

# Coming to America

Who Should We Welcome  
What Should We Do?



## The Purpose of an NIF Forum

To weigh different approaches for addressing a problem and exchange views with others on what should be done



# Today's Forum

1

## Introduction

We'll agree to some guidelines.

2

## Share our concerns

We'll talk about the kind of immigration policies we want, exploring overall goals and concerns about how to secure the border and improve the current system. We'll share our views and listen to each other. We'll consider a range of practical changes.

3

## Consider each approach

We'll weigh *three different* approaches to fixing our immigration system, along with some specific proposals for each. These aren't the only ideas, but they are a starting point.

4

## Review and reflect

We'll look at:

- Advantages, risks, costs, & trade-offs
- Possible unintended consequences
- Priorities—we can't do everything
- Areas of common ground & remaining concerns

# Forum Guidelines

Consider all the approaches fairly.

Listening is just as important as speaking.

No one or two individuals should dominate.

Maintain an open, respectful atmosphere.

Everyone is encouraged to participate.

# What is the PROBLEM?

## Possible Concerns about Immigration



1. Too many Americans don't value what immigrants contribute to our communities and our economy.
2. We aren't doing enough to stop illegal immigration
3. The current system is broken—it's easier to come in illegally than to follow the rules.
4. Our cities and communities just can't absorb so many newcomers—we need to reduce immigration levels.
5. America is a nation of immigrants. We've forgotten that this is a major reason for our success.
6. US borders and ports of entry aren't secure.
7. Something else?

# SOME CONTEXT

## These are widely-accepted estimates



- [2.6 million](#)—number of people who immigrated to the US legally in 2022
- [25,000](#)—number of refugees admitted in 2022
- [1.5 million—number](#) of people waiting for asylum hearings to stay in the US
- [2.06 million—number](#) of people arrested for crossing the US-Mexico border in 2023
- [11 million](#)—estimated number of undocumented immigrants living in the US
- [14%—percentage](#) of foreign-born residents in US
- [29%—the percentage](#) of US physicians who are foreign born
- [More than half of graduate students](#) in computers, math, and engineering were born outside the U.S.

## APPROACH 1: Welcome Newcomers

Immigration has made America strong. Let's look at ways to build on our tradition of welcoming immigrants and protecting those fleeing war and oppression

**But won't this burden a system already overwhelmed by high levels of immigration?**

## APPROACH 2: Enforce the Law

We need a stronger system that enforces the law and benefits those who follow the rules. Let's look at ways to secure our borders and discourage people from entering the US illegally.

**But won't this harm millions of people already here and endanger desperate people suffering in other countries?**

## APPROACH 3: Slow Down

Immigration levels are so high, and the country is so diverse, that we're losing our common bonds. Let's look at ways to reduce the number of immigrants and help new arrivals adapt to our way of life.

**But won't this rob our economy of hard-working immigrants just when we need them most?**

And . . . it's unlikely everyone will agree. Few of us are likely to get all the changes we want.

**So, what is your top priority?**

# First Impressions

We'll talk much more about each of these approaches, but just to start, which is most important to you now?



- Approach 1: Welcome Newcomers
- Approach 2: Enforce the Law
- Approach 3: Slow Down

# Welcome Newcomers

America is a nation of immigrants, and this has made our country prosperous and strong. Our country should be a beacon of hope and freedom to people around the world. What's more, immigration benefits the US, especially now when so many employers can't find enough skilled and unskilled workers.



PROPOSALS	POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS
Create a path to legal status for the millions of undocumented immigrants who have lived here for many years.	This will give people in other countries even more incentive to enter the U.S. illegally.
Accept more refugees who are fleeing war and brutality. This is our historic responsibility.	We risk overwhelming our communities and schools if we accept too many refugees.
Let asylum seekers stay in the US while they wait for court rulings and hire more immigration judges.	Anyone can come to the border and claim asylum—we won't know who we're letting in.

