U.S. Immigration Policy
in an Unsettled World

THE CHOICES PROGRAM
Explore the Past... Shape the Future
History and Current Issues for the Classroom

WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
BROWN UNIVERSITY WWW.CHOICES.EDU
Acknowledgments

U.S. Immigration Policy in an Unsettled World was developed by the Choices Program with the assistance of the research staff at the Watson Institute for International Studies, scholars at Brown University, and other experts in the field. We wish to thank the following researchers for their invaluable input to this and previous editions:

Peter Andreas  
Professor of Political Science and International Studies  
Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

Elsie Begler  
Director  
International Studies Education Project, San Diego

Robert G. Lee  
Associate Professor of American Studies  
Brown University

Stephen Shenfield  
Former Assistant Professor (Research)  
Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University

Michael White  
Professor of Sociology  
Brown University

U.S. Immigration Policy in an Unsettled World is part of a continuing series on public policy issues. New units are published each academic year and all units are updated regularly.

Visit us online — www.choices.edu
Contents

Introduction: U.S. Immigration Policy 1
Part I: Immigration and the U.S. Experience 2
  The Nineteenth Century 2
  The Twentieth Century 5
Part II: Immigration Today 10
  Immigration and the Economy 10
  Refugees 12
  Undocumented Immigrants 13
  National Security: A New Climate 16
Options in Brief 20
  Option 1: Open Ourselves to the World 21
  Option 2: Make Emigration Unnecessary 23
  Option 3: Admit the Talent We Need 25
  Option 4: Restrict Immigration 27
Supplementary Document 29
Supplementary Resources 33
This photo from 1902, “Emigrants coming to the land of promise,” shows people huddled on the deck of a ship coming to the United States.

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tost to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

—Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”
inscribed at the Statue of Liberty

These political cartoons reflect the debate in the United States about immigration. The cartoon above is from 2006. The cartoon on the right is from 1882, the year of the Chinese Exclusion Act. It depicts Republicans and Democrats holding the hair of a Chinese person while uprooting the tree of liberty.

The caption reads: “(Dis) ’Honors are Easy.’ Now both parties have something to hang on.”
Introduction: U.S. Immigration Policy

At the celebration of the opening of the Statue of Liberty in 1886, the United States was a country of fewer than sixty million people. Vast tracts of land in the West and the Great Plains were still largely unsettled, and the country’s growing cities were in the middle of the Industrial Revolution. That year, 334,000 immigrants entered the United States. The country was in the early stages of a forty-year upsurge in immigration that would transform society and spark debate about U.S. immigration policy. Even though many viewed the immigrants streaming into the country with apprehension, few could deny the need for more farmers and factory workers.

To say that the United States is a country of immigrants is more than an acknowledgment of history. It also reflects how many U.S. citizens perceive their country’s place in the world as a beacon of freedom and opportunity. Since records were first kept in 1820, more than seventy-four million immigrants have come to the United States. About one-third of that total moved between 1881 and 1920.

After a lull of almost half a century, immigration rates turned upward again in the late 1970s. The 9.5 million newcomers who arrived in the 1980s surpassed the previous peak in the early twentieth century. In the 1990s, immigration continued to rise. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than one million immigrants (legal and undocumented) have come to the United States each year.

As in 1886, these latest newcomers are arriving at a time when U.S. immigration policy is the subject of debate. With the U.S. population greater than 313 million and unemployment running high, many contend that the United States does not have room for more immigrants. Others argue that the United States cannot afford to close the door to the skills and energy newcomers bring. Many also believe that the United States has a humanitarian obligation to keep its doors open to refugees fleeing political or religious conflict.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, national security has also become a prominent issue in the debate over immigration policy. The fear of terrorists has led to increased border control, stricter enforcement of immigration laws, and more frequent deportations. Nevertheless, the United States continues to accept more immigrants, by far, than any other country.

In the following pages, you will explore the issues surrounding immigration policy and consider the course the United States should take. In Part I of the reading, you will examine the history of immigration and its evolution over time. Part II explores the nature of immigration today and the policy issues facing the United States. Ultimately, you will consider the same questions U.S. policy makers confront: How much immigration should the United States allow? How does immigration affect the economy? What responsibility does the United States have to citizens of other countries? How should the United States balance national security and its historical tradition of immigration?
Part I: Immigration and the U.S. Experience

The generation that authored the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution traced its roots primarily to the British Isles and other areas of northwestern Europe. They welcomed the prospect of continued immigration, but also sought to limit who could become citizens. The Naturalization Act of 1790 limited citizenship to free white people of “good moral character.”

“The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.”

—President George Washington, December 2, 1783

The Nineteenth Century

Even without an official policy, the United States proved to be a magnet for immigrants in the 1800s. For most of the century, a nearly ideal balance existed between the problems of Europe and the needs of the United States. In much of Europe, the forces of the Industrial Revolution, shifts in agriculture, and a soaring population left millions of people unable to make a living. In addition, a blight wiped out the potato crop in much of northwestern Europe in the late 1840s. Ireland, hit particularly hard by the blight, lost half a million people to disease and starvation.

Meanwhile, the United States expanded in both size and wealth throughout the 1800s. By 1848, the country stretched across the continent. Booming factories and abundant farmland seemed capable of absorbing an endless stream of immigrants. U.S. railroad companies actively recruited workers in Europe, while steamship companies depicted...
a country of boundless opportunity to spur ticket sales for the voyage across the Atlantic. Many immigrants began work as agricultural laborers, while others settled in cities and found jobs as servants or factory workers. Out west, immigrants found work in the growing mining industry.

Between 1820 and 1880, 70 percent of immigrants to the United States came from Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland. The Irish were the first Roman Catholics to arrive in large numbers in what was largely a Protestant country.

**What was the Know-Nothing Party?**

Immigrants found not only opportunity in the United States, but often hardship and discrimination as well. As immigrants poured into the United States, many U.S. citizens worried about the new arrivals. From the earliest days of the republic, there had been anxiety about the social and political implications of immigration. Thomas Jefferson argued against welcoming the “servile masses of Europe,” fearing that they would transform the U.S. people into an “incoherent, distracted mass.”

The first organized opposition to open immigration emerged in the 1840s with the creation of the American Party, better known as the Know-Nothing Party because of the secretiveness of its members. The Know-Nothings claimed that Irish and German immigrants, most of whom were Roman Catholic, would corrupt the country’s Protestant heritage. The Know-Nothings used violence to terrorize newcomers. Although the Know-Nothings faded from the political arena before the Civil War, anti-immigrant feelings remained strong among some groups.

“...Irish and Germans coming by Canada, New York, and New Orleans, [are] filthy, intemperate, unused to the comforts of life.... The air seems to be corrupted....”

—New York Mayor Philip Hone, June 30, 1849

**Which immigrant groups arrived at the turn of the century?**

The 1890 census revealed that the frontier of the American West had been filled in. The most fertile land of the Great Plains and western valleys had been claimed by newcomers. At the same time, the industrial cities of the Northeast and the Great Lakes region still needed cheap, unskilled labor.

During the period from 1881 to 1920, the majority of newcomers came from southern and eastern Europe, especially from Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia. These immigrants had different languages, cultures, and religions than immigrants from the British Isles. The new wave of immigrants formed close-knit
communities in major cities. Distinct enclaves of Italians, Poles, Jews, Greeks, and other ethnic groups peppered U.S. urban centers. By 1900, four out of five New Yorkers either were born abroad or were the children of immigrants.

In response to the new immigrant groups, anti-immigration forces in Congress sought to make literacy a requirement for entry to the United States. Since free public education was slow to advance in much of southern and eastern Europe, opponents of immigration expected that a literacy test would stem the flow of newcomers from those regions.

How were Asian immigrants received?
While the eastern and central parts of the country experienced an influx of European newcomers, large numbers of Asian immigrants arrived mainly in California. Between 1861 and 1880, almost two hundred thousand Chinese came to the United States, recruited for construction crews for the transcontinental railroad. They soon found other kinds of jobs as well, and by the 1870s, they comprised 20 to 30 percent of the labor force in California. Their willingness to work for low wages caused other workers to lobby for laws to restrict them. State law barred Asian immigrants from marrying whites or testifying in court against whites. Riots in a number of communities were resulting in a backlash against the presence of Asian immigrants.

