

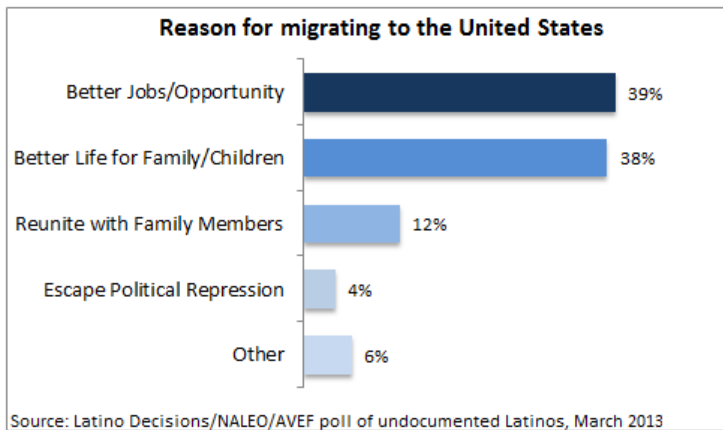
Immigration to the US

Every year, millions of people attempt to come to the US, whether to escape their country, to reunite with their family, or to live a better life. Unfortunately, only a small portion of them obtain a visa and a green card, and the ones who do have to wait many years to get it. In order to immigrate to the US, one must go through a very extensive process to become a permanent resident. Many are turned down because the immigration cap is very low, and the cost of permanent residence is very high. Because of this, immigration to the US is very hard and causes immigrants to get turned away. In order to solve this issue, some action could take place on a federal level and also by advocating for immigration, a human right. Many people who leave their countries to immigrate to the US for a new life must go through a very difficult process and are often rejected, so the US should make this process easier and accept more immigrants.

In order to apply for immigration, an individual or a family must contact the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, or USCIS. This can be through an appointment, or through long distance contact. They need to show ID and passports, and fill out many forms. They will then apply for a visa if they need one. If the family or individual comes from a country with an alliance with the US they might not need an immigration visa for temporary residence; however immigrants from most countries will need one. The wait might last many years, even up to 20. This is considered “waiting in line” in an article by Colorlines, a magazine that deals with political issues. Once an immigrant or immigrant family receives the visa, they then need to get

their green cards. The USCIS will eventually give the green card, which allows the immigrant(s) to gain permanent resident status. This means they can live in the US for as long as they want, even though they are not citizens. The process of becoming a citizen requires a permanent resident to fill out more forms, take a citizenship test, and take the Oath of Allegiance.

Some notable issues with this process are fairly evident. First of all, the time it takes.



Colorlines describes the process as taking more time than many of the immigrants have. The graphic to the left shows a graph of the reasons for immigration among immigrants from Latin America. It shows that around 4% of Latino immigrants per year are

escaping political repression. This may not seem like a huge amount, but Social Science Data Analysis Network (SSDAN) shows in a graphic that nearly 40% of all immigrants are Latino, and 40% of the annual 1.1 million immigrants admitted per year is around 400,000. This means that 4% is about 16,000 per year. For those 16,000 annual people, this process takes too much time. That's not even mentioning all the non-Latino immigrants coming to the US in a similar situation.

Additionally, the immigrants might not have the opportunities that they would in the US. Many immigrants don't have jobs or education in their old countries and come to the US for that purpose. Holding them off only extends the duration of their problem.

An article in The Guardian explains that the cost of immigration averages around \$465 per person just for the application fees. There are other additional expenses too, such as visiting the USCIS offices. Becoming a citizen costs even more; according to the American Immigration Council, this is currently \$680 per person. For some immigrants this price may be an afterthought, but for most this is quite a large price to pay.

The price of immigration, \$465 per person, may be unaffordable. To put that in perspective, a family of four must pay nearly \$2,000 for them all to immigrate to the US, which is why many families must separate in this process. The country with the most immigration applications to the US, Mexico had a poverty rate of 53.2% in 2014 according to the World Bank. Many immigrants come to the US for work because they have none in their countries, so \$2,000 isn't such a reasonable price for that family to pay.

There are various forms of immigrant status. The first, and most simple form of immigration, is temporary status. Instead of acquiring a green card, a temporary resident is given documentation of temporary status, only for fulfilling a certain goal such as education or work, like a sabbatical. The process is slightly less extensive than the one for permanent residence, as they do not need to acquire the green card. They must fulfill their specific goal and then must move back to their country unless their country is facing a severe humanitarian crisis, and in that case they can receive an extension to their temporary resident status. If their goal is not fulfilled, such as failing their class, they can face deportation. About 30 million temporary residents come to the US annually.

