



www.nifi.org



>> Immigration in America

How Do We Fix a System in Crisis?

IMMIGRATION HAS PLAYED a crucial role in American history. From the first settlement at Jamestown through the founding of the republic and right up to the present day, the United States has been shaped and reshaped by successive waves of newcomers.

Over the past two decades, America has admitted an average of about one million new immigrants a year. Of these, approximately two-thirds come to reunite with family members already here. Others come seeking freedom from political or religious persecution. And still others are accepted on the basis of their employment skills. A small number are also admitted through a lottery.

But these numbers tell only half the story. Each year we admit several hundred thousand people on long-term temporary visas, mostly foreign students, guest workers, and cultural exchange visitors. Many of these individuals eventually change, legally, to permanent status. We also have about 62 million short-term visitors annually, mainly tourists.

Furthermore, for every immigrant accepted into the country with a green card (a permit allowing him or her to live and work permanently in the United States), others cross the border undetected, or choose to stay on an expired temporary visa. While the flood of illegal immigration has slowed recently, an estimated 11.1 million immigrants now live in the United States without legal papers. Never before has America had such a large population of immigrants living outside the law.

New Controversies

The costs and benefits of immigration have always been debated. But as we work our way out of a tough economic recession, some wonder whether newcomers, especially those arriving illegally, are compromising our quality of life, taking jobs away from those already here, and threatening our security and sovereignty as a nation. In early 2013, fresh attention was focused on the issue when newly

reelected President Obama and a number of congressional leaders announced they would tackle immigration reform.

While immigration has always been a contentious subject in America, the current debate has zeroed in on the millions of undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States. But the problems with our current system are not limited to these people. Consider that:

- More than half the crop pickers in America are undocumented, and across the country otherwise law-abiding citizens routinely hire maids, nannies, gardeners, and construction workers who don't have legal papers. Many employers in some parts of the country now depend on the energy and hard work of people living here illegally.

- Visa caps have created huge backlogs causing family members to have to wait up to 20 years to be reunited with relatives living here (these do not apply to spouses and minor children of US citizens). Legal hurdles also make it difficult for skilled workers from other countries to become part of America's unique culture of entrepreneurship.

- While we offer visas to students from around the world so they can earn degrees from our top universities, our laws can make it difficult to put their talents and energy to work right here. Instead of training entrepreneurs to create jobs in the United States, we train our competition.

A Gallup poll conducted in early 2013 found that at least two-thirds of Americans support some kind of immigration reform. But the public remains divided about what kind of reform the country needs.

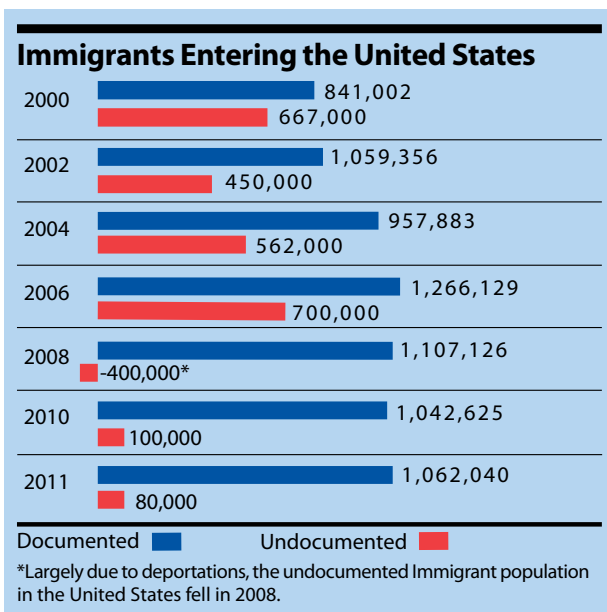
A Framework for Deliberation

For a growing number of Americans, the immigration issue is a tangible and pressing one. Those who support immigration are often bent on helping or employing newcomers. Those in favor of restricting immigrants worry about the growing costs—both social and economic—of assimilating and aiding new arrivals. For their part, immigrants themselves typically want little more than a better life. Can these often-conflicting interests be balanced?

The question facing Americans today is how to create a system that meets our diverse needs—a system that values the role immigrants play in society, takes heed of today's economic and legal responsibilities, and keeps us strong and competitive in the future.

To promote deliberation about immigration reform, this guide presents three options, each built on a framework of ideas and information drawn from studies, speeches, interviews, books, and public policy proposals.

These options are not definitive prescriptions for action so much as starting points for dialogue. The guide purposely avoids using partisan labels like Democrat, Republican, conservative, or liberal. The goal is to present ideas in a fresh way that encourages forum participants to judge them on their merit and openly explore them with others.



Source: US Department of Homeland Security and Pew Hispanic Center

The National Issues Forums Institute

This issue guide was prepared for the National Issues Forums Institute in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. Issue guides in this series are used by civic and educational organizations interested in addressing public issues. These organizations use the books in locally initiated forums convened each year in hundreds of communities. For a description of the National Issues Forums, log onto the website: www.nifi.org.

Other Topics and Ordering Information

Recent topics in this series include economic security, America's role in the world, health care, and education. For more information, please visit www.nifi.org or contact NIF Publications, 1800 N. Stonelake Drive, Bloomington, Indiana 47404. Phone: 1-800-600-4060.