Immigration and Race
Immigrant groups in the United States represent diverse ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. Throughout history, immigrants have also been defined along racial lines. Like African Americans at the time, many immigrants who arrived during the Civil War or the period of Reconstruction that followed experienced racism and exclusion. In fact, some abolitionists drew attention to the poor treatment of immigrant groups alongside the cause of ending slavery. Immigrants were often labeled “black” or “white” as a means of discrimination. More than skin tone, these labels were based on which region a person came from (Europe versus Asia or Africa). Following the turn of the century, immigrant communities continued to be defined by race. From California to Mississippi, immigrants, regardless of their status as legal or illegal, were segregated in schools and denied certain rights because they were not considered “white.”

“"There are such things in the world as human rights.... Among these, is the right of locomotion; the right of migration, the right which belongs to no particular race, but belongs alike to all and to all alike.... It is this right that I assert for the Chinese and the Japanese and for all other varieties of men equally with yourselves, now and forever.... [W]hen there is a supposed conflict between humanity and national rights, it is safe to go on the side of humanity.”
—Frederick Douglass, “Composite Nation” speech in Boston, Massachusetts, 1869
western towns resulted in the deaths of dozens of Chinese newcomers.

In response to anti-Chinese sentiment, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. This law prohibited more Chinese workers from entering the United States. Further laws led to a complete suspension of Chinese immigration and prohibited those already in the country from sending for their family. The Chinese Exclusion Act set the stage for later efforts to establish immigration restrictions on the basis of national origin.

Japanese immigrants began arriving during this same period because, for the first time in three hundred years, their government allowed them to emigrate. Like the Chinese, they were known as hard workers who would work for low wages. It was not long before they too became the victims of prejudice. There was talk of a “yellow peril” and the city of San Francisco created segregated schools, separating Asians from other children. The Japanese government protested to President Theodore Roosevelt, but in what became known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907, Roosevelt persuaded Japan to place restrictions on emigration again. Discrimination against Asian immigrants in the United States continued.

The Twentieth Century

The anti-immigration movement that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century drew upon the ideas advocated by the Know-Nothings half a century earlier and gained support from other groups. Labor union organizers, for example, feared that their struggle to raise wages and improve working conditions was hurt by the availability of cheap immigrant labor. In addition, political reformers believed that immigrant voters could be easily manipulated to support corrupt big-city politicians.

The campaign to restrict immigration faced opposition from business leaders. In addition, presidents from Grover Cleveland in 1895 to Woodrow Wilson in 1915 repeatedly vetoed Congressional legislation to require a literacy test for immigrants. Not until 1917, with people in the United States caught up in the nationalistic spirit of World War I, did Congress override President Wilson’s veto, making literacy an entrance requirement. In 1921, Congress passed another restrictive law, creating limits on the numbers of immigrants admitted from each country. These quotas served as the foundation of the Immigration Act of 1924, more commonly known as the National Origins Act.

What was the 1924 National Origins Act?

The National Origins Act grew out of recommendations presented to Congress in 1911 by the Dillingham Commission, a group of senators who investigated the state and effect of immigration. Reflecting the mood of Congress, the commission called for new regulations to reduce immigration. More importantly, it proposed limiting the number of immigrants to be accepted from each country.

Many of the Dillingham Commission’s suggestions found their way into the legislation that followed. The National Origins Act of 1924 limited the annual immigration quota of each European nationality to 2 percent of its proportion in the U.S. population in 1890. This had the effect of significantly reducing immigration by Italians, Hungarians, Poles, and other groups that only began coming to the United States in large numbers after 1890. The 1924 act also affirmed earlier laws that kept immigration from Asia to a minimum. While the quota for immigrants from Great Britain and Northern Ireland totaled 34,007 (2 percent of the total number of Britons and Irish in the United States at the time), the quota for Chinese immigrants was only 100.

The 1924 National Origins Act governed U.S. immigration policy until 1952. During this period, immigration fell to its lowest level since the mid-1800s. The effects of the quota system, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and World War II combined to reduce immigration significantly. In the 1930s, the number of people emigrating from the United States actually exceeded the number of immigrants coming into the country.
How did the Cold War affect immigration policy?
Following this lull in immigration, the United States underwent a dramatic transformation. World War II not only lifted the U.S. economy out of the Great Depression, but also sparked a new era of technological innovation. The United States emerged from the war as the most powerful country on earth. By the late 1940s, U.S. leaders had taken on a new range of international commitments to thwart the growing threat of the Soviet Union. The deepening Cold War—a global struggle for political and military domination between communist bloc countries led by the Soviet Union and capitalist, democratic countries led by the United States—redefined the U.S. role in the world. The war touched almost every aspect of government policy, including regulations on immigration.

The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 highlighted the new international position of the United States. The act allowed for the admission of more than 400,000 refugees left homeless by World War II and the imposition of Soviet communism in Eastern Europe. The Displaced Persons Act was followed in the 1950s and 1960s by a number of special bills designed to offer refuge to “escapees” from communist countries. The biggest wave of refugees—approximately 700,000—came from Cuba after a revolution brought communist leader Fidel Castro to power in 1959.

At the same time, the United States excluded refugees from countries who were not clearly escaping communism. For example, the majority of refugees from Central America were denied admission despite ongoing civil wars.

How was 1965 a turning point in immigration?
In 1952, the Immigration and Nationality Act slightly relaxed restrictions against immigration from Asia. Otherwise, the system created in 1924 remained in place until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s forced lawmakers to re-examine the national origins quotas. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, enacted during a period of robust economic growth, replaced the old quotas with a set of new requirements. The act placed priority on reuniting families and attracting highly skilled professionals.
The 1965 act immediately boosted immigration for the nationalities that the previous quota system severely restricted. As late as the 1950s, 68 percent of the immigrants entering the United States had come from Europe and Canada. The new law cleared the way for greater immigration from Asia. Asian doctors, nurses, engineers, scientists, and other university-trained specialists were part of an unprecedented wave of immigration due to the emphasis on admitting professionals. The 1965 act also set in motion a chain reaction that would affect future immigration patterns. Under the preference system, newcomers with citizenship status could sponsor the immigration of their spouses, children, and siblings. These new arrivals, in turn, could arrange for other family members to join them.

In the 1970s, immigration law faced new challenges as immigrants began to enter the United States in the largest numbers in half a century. Officially, legal controls on immigration were tighter than in the early 1900s. No more than twenty thousand immigrants from any single country could enter the United States annually. The law also limited the total number of immigrants to be admitted annually to 290,000. (The immediate relatives of U.S. citizens—spouses, children under age eighteen, and parents—were exempt from this limit.)

Despite the strict regulations, more immigrants entered the country outside of normal routes, either as refugees or undocumented immigrants. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of backlogged applicants clogged the conventional channels of immigration. Mexicans—who made up 24 percent of legal immigrants between 1971 and 1991—for example, faced a wait of more than six years to have their applications processed.
Who are the immigrants of the last two decades?

In the last two decades, the ranks of immigrants have been swelled by refugees and asylum seekers, who are granted special status within the law. Many come from countries in the Middle East and Africa where war, political instability, and religious and ethnic conflict are frequent. The immigrant population also continues to grow due to the flow of undocumented immigrants. Of the approximately 1.5 million immigrants who settled in the United States in 2009, the U.S. government estimates that roughly 350,000 were undocumented immigrants and 170,000 were refugees or asylum seekers.

At the same time, new arrivals in recent decades are the most highly educated group of immigrants in U.S. history. Many come to work in the United States from China, India, Philippines, and Korea. In the 1990s, 1.6 million college-educated immigrants joined the work force, nearly 50 percent of them from Asia.

What are the ways people gain legal entry to live and work in the United States?

There are many ways people from other countries obtain legal status to reside, study, work, or travel in the United States. The majority of non-U.S. citizens living in the country have visas or green cards.

