

United States Senate

MetMUNC XLVIII

Topic: Immigration

Chairs: John DiPierri & Jarret Kim



Immigration is defined as the act of coming to live permanently in a foreign country. For centuries, people from all nations around the world have immigrated to the United States, seeing this country as a beacon of hope, progress, and economic prosperity. Immigration falls under two categories in the United States: legal and illegal. In terms of legal immigration, applicants must apply for immigrant visas (a pass to a foreign national to enter the U.S.), or green cards if they already live in the U.S.¹ Then, an applicant is grouped into a specific category based on their reason to immigrate. These include family-based immigration, in which members of the immediate family of U.S. citizens can reconnect with their families, employment-based immigration for most temporary and permanent work, refugee status and asylum for those fleeing countries where they have a “well-founded fear of persecution,” and the diversity visa lottery, a program started in 1990 to accept immigrants from countries with a low rate of immigration to the U.S.² After that, one requires green card status for 5 years to apply for U.S. citizenship, in which they have to take English, Civics, and U.S. History courses, demonstrate continued residency and a high moral character, and pay an application fee. However, the debate on immigration has lasted decades, while politicians assess the social, economic, humanitarian,

¹ <https://www.usa.gov/enter-us#item-213379>

² <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-works>

and political weights associated with any comprehensive immigration reforms. The reforms that consistently come up in these debates include the length of time it takes to obtain a visa and get on the path to citizenship, and how to deal with illegal immigrants already in or trying to enter the country.

Every year, the U.S. Government is allowed to admit 675,000 immigrants, with some exceptions, while millions of people are clamoring to enter the country.³ The United States grants visas to a broad array of people in an almost bracketed system, with the most visas given

to those who possess certain traits. Some extra items on an application, like the ability to speak English, a sponsor that is an American citizen, a college degree, or an extraordinary talent, especially in the arts or sciences, help make it more likely that the U.S. would grant a visa in a more timely manner. However, those who lack these qualities find themselves waiting decades or

longer for a permanent visa. According to a study by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, immigrants from India are divided into three classes: EB-1 (extraordinary ability), EB-2 (advanced degrees), and EB-3 (bachelor degrees). In 2017, a total of 632,000 people were waiting for a U.S. green card from India, and the U.S. government permitted only 22,600 people, or 3.6%, to receive green cards. Also, the amount of green cards that were given to each bracket

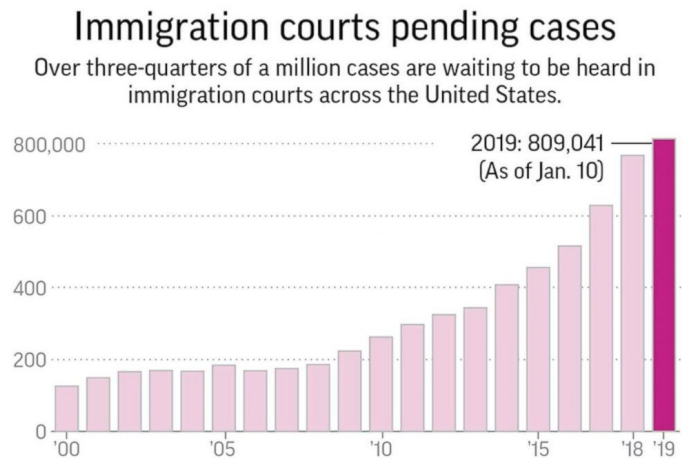


Figure 1: This chart by AP News shows the number of backlogged immigration cases in the United States, hitting an all time high in the beginning of 2019 and only expected to increase in years to come.

³<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/09/what-the-waiting-list-for-legal-residency-actually-looks-like/540408/>

was not proportional to the amount of people in those brackets. EB-1, while making up 13% of applicants, received 58% of the visas, resulting in a wait of about 6 years. The most stark example was EB-2, who made up 70% of the applicants and received only 13% of the visas, and had to wait a projected 151 years to get a green card. The study further stated that “Obviously, unless the law changes, they will have died or left by that point.”⁴ This is the case for hundreds of thousands of applicants, whether or not they have outstanding qualities or not. According to the State Department’s October 2017 Visa Bulletin, the unmarried son or daughter of a U.S. citizen above age 21 living in Mexico has to wait nearly 21 years to apply for an immigration visa.⁵