If a person gains permanent residence status they are not a citizen, but they have rights to many governmental services provided to citizens such as welfare and social security. However, they do not have the right to vote. Permanent residents are, for the most part, safe from deportation, unless they commit certain high crimes, in which case they do face the risk. For the most part, permanent residence is a neutral form of living in the US, they're not in much danger of being sent back, but also not with the rights of a citizen.

Immigrants who become citizens are considered naturalized immigrants. A USCIS fact sheet on immigrant naturalization states that about 6.6 million immigrants have been naturalized over the past decade, and 650,000 in 2014, about proportional. The applicant must be 18 years of age, and must have lived as a permanent resident in the US for 5 years. They also must be competent in English, be of "good moral character," and know about the US government and its history. The Migration Policy Institute gives a total of 19.3 million for how many naturalized citizens there were in the US in 2013, accounting to 47% of the immigrant population. Most of the other immigrants are permanent residents.

If a permanent resident does apply to become a citizen, they may be able to gain citizenship; however this process is long and expensive. This costs \$680 per person, and may take around a year. The individual must fill out their citizenship forms, and must take a citizenship test. The test has civic and history questions about the US and isn't too difficult; only a score of 60% is required to pass. The process then concludes with a ceremony where the individual takes the Oath of Allegiance to the US, and becomes a citizen.

If an immigrant does not fall under any of those categories they are considered undocumented, or illegal. An undocumented immigrant is a person who comes to this country without authorization and without going through the whole immigration process. The current US estimate for undocumented immigrants is 11 million according to the Center for American Progress. Undocumented immigrants aren't given many services by the government even though most do pay taxes, and they often face deportation. Many undocumented immigrants come as a result of the difficult immigration process. Some undocumented immigrants who come to the US don't go through the immigration process because they are attempting to bring crime; however, one could make the generalization that every one of them is bringing crime. Because of this, some believe that all 11 million undocumented immigrants should be deported, such as presidential candidate Donald Trump. However, many disagree with this statement and believe that there should instead be a pathway to permanent residence or citizenship for the undocumented population.

The majority of immigrants come from Mexico, India, China, and the Philippines, as mentioned in the Immigration Policy Center Special Report entitled *Breaking down the Problems: What's Wrong with Our Immigration System?* As previously cited, the graphic from Latino Decisions has showed that within the Latino demographic, about 39% of immigrants come for jobs and opportunity, 38% for family life, 12% to reunite with family, 4% for escaping political repression, and 6% for other reasons. The "Jobs and opportunity" category refers to those who can't find work in their previous country, or come for a business offer. To immigrate for "Family life" is to immigrate for better lives for the immigrant's family. Often times the

people previously lived in bad living conditions, and there was a lack of sufficient education for their children. In fact, 60% of immigrants come to the US with their families. The 12% who come to reunite with their families might have been separated by a previous immigration, a deportation, or if one family member was sent to the US with the rest to follow. The 4% escaping political repression are running away from a humanitarian crisis in their country, or escaping from direct governmental persecution against them.

In a 2013 census 41.3 million immigrants were recorded living in the US, as noted by the Migration Policy Institute in the article *Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States*. In the same article it explains that 6 million immigrants apply per year for permanent residence, yet only 1.1 million are admitted per year. This means only a little over 18% of applications are admitted per year.

The 82% of immigrants who are either deferred or denied are left in their country to deal with the problem that caused them to choose to immigrate. If deferred, they must wait until the US finally has room for them. If they are denied they may reapply; however, this usually does not work. Many of the reasons for being denied will carry over to the next application such as a criminal record, medical condition, or previous deportation.

As previously mentioned, many immigrants are separated from their families in the process which is extremely difficult for many who would like to bring their entire families to the US. The previously cited Immigration Policy Center Special Report explains an immigrant coming to the US must wait 5 years before they can apply for a green card for someone in their family unless that family member is a spouse, or a child under age 21.

Politicians tend to be very split on this issue. The more liberal standpoint on it is to make immigration easier, and the more conservative approach is to limit immigration. In the past, America used to be known for being one of the most accepting countries in the world for immigrants. It was considered to be like a melting pot, where people from across the world would come and assimilate to American culture. However, throughout the recent past, politicians have worked to slow down the rate of American immigration. This is for several reasons. Among those are economic reasons, as the cost for the US to provide for the immigrants can possibly be increasing our national debt, and some claim they are taking jobs from those already in America. Some politicians are worried about our national security, as there is a slight security risk in letting in immigrants. Currently, attempts to change the immigration system are tough, as political gridlock makes congress almost unable to pass any new bills.