Recent Immigration Laws

• The Refugee Act of 1980 was prompted largely by the arrival of more than four hundred thousand refugees from Southeast Asia between 1975 and 1980. The legislation sought to create greater consistency in refugee policy by allowing for both a regular flow of refugees and emergency admissions.

• In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act tackled the issue of undocumented immigrants. To stem the flow of unauthorized immigration, the act imposed penalties on employers who knowingly hired workers without proper documentation. It also allowed undocumented immigrants who had lived in the United States since 1981, including agricultural workers, to become citizens. Under the amnesty program, about 3.2 million immigrants gained legal status.

• The Immigration Act of 1990 raised the limit on annual admissions from 290,000 to 675,000 immigrants. (The 1965 act had set the limit of 290,000.) The act also nearly tripled the number of spots reserved for newcomers with prized job skills and their families. Like the 1965 act, the Immigration Act of 1990 made family reunification the guiding principle of U.S. immigration policy.

• The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 grew out of the economic troubles of the early 1990s. In its original form, it would have reduced overall annual immigration to 535,000 (including refugees and asylum seekers) and strengthened border control efforts. By the time the bill became law, the economic outlook had brightened and Congress had narrowed the focus of the act to curbing illegal immigration. The 1996 act streamlined procedures for deporting undocumented immigrants and rejecting asylum claims. The number of deportations doubled as a result. Critics warned that the law placed too much power in the hands of government agencies and denied legitimate refugees a fair hearing.

• The Real ID Act of 2005 was based on recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. Its goal is to strengthen national security by implementing stricter standards for obtaining state-issued IDs. The law requires that states implement new federal documentation requirements for issuing driver’s licenses and state-issued identification cards. Proponents of the act hope that new regulations to verify identity will make it more difficult for immigrants without “lawful status” to receive a fraudulent ID. Compliance with the law has been spotty. As of 2013, only nineteen states had met the new federal standards for issuing IDs.
Visas are granted for temporary work, education, or travel in the United States. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services issues over thirty types of visas every year. While those enrolled in school may stay for the length of their program on a student visa, temporary employees typically have up to three years to live in the United States before they must return home. Much of the debate about immigration policy centers on employment visas and how many people should be allowed to immigrate for seasonal, highly-skilled, or other forms of work. Speciality visas are also available to refugees and victims of crime or human trafficking.

People who plan to reside or work in the United States for a longer period of time often apply for a green card. A green card grants a person lawful permanent residence. Green cards are available under certain restrictions to family members of citizens, employees with permanent job placements, persons who were granted entry as refugees, investors in U.S. companies, and individuals who have worked in one of the Special Job Categories defined by the federal government (for example, an Afghan/Iraqi translator).

Lastly, people who want to obtain full citizenship must go through the process of naturalization. People who apply for naturalization must meet certain requirements. These include holding a green card for over five years, speaking English, and passing a test on U.S. history and civics.

How has the immigration debate changed in recent years?

The high numbers of newcomers in the 1990s and early 2000s set off a debate about immigration not seen since the late nineteenth century. Pressure for immigration reform gathered momentum and Congress passed a series of laws that addressed refugees, undocumented immigrants, and the reunification of families.

Although new laws and increased personnel have streamlined the immigration process, the system remains slow and overburdened. Today, the backlog of visa applications has decreased, but some immigrants can still face waits of five years. Each year, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service processes about six million immigration applications. The sheer number of applicants and the individual attention that must be given to each put significant stress on the system. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands more enter the United States outside of these legal channels and become undocumented immigrants.

After September 11, 2001, the immigration debate became more complex, with increased focus given to national security. The economic recession that began in 2007 led to further scrutiny of immigrants, their use of social services, and their role in the workforce. Anti-immigrant sentiments have increased due to these domestic policy concerns. Every year, members of Congress say they will tackle “immigration reform,” but differing opinions on how to deal with the complex issues make it a difficult task for both U.S. policy makers and the public.
Part II: Immigration Today

Today, immigrants are drawn to a life in the United States in record numbers. The United States continues to lure many with the promise of a better future. Scholars estimate that immigrants—lawful permanent residents, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants—made up approximately 13 percent (40.4 million) of the U.S. population in 2011. Congress and government agencies continue to debate how best to deal with the steady stream of immigrants and those already living in the United States. Concerns about the economic security of U.S. workers fuels the debate, just as it has throughout U.S. history. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 added another dimension to the debate surrounding immigration and national security.

Recently, immigration policy has come head-to-head with health care, unemployment, national security, education and other important domestic issues. In the foreign policy arena, immigration has left a mark on human rights, international trade, the worldwide refugee crisis, and U.S. relations with Latin America. The question for you to answer at the end of this reading is: What should U.S. immigration policy be?

Before you consider the future of U.S. immigration policy, you will explore the chief issues of the debate. This reading reviews the economic impact of immigration, the role of undocumented immigration, refugee policy, and concerns about national security.

Immigration and the Economy

Economic concerns have long dominated discussions about immigration. For most of the past century, business leaders and large-scale farmers have generally favored open immigration to ensure an adequate supply of low-wage workers. In the early 1900s, the steady flow of unskilled immigrants into the labor force helped fuel the boom in manufacturing. Although opportunities for unskilled factory workers have declined since World War II, other industries, such as hospitality and agriculture, continue to depend on low-wage labor to hold down costs.

What are the economic arguments in favor of immigration?

Many economists attribute some of the success of the U.S. economy to the openness of U.S. society and the influx of skills and labor from overseas. For example, immigrants from China and India started 30 percent of the new high-tech companies in Silicon Valley during the 1990s.

Supporters of open immigration policies note that many high-tech industries have come to rely on newcomers. Immigrants tend to specialize in engineering, computer science, chemistry, and other fields that are in high demand. In 2012, over 760,000 foreign students were enrolled in U.S. higher education, from undergraduate to doctoral degree programs.

In the past two decades, immigrants in large urban areas have helped revive downtown business districts. Many have opened up small businesses, created new jobs, and strengthened the local tax base. Without the influx of immigrants, the United States’ largest cities would have experienced a drop in population since 1980.

Low-skilled immigrant workers also supply a steady stream of labor for certain industries, such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and meat-processing.

Part II Definitions

Social Services and Welfare—government programs or benefits that assist children, the elderly, impoverished adults, and the disabled.

Deportation—the removal of a person from the United States.
What are the economic arguments against immigration?

Historically, opposition on economic grounds to open immigration laws has come from labor union leaders. They claim that high levels of immigration have taken jobs away from people born in the United States. Immigration critics note that one-third of immigrants lack a high school diploma, double the rate for U.S. citizens. They maintain that the entry of unskilled immigrant workers into the economy holds down wages at the bottom of the employment ladder. Economic research supports this argument.

Other critics argue that U.S. immigration policy drains poor countries of their most-educated professionals. Experts estimate that about half of the foreign students who study in U.S. universities do not return to their home countries after graduation. Officials in some poor countries have even made the case that they should be compensated by the United States for highly skilled emigrants who leave their countries.

What is the relationship between immigration and social services?

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 made all legal immigrants eligible to receive the same government benefits as citizens. This changed in 1996, when Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. While the law granted benefits to families in need, it excluded legal and undocumented immigrants who met the income qualifications. Many in Congress hoped that the 1996 law would discourage would-be immigrants from coming to the United States to take advantage of the welfare system. But as the immigrant community has continued to grow, the burden has shifted from the federal government to state and local governments.

Under the 1996 law, states are still required to provide health and financial benefits to the children of legal residents. In addition, states must offer free, public education to students no matter the status of their families. During a time when education budgets have been shrinking, many states have struggled to keep up with the materials and staff they need.
to meet the demands of a diverse and multilingual student population.

Certain regions face greater costs than others. Six in ten immigrants live in California, New York, Texas, Florida, and New Jersey. Meanwhile, five states—Kentucky, South Carolina, Mississippi, Wisconsin, and North Carolina—have experienced the fastest growth in immigration. In Kentucky, the number of immigrants in the state grew by 97 percent between 2000 and 2011. Some states have passed laws to provide financial assistance and health coverage not required by federal law to struggling immigrant families. Approximately one-third of immigrants lack health coverage and one-fifth live in poverty.

