Senior VP for Government Affairs & Public Policy, (202) 331-5912

Brendan Flanagan, Director of Legislative Affairs, (202) 331-5900

Sue Hensley, Senior Vice President for Media Relations, 202-973-3677 or
media@restaurant.org

U.S. Chamber of Commerce

(www.uschamber.com)

Randall Johnson, VP for Labor & Immigration Policy, (202) 463-5448

Angelo I. Amador, Director of Immigration Policy, (Speaks Spanish) (202) 463-5422

Faith-Based Organizations**Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)**

(www.hias.org)

Gideon Aronoff, President and CEO, (212) 967-4100

Lisa Shuger, Washington Director, (202) 857-6616

Roberta Elliott, Communications Director, (212) 967-4100

Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services (LIRS)

(www.lirs.org)

Gregory Chen, Director for Legislative Affairs, (202) 783-7509

Eric Sigmon, (202) 626-7943

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

(www.nccbuscc.org/mrs/)

Kevin Appleby, Migration and Refugee Services Director of Policy, (202) 541-3352

Asian Organizations**Asian American Justice Center (AAJC)**

(www.advancingequality.org)

Karen Narasaki, Executive Director, (202) 296-2300

Leonie L. Campbell-Williams, Communications Manager, (202) 296-2300 x135

Latino Organizations**National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)**

(www.naleo.org)

Arturo Vargas, Executive Director (213)-747-7606

Rosalind Gold, Sr. Director of Policy, Research, and Advocacy, (213) 747-7606, ext. 120

William Ramos, Washington, DC Office Director, (202) 546-2536

National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

(www.nclr.org)

Clarissa Martinez, Director of Immigration and Campaigns (speaks Spanish) (202) 776-1561
Lisa Navarrete, VP, Office of Public Information (speaks Spanish), (202) 776-1744
Marie Watteau, Director, Office of Media Relations (speaks Spanish), (202) 776-1814
Laura Anduze, Senior Media Relations Specialist (speaks Spanish), (202) 776-1568

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

(www.maldef.org)

John Trasviña, President and General Counsel, Los Angeles (213) 629-2512
Peter Zamora, Regional Counsel, Washington, DC (202) 293-2828
John Amaya, Legislative Staff Attorney, Washington, DC (202) 293-2828

State and Local and Grassroots Organizing**Center for Community Change/Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)**

(www.communitychange.org)

Deepak Bhargava, Executive Director, (202) 339-9300
Rich Stolz, Fair Immigration Reform Movement Campaign Coordinator, (202) 339-9300
Germonique R. Jones, Sr. Communications Specialist, (202) 339-9331
Mary Moreno, Sr. Communications Specialist (speaks Spanish) (202) 339-9316

CA: Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)

(www.chirla.org)

Angélica Salas, Executive Director, (213) 353-1333
Anike Tourse, Communications Manager, (213) 353-1339

DC: National Capital Immigration Coalition (NCIC)

(www.ncic-metro.org)

Jaime Contreras, President (and President, SEIU Local 32BJ) (speaks Spanish), (301) 775-0202
See also: Casa of Maryland (below)

IL: Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

(www.icirr.org)

Josh Hoyt, Executive Director, (312) 332-7360 x211
Fred Tsao, Policy Director (312) 332-7360 x213
Catherine Salgado, Communications Manager (speaks Spanish), (312) 332-7360 x 235

MD: CASA of Maryland, Inc. (Takoma Park, MD and statewide)

(www.casademaryland.org)

Gustavo Torres, Executive Director (speaks Spanish), (301) 431-4185
Kim Propeack, Legal Counsel, (301) 431-4185, x216

MA: Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition

(www.miracoalition.org)

Eva Malona, Interim Executive Director, (617)-350-5480 x211
Shuya Ohno, Communications Director, (617)26350-5480 x204, (617) 821-8990 (mobile)

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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www.immigrationpolicy.org • info@aifl.org

MI: ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic & Social Services) (Dearborn)

(www.accesscommunity.org)

Hannan Deep, Communications Director, (313) 842-7010

NY: New York Immigration Coalition

(www.thenyic.org)

Chung-Wha Hong, Executive Director, (212) 627-2227

Norman Eng, Communications Coordinator, (212) 627-2227, x235

OR: CAUSA/PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste – Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United)

(www.causaoregon.org; www.pcun.org)

Ramon Ramirez, Executive Director (speaks Spanish), (503) 982-0243, x 201

Aeryca Steinbauer, Campaign Coordinator, (503) 984-6816

Erik Sorensen, Communications Director, (503) 488-0263

TN: Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition

(www.TNimmigrant.org)

Stephen Fotopolous, Executive Director, (615) 833-0384

Catalina Nieto, Communications Coordinator, (615) 833-0384

Immigration Research

National Foundation for American Policy

(www.nfap.com)

Stuart Anderson, Executive Director, Former Executive Associate Commissioner for Policy and Counselor to the Commissioner of the INS and Staff Director of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, (703) 351-5042

Migration Policy Institute

Michelle Mittelstadt, Press Contact, (202) 266-1910

Muzaffar Chishti (Migration Policy Institute at New York University Law School), (212) 992-8844

Pew Hispanic Center

(www.pewhispanic.org)

Jeffrey Passel, Senior Research Associate, (202) 419-3600

Press Inquiries: (202) 419-3606.

Public Policy Institute of California

(www.ppic.org)

Laura Hill, Research Fellow (415) 291-4424

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc.

(www.ilctr.org)

Marcia Hohn, Director of Public Education (781) 322-9777