But giving amnesty to people who entered illegally and letting asylum seekers wait in the U.S. for their hearings tempts even more people to cross the border. Won't this just make the problem worse?

# Enforce the Law



Allowing people to routinely ignore the law isn't fair to those who follow the rules. Moreover, it's not safe to have millions of people coming into the country without a system for checking out who they are. We need more patrols, more judges, and faster processing. And we need to make sure that those who disobey our laws are returned to their home countries.

PROPOSALS	POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS
Deport people who entered the US illegally and require them to apply for visas to come back.	Deporting 11 million undocumented people will tear families and communities apart. It may not even be doable.
Prosecute employers who hire workers without legal papers and make these violations criminal offenses.	This will create chaos in industries like agriculture and construction and lead to shortages and higher prices.
Beef up border with military-level protection and complete the wall.	We're already catching hundreds of thousands of people each year, and this hasn't solved the problem.

But do we really want to be a country that turns away asylum seekers and rounds up and deports people after they've built productive lives here?

# Slow down

America is a nation of immigrants, and we'll continue to be, but the current levels of immigration are too high. Too many newcomers don't get the help they need to learn English and learn about our way of life. We should reduce the rate of immigration and focus on ensuring that newcomers, especially foreign-born children, become part of the American community.



PROPOSALS	POSSIBLE DRAWBACKS
Reduce the number of legal immigrants admitted each year	There is a huge waiting list for legal entry including many people with family in the US. Plus, our country needs these workers.
Give priority to English-speaking immigrants so they can adapt to our society more quickly.	Many people who want to come here don't speak English. Do we really want to shut them out?
In schools, make learning English the top priority for new immigrant students.	It's more humane for children to keep learning in their own languages and take pride in their own cultures.

But this means turning away millions of highly skilled workers and highly motivated unskilled workers. Do we really think there are enough native-born Americans willing and able to do these jobs?

# Here's what we talked about...

- Create path to legal status for undocumented residents
- Accept more refugees
- Allow asylum seekers to wait in the US
- Deport people who entered illegally
- Prosecute employers who hire workers without legal papers
- Beef up border protection and complete the wall
- Reduce the number of immigrants admitted
- Give priority to English speakers
- Make learning English the top priority in schools

Which 1 or 2 proposals do you FAVOR most?

Which 1 or 2 proposals do you most OPPOSE?

# The Group's Results...

PROPOSAL	MOST FAVORED	MOST OPPOSED
Create path to legal status for undocumented residents		
Accept more refugees		
Allow asylum seekers to wait in the US		
Deport people who entered illegally		
Prosecute employers who hire workers without legal papers		
Beef up border protection and complete the wall		
Reduce the number of immigrants admitted		
Give priority to English speakers		
Make learning English the top priority in schools		

# The Group's Overall Results



What do you think of this outcome?  
Could you live with this set of  
changes if enacted?

# Closing Reflections

## **OTHER QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

Are there important ideas we didn't talk about?

Are there areas where we're divided and need to talk more?

Who else should we hear from?

What actions could we take as individuals?

What should we expect from candidates we support?

# Let us know how we've done by answering these last four questions

These results are anonymous, and your honest answers can help us.

Thank you so much for joining us in this National Issues Forums conversation on immigration.

For more information, please visit: [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org)



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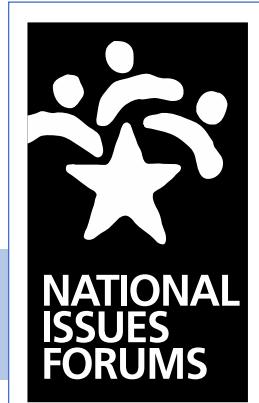
# Please let us know how we're doing by filling out this online questionnaire:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/elections-nifi>

Anonymous responses will be included in reports and research to help us improve our online forums and better understand how people are wrestling with current issues.

*Thank you!*

For more information, please visit: [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org)



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