The cost of newcomers in terms of education, health care, and welfare colors the debate on immigration, but the topic is complex. Despite the unique burden immigrant communities place on certain social services, studies suggest that immigrant parents, including legal residents, are less likely to seek out benefits for their children. Language barriers, lengthy paperwork, and fear of deportation for themselves or their family members lead to lower usage rates than eligible citizens.

Immigrants also contribute a significant amount to these state and federal programs through the payment of sales, property, and income taxes. On the other hand, for immigrants making lower wages, economic research suggests that on average they receive slightly more in benefits than they pay in taxes.

Refugees

The issue of refugee policy has become more prominent in recent years. The 1980 Refugee Act opened the United States to more refugees and changed the definition of refugee to conform with United Nations (UN) standards.

"A refugee is a person unable or unwilling to return to [his or her home country]...because of persecution or a well-founded fear."

An International Look at Immigration

The United States is not alone among wealthy countries in dealing with the issues of immigration. In the early 1990s, Western Europe was the destination of at least four million people seeking refuge. Most were fleeing from war in the Balkans. Thousands of others sought to escape poverty of the former Soviet bloc and Africa. From 1990 to 1995, Germany took in 2.4 million foreigners, many of them asylum seekers. In 1993, Germany narrowed its definition of political asylum and began deporting foreigners who did not meet the new standards. Other European countries followed Germany’s lead, tightening their policies on both asylum and general immigration.

Nonetheless, the peace and prosperity of Western Europe continues to attract millions of would-be immigrants. While some countries in Northern and Western Europe see immigration from other parts of the region, large numbers of immigrants also come from North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) and the Middle East. The influx in immigrants from countries outside the European Union, many undocumented, has created some tensions in local communities. The September 11 terrorist attacks and bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) have also led many countries in Europe to increase border security and heighten their internal monitoring of immigrant communities.

In Canada too, recent adjustments in immigration standards reflect a change in priorities. In 2012, Canada admitted about 257,000 immigrants—a much higher percentage of its population than immigrant admissions to the United States. Unlike U.S. immigration laws, Canadian standards are geared toward admitting young, college-educated newcomers who speak fluent English or French. Emphasis on reunifying families has been downgraded.
of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

—Refugee Act of 1980

Although the Refugee Act called for the admission of roughly fifty thousand refugees and asylum seekers a year, the annual total has averaged over eighty-five thousand since the law was enacted.

U.S. refugee laws during the Cold War were primarily an instrument of foreign policy. Preference was given to refugees escaping from communist countries. Of the more than two million refugees admitted from 1980 to 2001, 85 percent came from communist or former communist countries.

In the past two decades, a worldwide refugee crisis has challenged old assumptions. Since 2001, U.S. policy shifted to admit more refugees from crises and conflicts. Today, the internationally recognized refugee population is almost fifteen million, largely due to war and famine. Refugee applications to the United States have shot up to more than twenty times previous levels. Of the seventy-six thousand immigration visas set aside for refugees in 2012, 35,500 were earmarked for the Middle East and South Asia. In contrast, Europe was set at 2,000, and Latin America at 5,500.

Critics of U.S. refugee policy are sharply divided among themselves. Some charge that the United States has lost sight of humanitarian considerations in awarding immigration visas. They want refugee and asylum applicants to be evaluated in strict accordance with UN standards, regardless of the political significance of their countries of origin. Others assert that many of the people admitted as refugees and asylum seekers are not fleeing persecution, but simply looking for a better life. They favor lowering the overall ceiling for the number of refugees admitted into the United States.

Undocumented Immigrants

Today, an estimated eleven million undocumented immigrants currently reside in the United States. The U.S. government calculates that many of them arrived as tourists, students, or businesspeople, and then stayed beyond the limitations of their visas. Some used false documents to get past immigration officials at airports. Others came across the U.S. border illegally as children or adults. In recent years, the number of people apprehended trying to enter the United States without documentation has dropped significantly.

How has immigration from south of the border changed?

Before 1924, no attempts were made to monitor the borders. The subjects of border control and undocumented immigrants were seldom mentioned. Until 1968, there were not even official limits on immigration from countries in the Western Hemisphere. In recent decades, all of this has changed. Undocumented immigrants enter the United States from
all parts of the globe. The public spotlight and U.S. government resources have zeroed in mainly on undocumented immigrants who enter the country by crossing the U.S.-Mexican border.

Until recently, there was a particularly heavy flow from across the southern border. Workers from Mexico have been a critical part of the labor force in the Southwest for many years. In the past, Mexican immigrants generally worked in agriculture during the growing season and then returned to their homes in Mexico. Today, there is much less seasonal migration between the United States and Mexico. In fact, more Mexicans have returned to Mexico than come to the United States.

**The DREAM Act**

In 2001, the DREAM Act, or the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, was first introduced in Congress. The bill addressed the large population of undocumented immigrants who were children when they first arrived in the United States. The DREAM Act sought to change immigration law in two ways: 1) undocumented immigrant students who receive their high school diploma and plan to attend college would be eligible for public financial assistance to help them pay for school; 2) a path to citizenship would be made available to these students. Although the bill did not pass in 2001, it has been reintroduced every few years.

Opponents of the bill argue that the DREAM Act will encourage “criminal” behavior and reward undocumented immigrants. Supporters of the bill, including student groups called DREAMers, argue that as the children of undocumented immigrants they did not have a say in where they grew up. Furthermore, they consider themselves Americans and believe their education and work will benefit the country. In 2010, the bill passed in the House of Representatives, but it failed in the Senate. Frustrated with the outcome, President Obama (2009-) established the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Process. The president’s executive action allows undocumented immigrants up to age thirty-one who were brought to the country as children to pursue higher education and jobs without the risk of deportation. Legislators and activists continue to demand broader legislation that will provide a clear path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.
since 2005. A weak U.S. job market, increased border security, and improved economic conditions in Mexico may all have contributed to this development. Nevertheless, large farms and low-wage industries in the United States continue to rely on undocumented Mexican workers.

How has the profile of the average undocumented immigrant changed?

In the last two decades, the undocumented immigrant population has changed. Although the typical undocumented immigrant is still a single young man, more women and children are entering the country illegally as well. Fewer than one-fifth of today’s undocumented immigrants work in agriculture, far less than before. The majority live and work in large cities.

Mexicans make up a smaller proportion of undocumented immigrants than in the past. Increasingly, undocumented immigrants are arriving from Central America, the Caribbean, and Asia. In addition, the U.S. State Department reports that hundreds of thousands of immigrants have entered the United States through organized smuggling rings, many from China and South Asia.

What impact do undocumented immigrants have on state and local economies?

In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that states must provide undocumented immigrants with schooling. That decision, along with the growing proportion of women and children among the undocumented immigrant population, has added to the education and health care budgets of many states.

The same states that are burdened by the social service needs of undocumented immigrants are also home to businesses that employ them. Whether stitching pants in a clothing factory, washing dishes in a restaurant, or harvesting fruits and vegetables, undocumented immigrants have become a crucial element of the work force in many areas. Most are willing to accept demanding jobs for low wages.

Critics of illegal hiring maintain that some employers prefer hiring undocumented workers because they are unlikely to complain about low pay and poor working conditions due to fear of being fired or deported. In fact, law enforcement officials report that clothing factories that violate worker’s rights, known as “sweatshops,” have made a comeback in Los Angeles and New York in part due to the availability of undocumented immigrant labor.

What is E-Verify?

Local, state, and federal governments have found it difficult to penalize employers in the United States for hiring undocumented immigrants. In many places, undocumented immigrants are able to obtain false documents and apply for jobs as legal residents. In some cases, employers deliberately hire undocumented workers.

In recent years, there has been a push at both the state and federal levels to implement E-Verify laws. These would require that employers use electronic databases from the Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration to check the identity of their employees. Proponents
of E-Verify argue that it gives law-abiding employers a tool to ensure they hire legal residents and discourages undocumented immigration. Critics point to the high costs of implementing these requirements across the board. They also argue that employers who have been ignoring the law will continue to do so unless a more targeted approach is developed.