Illegal immigration occurs mainly through overstaying a temporary visa or crossing illegally through the southern border. According to NPR, the number of illegal immigrants who overstayed their visas was double those who crossed the southern border.⁶ According to the Pew Research Center, roughly 10.5 million of 45.6 million people that are living in the U.S. and are foreign born are illegal immigrants.⁷ Many

illegal immigrants cross the southern border and claim asylum. This practice requires them to go

Unauthorized immigrants are almost a quarter of U.S. foreign-born population

Foreign-born population estimates, 2017

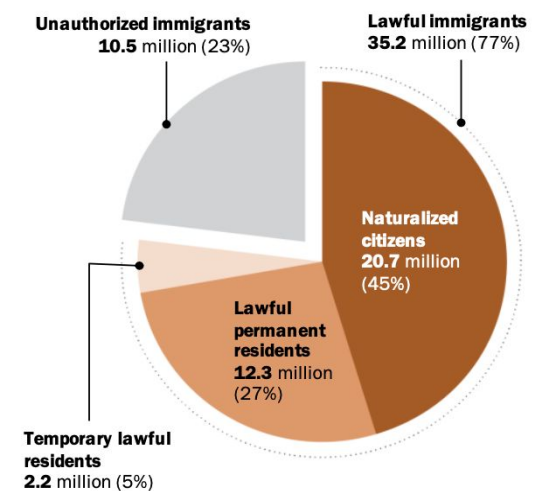


Figure 2: This chart by the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan political organization used to track social and economic data, found the amount of foreign-born people living in the U.S. and the proportion of those who are illegally here, which is 25%.

⁴ <https://www.cato.org/blog/150-year-wait-indian-immigrants-advanced-degrees>

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/09/what-the-waiting-list-for-legal-residency-actually-looks-like/540408/>

⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/10/683662691/where-does-illegal-immigration-mostly-occur-here-s-what-the-data-tell-us>

⁷ Figure 2

to immigration court and allow their case to be heard. Yet, many illegal immigrants simply skip these hearings, because they either do not want to pay the fees and take the time associated with the trial only to potentially get deported, or to simply enter the country and be able to achieve economic prosperity. Many immigrants like this stay in sanctuary cities, which are places where state and/or local authorities do not cooperate with federal officials to deport or detain certain individuals that are illegal.

However, for some, illegal immigration is the only option. Those who are trying to escape meager and possibly dangerous conditions in their home countries cannot wait years or decades to wait for even the ability to apply. The illegal immigrants that are already here and continue to illegally enter present both positive and negative effects for the United States. For the positive, illegal immigrants contribute a net benefit to the economy and fill unwanted and low-paying jobs. Lisa Gee and Matthew Gardner of the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy found that undocumented immigrants are in fact taxpayers, collectively contributing an estimated \$11.74 billion, or around 8% of their incomes, to state and local governments each year.⁸ Furthermore, the Social Security Administration says that illegal immigrants contributed \$13 billion in Social Security payments. Illegals make up about 5% of the American workforce, and a recent CBS News article stated that certain industries would not survive without their contributions. These industries include farming, construction, production and transportation.⁹

However, some negative implications of illegal immigrants are their economic participation and the national security issue they present to American society. While it is proven that illegals contribute to the economy through taxes, a study from the Heritage Foundation

⁸ <https://itep.org/immigration/>

⁹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/illegal-immigrants-us-jobs-economy-farm-workers-taxes/>

found that “in 2010, the average unlawful immigrant household received around \$24,721 in government benefits and services while paying some \$10,334 in taxes. This generated an average

State by State Costs of Illegal Immigration (Excluding Federal Costs)