On the more conservative side of this issue, the approach is to limit immigration for several reasons. One of the reasons is because of the jobs that the immigrants will take. These might be jobs that people already living in the US could have occupied. In response to this claim, many of the immigrants coming from the countries didn't have sufficient, or any jobs, so this claim is analogous to stating that people born in America should be given an advantage in the global economy.

Another concern is that the immigrants are using services from the government such as healthcare, education, and social security. The question is to why we should be paying for the social services of someone not even from America. Then again, the overwhelming majority of all

immigrants in the US pay taxes, so they do in fact deserve the same benefits from the government.

Controversy around undocumented immigration is even more common, as it is technically a criminal act. First of all, many of the above arguments may be made. Additionally, Some claim that undocumented immigrants harm the economy, but according to the Immigration Policy in Focus article, The Economics of Necessity, their overall economic contribution may be as high as \$10 billion per year to the US. The majority do pay taxes, yet very few governmental services are given to them. Another concern is about crime and drug trafficking, and while this is an issue, it is overgeneralized by many of those concerned with this issue, as the majority of undocumented immigrants come without documentation because the process was too difficult for them to follow through with.

There are three main ways I believe the US should reform immigration. These include making the process less expensive, making the process take less time, and admitting more immigrants. The price is much too high for many of the immigrants to pay. To solve this issue, immigrants should have the option to pay the majority of the immigration fees over time once they have a job in the US. Perhaps there could be a small initial fee, but the rest could be paid back over a few years as a small tax once the immigrant has a job. It could also follow a similar format to progressive taxation; those who are more wealthy would have to pay more than those who aren't, therefor averaging to the same net amount.

The process also takes too much time for many of the immigrants, which can be addressed by the third solution. If more immigrants are admitted per year, fewer people will have

to “wait in line,” and this waiting time will reduce. As long as the immigrants pay taxes for the services that the government provides them with, there shouldn’t be a problem with increasing the immigration cap to a certain extent. At the current rate of economic contribution, the immigrants will not harm, but instead will support our economy, which will help create jobs to accommodate all the new immigrants. Additionally, the economic boost can reduce the price of immigration, leading back to the first solution. This creates a cycle of growth and development of our country, and allowing more immigrants to come to the US. This will make the wait shorter too, as the “line” of immigration shortens. Dramatic change may not be the best answer, but a 20% increase of acceptance per year will allow more immigrants to come per year, and will shorten the wait for immigration.

The citizenship process could also be refined by creating a more defined path to citizenship. This could include better education in the English language and US history and civics, reducing the wait time of 5 years, getting rid of the age requirement, or reducing the cost or using a payment over time (similar to previous system mentioned). Not only should the process be available to permanent residents, but also to undocumented immigrants who do not have a criminal background .

The real question is on how one can help. There are two main methods, education and advocacy. Many generalizations of immigrants will paint a picture of criminals who manage to enter the country to steal jobs and ruin the economy. This picture needs to be discarded. In schools, there should be a mandatory unit on immigration to the United States in civics classes,

and adult education should be more readily available, sponsored by the US Department of Education.

Advocacy is the most important contribution one can make. The Advocates for Human Rights is an organization that advocates for victims of a wide variety of social justice issues, including immigration. Advocacy can consist of expressing our First Amendment rights, such as Freedom of Press, the Freedom of Assembly, or the Freedom of Petition. Advocacy can take the form of writing an article on this social justice issue and what could change, or by assembling in large groups of people who believe in the same solutions, or by petitioning or protesting against the current system. When notice is passed to legislature, a bill may be passed, which can lead to change. This is what the Advocates for Human Rights believes in for us to make this country better for immigrants attempting to come to the US, or for the solution to any other social justice issue. The US is a constitutional republic, granting power to the people, which we should use to initiate change.

וְגַר לֹא תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְקָחְנֻהוּ כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: This is one of the HMJDS core values, found in Shemot chapter 22, verse 20. It says that we should not wrong or oppress any stranger, as we were once strangers in the land of Egypt. We should treat immigrants well, as all of us were new to this land at some point, whether in our lifetimes, or in the lifetimes of our ancestors. Using our own, or our families experiences, we need to empathise with the immigrants coming to this country.

The current immigration system is extremely hard on those trying to come to the US, which is why we need immigration reform by making the process less expensive, take less time, and by accepting more immigrants annually into our country. We need to use our First Amendment

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rights to advocate and work towards solving this issue. Everyone can make a difference, not just the US government. If we come together and fight for the human right of immigration, all of us can come together, natural-born citizen and foreign-born alike.

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