While E-Verify still remains voluntary in many areas, some states have passed mandatory E-Verify laws for government agencies, others for all public and private businesses.

**National Security: A New Climate**

The debate surrounding immigration is not limited to economic issues. Maintaining national security has long been an important consideration in immigration and refugee policy. For example, in 1992, thousands of Haitians set sail for U.S. shores after the Haitian army overthrew the island nation’s newly elected president. The refugee crisis was a key factor in the U.S. decision to send twenty thousand U.S. troops to Haiti in September 1994 in an attempt to restore a democratic government on the island.

For a long time, many people considered drug smuggling as the biggest issue surrounding immigration’s potential threats to national security. The United States devotes huge resources to stopping drugs from entering the country, especially across the U.S.-Mexican border. In 2008, the United States and Mexico entered a joint effort, called the Merida Initiative, to decrease drugs and arms trafficking across their shared border. Since its inception, the United States has given billions of dollars to strengthen Mexico’s security and judicial systems.

**What changes did the government make following the September 11 attacks?**

The September 11 terrorist attacks changed how many U.S. citizens look at the world. The attacks awakened the belief in many that open borders and an open society had made the United States vulnerable to this terrible event. The nineteen hijackers were Islamic extremists from the Middle East. Sixteen had entered the United States on student visas—not as immigrants or refugees. The others used manipulated passports and fraudulent visas, and were able to persuade border officials to grant them entry into the United States. Most were able to avoid suspicion while in the United States, despite violating immigration laws.

Two weeks before September 11, the FBI received information connecting two of the hijackers to the bombing of the USS Cole. A search for the men began. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was alerted, but the two men could not be found. Because
the FBI was not aware of a specific threat, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and other authorities were not notified. Improved communication and coordination between agencies became a top priority in the struggle to prevent terrorism.

“The national security demands that we know who is living within our borders, especially since 9/11.”
—Senator John Cornyn, May 16, 2006

In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was formed and assumed control of protecting U.S. borders. The DHS now coordinates and manages the work of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly the INS), the Customs Service, Border Patrol, the Transportation Security Administration, and other agencies.

How did September 11 change attitudes about immigration?

The terrorist attacks added a new dimension to the debate about immigration and the United States as a place for those from other countries. While some experts warned of cells of terrorists in the United States, legal immigrants from the Middle East and Muslims from around the world worried that suspicions would be directed at them simply because of their heritage or religion.

In 2001, the United States suspended admitting refugees to the country for two months. Although the United States planned to admit seventy thousand refugees in 2001, only twenty-seven thousand actually arrived. Thousands of refugees approved for admission to the United States remained in camps (mainly in Africa) where conditions were poor and even dangerous. During that time, the FBI and CIA compared their names against lists of known or suspected terrorists.

In the decade that followed, increased security checks delayed the arrival of refugees. Balancing the need for security and a tradition of receiving people from all over the world remains a topic of contentious debate.

“‘If, in response to the events of September 11, we engage in excess and shut out what has made America
great, then we will have given terrorists a far greater victory than they could have hoped to achieve.”
—James Ziglar, INS Commissioner, October 11, 2001

What efforts have been made to tighten security along the borders?
The challenge of border control is daunting, yet critical. More than 440 million people, 105 million vehicles, 11 million trucks, and 2.5 million railcars cross the borders of the United States each year.

For more than half its nearly two thousand miles, the U.S.-Mexican border is marked by the shallow Rio Grande. To the north, the United States shares 5,525 miles of border with Canada—much of it less clearly marked than the Mexican border. In addition to thousands of miles of coastline, there are over 350 official international points of entry (ports, airports) into the United States. There is serious concern that vast borders and numerous points of entry make the United States vulnerable to illegal immigration, drug smuggling, and to efforts by international terrorists to sneak into the country.

In 2006, the U.S. government began construction of a fence that will span seven hundred of the two thousand miles of the U.S.-Mexico border in order to prevent illegal border crossings. Increased enforcement around urban areas on the border has forced many undocumented immigrants to cross in more remote areas and in more hazardous conditions.

Why has the rate of deportations increased in recent years?
In 2008, President George W. Bush (2001-2008) created the Secure Communities program within the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The program asks that local jurisdictions cross-check fingerprints of people put in jail with the immigration database to ensure that they are legal residents. If those individuals are not in the system, they are prioritized for deportation.

After taking office in 2009, President Obama expanded Secure Communities to more jurisdictions across the country, which has led to a rise in the monthly rate of deportations. Immigrant rights activists fear the program leads to increased racial profiling by police in local communities and a spike in the numbers of separated families.

Deportation rates have also increased for border crossers, or people who have recently entered the United States illegally. Increased security forces along the U.S.-Mexico border have led to this increase. In 2012, close to seventy thousand people were deported after being caught crossing the Southwest border.
What is the current status of the debate about immigration?

Immigration remains a highly charged topic in U.S. politics. President George W. Bush called for changes to existing laws during his presidency and President Barack Obama has called for reform as well. Many members of Congress agree that reform is necessary. Yet progress on the issue remains uncertain. The debate is so hotly contested in the public and within political parties that Congress has found it difficult to write legislation that has a chance of passing. Questions about security and economic issues top the list of concerns. In the coming years, the debate will play out in Washington and around the United States as people wrestle with the many issues surrounding U.S. immigration policy.

In the coming days, you will have an opportunity to consider four options for U.S. immigration policy. Each option is based on a distinct set of values and beliefs. Each takes a different perspective on the U.S. role in the world and prospects for the future. You should think of the options as a tool to help you understand the contrasting strategies behind U.S. immigration policy. After you have considered the four options, you will be asked to create an option that reflects your own beliefs and opinions about U.S. immigration policy. You may borrow heavily from one option, combine ideas from two or three options, or take a new approach altogether. You will need to weigh the risks and trade-offs of whatever you decide.
Options in Brief

Option 1: Open Ourselves to the World

From its earliest days, the United States has been a land of opportunity for people outside our borders. By welcoming a diverse group of people to its shores, the United States not only invests in a tradition of openness and tolerance, but also benefits from the skills and experiences immigrants bring. The latest generation of immigrants contains the best and brightest from a rich variety of cultures and regions. Even those lacking a formal education are driven by a strong sense of initiative and an unshakable work ethic. In the end, the talents, ambitions, and dreams of immigrants will benefit us all.

Option 2: Make Emigration Unnecessary

The United States is the destination of choice for many of the world’s people. But opening our doors to large-scale immigration causes problems here and abroad. It overburdens our schools and health care system. It also drains poor countries of many of their most educated, highly skilled workers. We must lead the international community in solving the problems that cause people to leave their countries and come to the United States. We should work with the international community to strengthen economies and end conflicts worldwide. We should also create incentives for the best and brightest to stay where they are and contribute their skills to improve conditions in their own countries.

Option 3: Admit the Talent We Need

Every country has the right to promote its national interests. Our immigration policy should be designed to serve our country’s economic needs, not to solve the world’s problems. In the last few years, our country’s economy has been going through a wrenching readjustment. We must ensure that our country’s immigration policy is in line with our priority of strengthening the economy and, by doing so, improving the livelihoods of U.S. citizens. To spur U.S. high-tech industries forward, our doors should be open to scientists and engineers from abroad. To help U.S. factories, farms, and service industries hold down costs, we should allow a limited number of foreigners to work temporarily in low-wage jobs.

Option 4: Restrict Immigration

War, terrorism, hunger, and disease plague an ever-growing portion of humanity. We must recognize that the United States can do little to end the misery that haunts much of the world. At a time when our country is trimming budgets and social services, we can hardly afford to keep the door open every year to roughly one million newcomers. We must stop the immigration of foreigners who place a burden on our system and take away jobs from members of our communities. We should drastically reduce the number of immigrants we accept and commit the resources necessary to take control of our borders. It is time to say stop and focus on what is best for the citizens of the United States.
Option 1: Open Ourselves to the World

From its earliest days, the United States has been a land of opportunity for people outside our borders. Each wave of immigrants has contributed to the United States’ greatness and enriched our society. Today, people, ideas, and goods travel the globe at a pace unseen in previous decades. Instead of resorting to rigid notions of borders and “American” identity, the United States should embrace the opportunities globalization presents and remain open to new immigrant communities. By welcoming a diverse group of people to its shores, the United States not only invests in a tradition of openness and tolerance, but also benefits from the skills and experiences immigrants bring.