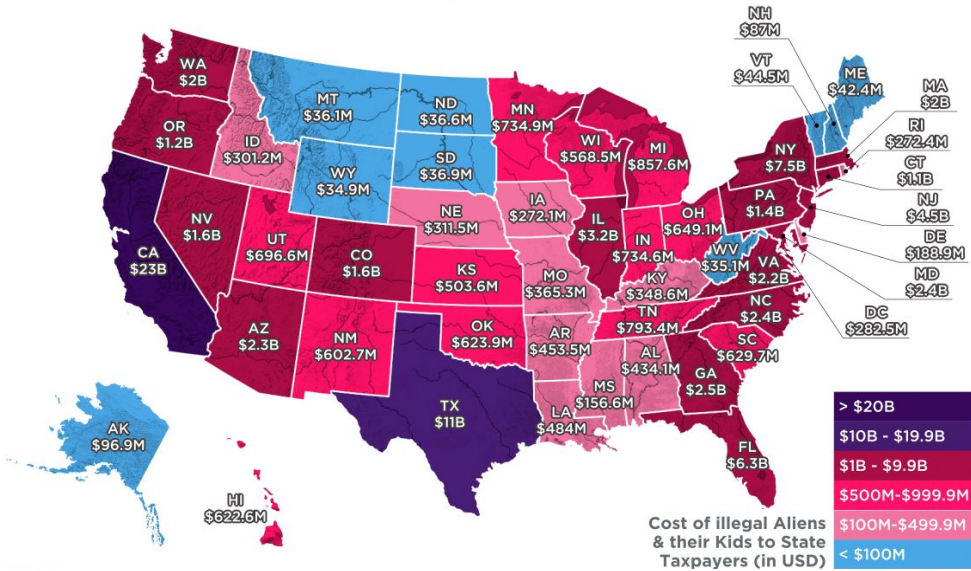


Figure 3: This chart from the Washington Examiner, an American newspaper shows the state-by-state costs of illegal immigrants. The total costs on this chart equals \$89 billion.

annual fiscal deficit (benefits received minus taxes paid) of around \$14,387 per household.”¹⁰ For national security purposes, illegal immigrants are unvetted by the U.S. Border Patrol (CBP) or the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and have the possibility to be

people with malignant or anti-American views. An example of this is the deaths of Bambi Larson and Kate Steinle by

the hands of undocumented immigrants. In Steinle’s case, her killer, Jose Zarate, was deported five times by U.S. personnel before returning for the sixth time and committing such a heinous act. However, this is untrue of the majority of illegal immigrants. According to the Department of Homeland Security in a 2015 report, roughly 820,000 of the 11 million suspected illegal immigrants have criminal records.¹¹ Border Patrol officials are also having a hard time dealing

¹⁰ <https://immigration.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000788>

¹¹ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/unauthorized-immigrants-criminal-convictions-who-might-be-priority-removal>

with the influx of migrants crossing the southern border, and are failing in their efforts to properly house and process these individuals. In May of 2019, CBP hit an all-time high of 144,000 border apprehensions,¹² crippling the existing infrastructure used.

During the last two presidential administrations, immigration policy has radically shifted. In 2012, then-President Barack Obama's administration began a program, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), that offered renewable, two-year deportation deferrals and work permits to undocumented immigrants who had arrived to the United States as children and had no criminal records. Furthermore, Obama urged Congress to pass the Dream Act, first introduced in 2001, that would have benefited many of the same people. As of March 2018, more than 800,000 people had used the program to prevent deportation and protect their status.¹³ In the 2016 campaign, then candidate Donald Trump proposed mass deportations and a ban on Muslim immigration, which did not come to fruition during his first three years in office. Yet, he has signed multiple executive orders to construct a border wall on the southern border, penalize sanctuary cities, and commissioned his Justice Department to end the DACA program, which was struck down in federal court. He has also instituted a no-tolerance policy, which led to the separation of migrant families at the border, move wholly condemned by the American populace. Most recently, in February of 2019, he declared a national emergency to divert funds to construct a border wall, which survived being disapproved by Congress with Trump's veto.

In conclusion, issues remain with our federal immigration system. Potential immigrants must wait extreme amounts of time to legally enter the country, the high level of illegal

¹² <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>

¹³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/02/13/who-daca-dreamers-and-how-many-here/333045002/>

immigrants crossing the border, and the failure of the federal government to properly address the current problems both at the border and with the immigration system overall. **It is up to the U.S. Senate and its senators to come up with a bill that resolves both the short and long-term crises with the American immigration system. It is up to the senators to decide how to go about fixing the issues, particularly at the southern border, through any action they deem necessary.**

Questions to Consider:

1. How much does illegal immigration affect your state?
2. What programs has your state, or cities/areas in your state, enacted to either protect illegal immigrants or American citizens?
3. What votes have you taken to improve the legal immigration system and/or dealt with issues with illegal immigration?
4. Do you favor giving amnesty to illegal immigrants? Do you favor allowing more or less people to immigrate to the U.S. each year? Why or why not?
5. How prevalent are immigration courts in your state? To what extent are they backlogged with amnesty and visa hearings?

Helpful Links:

- <https://qz.com/76047/all-the-paths-to-us-citizenship-in-the-senates-immigration-bill-visualized/>
- <https://www.thebalance.com/how-immigration-impacts-the-economy-4125413>
- <https://immigration.procon.org/>
- <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>