The latest generation of immigrants contains the best and brightest from a rich variety of cultures and regions. Even those lacking a formal education are driven by a strong sense of initiative and an unshakable work ethic. They have come because they believe the United States is the land of opportunity. They recognize that the United States rewards hard work and ability like no other country in the world. As the country that accepts the largest number of immigrants, we have an advantage against our chief economic rivals. Immigrants put our country in touch with the tastes and preferences of consumers worldwide, and give U.S. companies a competitive edge in their ability to reach an international audience. In the end, the talents, ambitions, and dreams of immigrants will benefit us all. The world will know that the United States remains a beacon of hope for countless people considering a new life for themselves in our country.

Option 1 is based on the following beliefs

- The United States is still a young, vigorous country with room to grow.
- The United States’ strength lies in its diversity, particularly in the fresh ideas and cultures provided by new immigrants.
- Immigration does not significantly threaten our national security.
- The United States needs immigrants to contribute to our economic growth.

What policies should we pursue?

- Remove bureaucratic obstacles in the immigration process that separate families.
- Allow people worldwide with a legitimate fear of persecution the full protection of U.S. refugee and asylum laws.
- Adjust immigration laws to permit greater immigration from countries such as China and Mexico that have been the victims of unfair restrictions in the past.
- Provide immigrants with more opportunities, job training, and English-language instruction to speed their adjustment to U.S. life.
- Ensure that everyone in the United States, including undocumented immigrants, has access to education, basic health care, and other essential services.
- Streamline the process of naturalization so that undocumented immigrants, including children and youth, may be rewarded for their contributions to U.S. society.
Arguments for

1. Welcoming new immigrants into our country will inject valuable skills and workers into the U.S. economy and enable U.S. culture to maintain the rich diversity that appeals to consumers worldwide.

2. Renewing the United States’ long tradition of offering opportunity and refuge for immigrants will earn the United States respect and admiration from people throughout the world.

3. Immigrants will take advantage of their ties to their native countries to open up new export markets for U.S. products.

Arguments against

1. If immigration continues at its current pace, more than fifty million newcomers will flood into the United States in the next half century, overloading our schools, hospitals, and other social services.

2. An open immigration policy will inevitably make it easier for terrorists to enter the country undetected.

3. High levels of immigration will deprive U.S. workers of jobs, while forcing the government to spend more on the needs of immigrants.

4. Encouraging highly skilled workers to immigrate to the United States robs poor countries of their most valuable human resources.

5. Opening our doors to unskilled immigrants at a time when the U.S. economy offers them few opportunities will only add to our society’s problems.

6. High levels of immigration will push our country’s population past tolerable limits and inflict still more harm on our country’s environment.

7. The continual arrival of large numbers of immigrants, both legal and undocumented, will eventually overwhelm U.S. culture and contribute to the fragmentation of our society.
Option 2: Make Emigration Unnecessary

The people of the world are on the move. Population growth, the spread of war and violence, and the age-old curses of hunger, poverty, and disease drive people to our shores. The United States is the destination of choice for many of the world’s people. But opening our doors to large-scale immigration causes problems here and abroad. It overburdens our schools and health care system. It keeps wages of low-skilled workers low. It also drains poor countries of many of their most educated, highly skilled workers. This “brain drain” only makes it harder for poorer countries to meet the needs of their own populations. We are the strongest economic power on earth and the most desired destination for the world’s immigrants. We must lead the international community in solving the problems that cause people to leave their countries and come to the United States.

We should work with the international community to strengthen economies and end conflicts worldwide. We should also create incentives for the best and brightest to stay where they are and contribute their skills to improve conditions in their own countries. By improving living standards among the world’s disadvantaged, the United States can reduce the forces that drive immigrants to our borders. We know this process will take time. We also know humanitarian crises continue to create refugees. The United States must welcome refugees in need and strengthen humanitarian efforts throughout the globe. Eventually, some immigrants will return to their native countries. For others with roots in the United States, we must create a path to citizenship so they can fully contribute to our country moving forward.

Option 2 is based on the following beliefs

- In today’s interconnected world, we must accept that the problems affecting other countries are U.S. problems as well.
- By developing well-crafted programs of foreign aid and trade benefits, the United States can help people in poor countries improve their lives without migrating abroad.
- While we have an obligation to reduce suffering wherever possible, we have a primary responsibility to the well-being of those here at home.

What policies should we pursue?

- Expand foreign aid and trade benefits to help governments in developing countries to strengthen their economies and reduce the flow of immigration to the United States.
- Work with other wealthy countries to coordinate the resettlement of existing refugees and prevent future refugee crises.
- Apply consistent, humane standards in granting political asylum to refugees, rather than mold refugee policy to suit political purposes.
- Reduce the number of immigration visas awarded annually to 600,000, including refugees.
- Provide a path to citizenship for immigrants, including undocumented ones, who have lived in the United States for many years.
Arguments for

1. Expanding foreign aid programs and trade benefits for developing countries will reduce the drain of highly skilled workers from these countries and also reduce the anger that fuels terrorism.

2. Developing refugee policies that are consistent and humane will bolster the U.S. image throughout the world.

3. Reducing the level of immigration to the United States will reduce the drain on our social service resources.

Arguments against

1. Dumping money into new foreign aid programs will come at the expense of addressing other, more pressing needs.

2. Closing our doors to immigrants will increase resentment of the United States.

3. Awarding immigration visas on the basis of humanitarian concerns, rather than economic priorities, will not significantly lower U.S. spending on social services for newcomers.

4. As past failures show, U.S. assistance cannot overcome the crippling poverty and social chaos plaguing many parts of the world.

5. Without high levels of immigration, the United States will lack the talent and energy to strengthen our economy and address future problems.

6. No matter what we do, people will always want to come to the United States.
Option 3: Admit the Talent We Need

Every country has the right to promote its national interests. The United States should be no different. Our immigration policy should be designed to serve our country’s economic needs, not to solve the world’s problems. We cannot afford to admit into our country hundreds of thousands of newcomers every year who will be a burden on our society. In the last few years, our country’s economy has been going through a wrenching readjustment. Businesses are cutting jobs. Salaries have been slashed. Government programs are being trimmed. Workers are forced to do more with less. We must ensure that our country’s immigration policy is in line with our priority of strengthening the economy and, by doing so, improving the livelihoods of U.S. citizens. After calling on working Americans to tighten their belts, we owe them nothing less.

Facing a demanding global marketplace and the relentless pace of technological change, the United States must implement an immigration policy that maintains our competitiveness internationally and ensures a strong domestic economy. A two-pronged approach makes the most sense. To spur U.S. high-tech industries forward, our doors should be open to scientists and engineers from abroad. To help U.S. factories, farms, and service industries hold down costs, we should allow a limited number of foreigners to work temporarily in low-wage jobs. Simultaneously, we must discourage undocumented immigration by restricting social services and increasing deportations. By forging ahead with a realistic, far-sighted strategy, we can make immigration policy work for the United States.

Option 3 is based on the following beliefs

• Strengthening the U.S. economy should be the guiding principle underlying our country’s immigration policy.
  • Maintaining our economy’s competitive edge is essential to the well-being of people in the United States.

• Skilled, well-educated immigrants are most capable of contributing to the betterment of the United States.

What policies should we pursue?

• Award 200,000 immigration visas annually for skilled workers and their families, making the advancement of science and technology the top priority in guiding immigration policy.

• Reduce total annual immigration to 500,000, including refugees, making adjustments to reflect economic conditions. (During an economic downturn, the number of immigration visas should be decreased, while during an economic expansion, the number should be increased.)

• Allow a limited number of foreigners to work temporarily in the United States in a guest worker program for agriculture and other industries facing labor shortages.

• Offer scholarships to foreign graduate students in science, engineering, and other high-tech fields, provided they will work in the United States for at least five years.

• Deny education, health care, and other social services to undocumented immigrants, except in cases of emergency.
Arguments for

1. Admitting highly skilled immigrants who are well-suited to the demands of the U.S. economy will help hold down government costs for welfare, health care, and other social services.

2. Tailoring U.S. immigration policy to the needs of our economy will attract immigrants who have the most to offer to U.S. industry, especially in high-tech fields.

3. Permitting the entry of temporary foreign workers into the labor force will help low-wage industries remain in the United States while competing in the global market.

Arguments against

1. Limiting immigration to the well-educated discriminates against worthy applicants who have been deprived of an opportunity to educate themselves.

2. Pursuing an immigration policy that overlooks the concerns of other countries will damage U.S. foreign relations, especially with our neighbors to the south.

3. Drawing the best and brightest skilled workers from poor countries will undercut economic development in much of the world and harm international stability.

4. Admitting foreigners as temporary workers and denying social services to undocumented immigrants will create a group of second-class citizens with few rights and little stake in U.S. society.

5. Reducing the number of immigration visas available for family reunification will leave many close relatives separated.

6. Assisting foreign graduate students in science and engineering will deprive U.S. citizens of jobs and educational opportunities, and leave many of our most important high-tech industries dominated by foreign-born workers.
Option 4: Restrict Immigration

The world is rapidly changing. War, terrorism, hunger, and disease plague an ever-growing portion of humanity. The United States is a strong country militarily and economically, but it cannot solve the world’s problems. As the planet’s population soars from more than seven billion today to an estimated ten billion by the year 2050, we must recognize that the United States can do little to end the misery that haunts much of the world. Meanwhile, the forces of economic change have left millions of U.S. citizens struggling to keep up. Many citizens are working longer hours than ever just to make ends meet. Schools are overcrowded and underfunded, while health care costs have skyrocketed. Simply maintaining our way of life is a major challenge. At a time when our country is trimming budgets and social services, we can hardly afford to keep the door open every year to roughly one million newcomers.

The arguments supporting massive immigration in the United States have long since passed into history. We must stop the immigration of foreigners who place a burden on our system and take away jobs from members of our communities. The world’s disadvantaged people cannot be blamed for wanting to enter the United States. Many of them lead difficult lives and face hardship and hunger. But the United States has already given enough. We also have a duty to stop the senseless influx of unskilled immigrants who keep wages low for struggling U.S. workers. And instead of welcoming highly skilled workers to come to our country, should we not focus on equipping our own citizens with the skills they need to contribute to our country? We should drastically reduce the number of immigrants we accept and commit the resources necessary to take control of our borders. It is time to say stop and focus on what is best for the citizens of the United States.

Option 4 is based on the following beliefs

- The United States is one of the few islands of stability and prosperity in a world marked largely by poverty and hardship.
- Continued high levels of immigration would overwhelm the United States’ unique culture.
- High levels of immigration deprive poor people in the United States of opportunities for economic advancement.

What policies should we pursue?

- Reduce the number of immigration visas awarded annually to the level set in 1965—290,000—including refugees.
- Prioritize highly skilled work visas over others.
- Pressure other governments to take steps to prevent mass movements of refugees to the United States.
- Strengthen border control by tripling the number of Border Patrol agents, constructing impassable barriers at major crossing points along the U.S.-Mexican border, and swiftly deporting foreigners who overstay their visas or enter the country illegally.
- Insist that those seeking political asylum apply at U.S. embassies in foreign countries instead of here.
- End the policy of granting automatic citizenship to the children of foreigners born in the United States.
- Deny education, health care, and other social services to undocumented immigrants to discourage immigration.
Arguments for

1. Reducing immigration will allow the United States to hold down spending for education, health care, and other social services.

2. Restoring firm control over our borders will help us reduce the flow of drugs into the United States and strengthen our defenses against international terrorism.

3. Lowering the number of newcomers entering the U.S. labor market will make more jobs available for U.S. workers, especially those with few skills.

Arguments against

1. Fencing off our neighbors to the south and restricting immigration from abroad will fuel anti-American sentiment throughout the world and harm relations with many of our leading trading partners.

2. Closing the door on new immigrants will deprive the U.S. workforce of skills, talent, and ambition.

3. Industries that rely on immigrant labor will face hardships, causing repercussions in other areas of the economy.

4. Drastically reducing immigration will create a society that lacks a solid understanding of the world beyond our borders.

5. Without young immigrants entering the country, U.S. workers will face a heavy burden in supporting the steadily increasing elderly population.

6. Severely cutting back immigration will leave many recently arrived U.S. citizens separated from close family members in their native countries.
Supplementary Document

President Obama’s Remarks on Immigration
January 29, 2013

...Now, last week, I had the honor of being sworn in for a second term as President of the United States. And during my inaugural address, I talked about how making progress on the defining challenges of our time doesn’t require us to settle every debate or ignore every difference that we may have, but it does require us to find common ground and move forward in common purpose. It requires us to act.

I know that some issues will be harder to lift than others. Some debates will be more contentious. That’s to be expected. But the reason I came here today is because of a challenge where the differences are dwindling; where a broad consensus is emerging; and where a call for action can now be heard coming from all across America. I’m here today because the time has come for common-sense, comprehensive immigration reform. The time is now. Now is the time. Now is the time.

Now is the time.

I’m here because most Americans agree that it’s time to fix a system that’s been broken for way too long. I’m here because business leaders, faith leaders, labor leaders, law enforcement, and leaders from both parties are coming together to say now is the time to find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as the land of opportunity. Now is the time to do this so we can strengthen our economy and strengthen our country’s future.

Think about it—we define ourselves as a nation of immigrants. That’s who we are—in our bones. The promise we see in those who come here from every corner of the globe, that’s always been one of our greatest strengths. It keeps our workforce young. It keeps our country on the cutting edge. And it’s helped build the greatest economic engine the world has ever known.

After all, immigrants helped start businesses like Google and Yahoo!. They created entire new industries that, in turn, created new jobs and new prosperity for our citizens. In recent years, one in four high-tech start-ups in America were founded by immigrants. One in four new small business owners were immigrants, including right here in Nevada—folks who came here seeking opportunity and now want to share that opportunity with other Americans.

But we all know that today, we have an immigration system that’s out of date and badly broken; a system that’s holding us back instead of helping us grow our economy and strengthen our middle class.

Right now, we have 11 million undocumented immigrants in America; 11 million men and women from all over the world who live their lives in the shadows. Yes, they broke the rules. They crossed the border illegally. Maybe they overstayed their visas. Those are facts. Nobody disputes them. But these 11 million men and women are now here. Many of them have been here for years. And the overwhelming majority of these individuals aren’t looking for any trouble. They’re contributing members of the community. They’re looking out for their families. They’re looking out for their neighbors. They’re woven into the fabric of our lives.

Every day, like the rest of us, they go out and try to earn a living. Often they do that in a shadow economy—a place where employers may offer them less than the minimum wage or make them work overtime without extra pay. And when that happens, it’s not just bad for them, it’s bad for the entire economy. Because all the businesses that are trying to do the right thing—that are hiring people legally, paying a decent wage, following the rules—they’re the ones who suffer. They’ve got to compete against companies that are breaking the rules. And the wages and working conditions of American workers are threatened, too.
So if we’re truly committed to strengthening our middle class and providing more ladders of opportunity to those who are willing to work hard to make it into the middle class, we’ve got to fix the system.

We have to make sure that every business and every worker in America is playing by the same set of rules. We have to bring this shadow economy into the light so that everybody is held accountable—businesses for who they hire, and immigrants for getting on the right side of the law. That’s common sense. And that’s why we need comprehensive immigration reform.

There’s another economic reason why we need reform. It’s not just about the folks who come here illegally and have the effect they have on our economy. It’s also about the folks who try to come here legally but have a hard time doing so, and the effect that has on our economy.

Right now, there are brilliant students from all over the world sitting in classrooms at our top universities. They’re earning degrees in the fields of the future, like engineering and computer science. But once they finish school, once they earn that diploma, there’s a good chance they’ll have to leave our country. Think about that.

Intel was started with the help of an immigrant who studied here and then stayed here. Instagram was started with the help of an immigrant who studied here and then stayed here. Right now in one of those classrooms, there’s a student wrestling with how to turn their big idea—their Intel or Instagram—into a big business. We’re giving them all the skills they need to figure that out, but then we’re going to turn around and tell them to start that business and create those jobs in China or India or Mexico or someplace else? That’s not how you grow new industries in America. That’s how you give new industries to our competitors. That’s why we need comprehensive immigration reform.

Now, during my first term, we took steps to try and patch up some of the worst cracks in the system.

First, we strengthened security at the borders so that we could finally stem the tide of illegal immigrants. We put more boots on the ground on the southern border than at any time in our history. And today, illegal crossings are down nearly 80 percent from their peak in 2000.

Second, we focused our enforcement efforts on criminals who are here illegally and who endanger our communities. And today, deportations of criminals is at its highest level ever.

And third, we took up the cause of the DREAMers—the young people who were brought to this country as children, young people who have grown up here, built their lives here, have futures here. We said that if you’re able to meet some basic criteria like pursuing an education, then we’ll consider offering you the chance to come out of the shadows so that you can live here and work here legally, so that you can finally have the dignity of knowing you belong.

But because this change isn’t permanent, we need Congress to act—and not just on the DREAM Act. We need Congress to act on a comprehensive approach that finally deals with the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are in the country right now. That’s what we need.

Now, the good news is that for the first time in many years, Republicans and Democrats seem ready to tackle this problem together. Members of both parties, in both chambers, are actively working on a solution. Yesterday, a bipartisan group of senators announced their principles for comprehensive immigration reform, which are very much in line with the principles I’ve proposed and campaigned on for the last few years. So at this moment, it looks like there’s a genuine desire to get this done soon, and that’s very encouraging.

But this time, action must follow. We can’t allow immigration reform to get bogged down in an endless debate. We’ve been debating this a very long time. So it’s not as if we don’t know technically what needs to get done. As a
consequence, to help move this process along, today I’m laying out my ideas for immigration reform. And my hope is that this provides some key markers to members of Congress as they craft a bill, because the ideas I’m proposing have traditionally been supported by both Democrats like Ted Kennedy and Republicans like President George W. Bush. You don’t get that matchup very often. So we know where the consensus should be.

Now, of course, there will be rigorous debate about many of the details, and every stakeholder should engage in real give and take in the process. But it’s important for us to recognize that the foundation for bipartisan action is already in place. And if Congress is unable to move forward in a timely fashion, I will send up a bill based on my proposal and insist that they vote on it right away.

So the principles are pretty straightforward. There are a lot of details behind it. We’re going to hand out a bunch of paper so that everybody will know exactly what we’re talking about. But the principles are pretty straightforward.

First, I believe we need to stay focused on enforcement. That means continuing to strengthen security at our borders. It means cracking down more forcefully on businesses that knowingly hire undocumented workers. To be fair, most businesses want to do the right thing, but a lot of them have a hard time figuring out who’s here legally, who’s not. So we need to implement a national system that allows businesses to quickly and accurately verify someone’s employment status. And if they still knowingly hire undocumented workers, then we need to ramp up the penalties.

Second, we have to deal with the 11 million individuals who are here illegally. We all agree that these men and women should have to earn their way to citizenship. But for comprehensive immigration reform to work, it must be clear from the outset that there is a pathway to citizenship.

We’ve got to lay out a path—a process that includes passing a background check, paying taxes, paying a penalty, learning English, and then going to the back of the line, behind all the folks who are trying to come here legally. That’s only fair, right?

So that means it won’t be a quick process but it will be a fair process. And it will lift these individuals out of the shadows and give them a chance to earn their way to a green card and eventually to citizenship.

And the third principle is we’ve got to bring our legal immigration system into the 21st century because it no longer reflects the realities of our time. For example, if you are a citizen, you shouldn’t have to wait years before your family is able to join you in America. You shouldn’t have to wait years.

If you’re a foreign student who wants to pursue a career in science or technology, or a foreign entrepreneur who wants to start a business with the backing of American investors, we should help you do that here. Because if you succeed, you’ll create American businesses and American jobs. You’ll help us grow our economy. You’ll help us strengthen our middle class.

So that’s what comprehensive immigration reform looks like: smarter enforcement; a pathway to earned citizenship; improvements in the legal immigration system so that we continue to be a magnet for the best and the brightest all around the world. It’s pretty straightforward.

The question now is simple: Do we have the resolve as a people, as a country, as a government to finally put this issue behind us? I believe that we do. I believe that we do. I believe we are finally at a moment where comprehensive immigration reform is within our grasp.

But I promise you this: The closer we get, the more emotional this debate is going to become. Immigration has always been an issue that enflames passions. That’s not surprising. There are few things that are more important to us as a society than who gets to come here and call our country home; who gets the privilege of becoming a citizen of the United States of America. That’s a big deal.
When we talk about that in the abstract, it’s easy sometimes for the discussion to take on a feeling of “us” versus “them.” And when that happens, a lot of folks forget that most of “us” used to be “them.” We forget that.

It’s really important for us to remember our history. Unless you’re one of the first Americans, a Native American, you came from somewhere else. Somebody brought you.

Ken Salazar, he’s of Mexican American descent, but he points that his family has been living where he lives for 400 years, so he didn’t immigrate anywhere.

The Irish who left behind a land of famine. The Germans who fled persecution. The Scandinavians who arrived eager to pioneer out west. The Polish. The Russians. The Italians. The Chinese. The Japanese. The West Indians. The huddled masses who came through Ellis Island on one coast and Angel Island on the other. All those folks, before they were “us,” they were “them.”

And when each new wave of immigrants arrived, they faced resistance from those who were already here. They faced hardship. They faced racism. They faced ridicule. But over time, as they went about their daily lives, as they earned a living, as they raised a family, as they built a community, as their kids went to school here, they did their part to build a nation.

They were the Einsteins and the Carnegies. But they were also the millions of women and men whose names history may not remember, but whose actions helped make us who we are; who built this country hand by hand, brick by brick. They all came here knowing that what makes somebody an American is not just blood or birth, but allegiance to our founding principles and the faith in the idea that anyone from anywhere can write the next great chapter of our story.

And that’s still true today. Just ask Alan Aleman. Alan is here this afternoon—where is Alan? He’s around here—there he is right here. Alan was born in Mexico. He was brought to this country by his parents when he was a child. Growing up, Alan went to an American school, pledged allegiance to the American flag, felt American in every way—and he was, except for one: on paper.

In high school, Alan watched his friends come of age—driving around town with their new licenses, earning some extra cash from their summer jobs at the mall. He knew he couldn’t do those things. But it didn’t matter that much. What mattered to Alan was earning an education so that he could live up to his God-given potential.

Last year, when Alan heard the news that we were going to offer a chance for folks like him to emerge from the shadows—even if it’s just for two years at a time—he was one of the first to sign up. And a few months ago he was one of the first people in Nevada to get approved. In that moment, Alan said, “I felt the fear vanish. I felt accepted.”

So today, Alan is in his second year at the College of Southern Nevada. Alan is studying to become a doctor. He hopes to join the Air Force. He’s working hard every single day to build a better life for himself and his family. And all he wants is the opportunity to do his part to build a better America.

So in the coming weeks, as the idea of reform becomes more real and the debate becomes more heated, and there are folks who are trying to pull this thing apart, remember Alan and all those who share the same hopes and the same dreams. Remember that this is not just a debate about policy. It’s about people. It’s about men and women and young people who want nothing more than the chance to earn their way into the American story.

Throughout our history, that has only made our nation stronger. And it’s how we will make sure that this century is the same as the last: an American century welcoming of everybody who aspires to do something more, and who is willing to work hard to do it, and is willing to pledge that allegiance to our flag.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.