Writer: Scott London

Editor: Tony Wharton and Ilse Tebbetts

Executive Editor: Brad Rourke

Design and production: Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

Copy Editor: Lisa Boone-Berry

Immigration in America: How Do We Fix a System in Crisis?

Copyright 2013, National Issues Forums Institute

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-0-945639-57-2

This publication may not be reproduced or copied without written permission of National Issues Forums Institute. For permission to reproduce or copy, please write to Bill Muse at bmuse@nifi.org.

Founded in 1927, the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio (with offices in Washington, DC, and New York City), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that studies the public's role in democracy. It provides issue guides and other research for the National Issues Forums. For information about the Kettering Foundation, please visit www.kettering.org or contact the foundation at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799.

OPTION ONE

A rich combination of diverse cultures is what defines us as a people. We must preserve our heritage as a nation of immigrants by shoring up our existing system while also providing an acceptable way for the millions of undocumented immigrants currently living here to earn the right to citizenship.



>> Welcome New Arrivals

AMERICANS ARE A PEOPLE welded from many nations and races, bound together by a common vision of opportunity and freedom. This is reflected in the national motto, *E Pluribus Unum*—"out of many, one"—that appears on every dollar bill. Originally, the phrase referred to the act of political union by which the colonies joined to form a sovereign state. But it also describes who we are as a people. Like the food we eat—an "all-American" combination of hamburgers, pizza, and tacos—America is the sum total of a vast number of national differences.

This option makes the case that our long-standing commitment to newcomers is part of what defines us as a people. Combining diverse cultures yields a uniquely strong and rich society and, overall, immigrants offer far more to American society than they take from it.

A Complex and Outdated System

Each year an average of about one million immigrants are admitted into the United States as permanent residents. They fall into several broad categories. The majority—about two-thirds—are accepted on the basis of family reunification laws. Some 10 percent are admitted on humanitarian grounds, most of them refugees or people seeking freedom from political or religious persecution. Another 10-15 percent are issued green cards, or permits to live and work here permanently on the strength of their special employment skills. In addition, a small number—about five percent—are accepted through a lottery available to nationals of countries considered less well represented in the regular immigration flow.

Today's immigration system reflects laws put in place in 1965 (along with a series of amendments in 1986, 1990, and 1996). Most Americans recognize that these policies are no longer working as they should. Because of bureaucracy and backlogs many of those seeking to reunite with their families have to wait years, even decades, before being accepted into the country. The State Department reports that in November 2012, there were 4.3 million people on family waiting lists. High fees and the increasing need for costly legal guidance excludes many worthy candidates. And long wait times create problems for the high-skilled workers American companies need to remain competitive.

Once immigrants are accepted into the country, many of them fail to get the help they need to fit productively into American society. Communities lack the resources to absorb newcomers and ensure they get the language and job training they need. This puts a strain on the public purse, weakens the economy, and compromises our sense of unity and common purpose as a people.

Living in the Shadows

Perhaps the most serious challenge confronting our current immigration system is the fact that too many newcomers live and work here without legal papers. Some arrive on student or tourist visas and never leave. Others risk their lives crossing into the country on makeshift boats or across the open deserts of the Southwest.

Today the United States is home to an estimated 11.1 million undocumented immigrants. The presence of such a large number makes a mockery of all those who are going through the process of immigrating legally.

In 1963, President Kennedy declared that "a new, enlightened policy of immigration need not provide for unlimited immigration but simply for so much immigration as our country could absorb and which would be in the national interest."

This option holds that what was true a half-century ago remains true today. Honoring our past as a nation of newcomers doesn't mean we have to admit any and all who wish to come to the United States. But it does mean recognizing the value they bring and making sure that the process by which we welcome them works fairly and in the best interest of all Americans.

Shoring Up the System

Option One makes the case for reforming the US immigration system while staying true to our humanitarian concerns

and our core values as a multicultural society. In practical terms, that means removing the delays and bureaucratic hurdles that prevent qualified newcomers from being accepted into the country and creating a viable route to citizenship for the growing subculture of undocumented immigrants who reside in the United States without access to rights and benefits reserved for legal residents, such as voting and Social Security, or other protections (in some cases, public assistance and emergency services when they need them).

In 1986, President Reagan signed a bill that offered amnesty to close to three million undocumented immigrants who had been living in the country continuously for more than four years. A similar bill, if passed today, could significantly reduce the population of undocumented immigrants although such a policy might be viewed as unfair by those already waiting in line to become naturalized citizens.

In considering Option One, we must ask ourselves whether we can shore up a system that has worked well for America in the past or whether the realities confronting US society today—in the wake of a major economic crisis and in the face of a rapidly changing global order—require that we develop an altogether new approach to immigration.

What We Could Do

This option says that our top priority must be to honor our long-standing values as a nation of immigrants. The way to do that is to address the shortcomings of our current system and the plight of the millions of newcomers who are living here illegally. Here are some practical actions that could help us achieve that, along with some of the potential drawbacks.



How Long Must I Wait?

Estimated Time to Acquire a US Green Card (Based on Current Policies)



6 months ■ 40-year-old British, PhD, bioengineering

6 months ■ 75-year-old Kenyan, son is US citizen

3 years ■ 24-year-old Iraqi, translator, US military

6 years ■ 35-year-old South African, computer programmer

6 years ■ 25-year-old Venezuelan, student, father is US citizen

10 years ■ 31-year-old Chinese, factory worker

20 years ■ 25-year-old Filipino, student

35 years ■ 35-year-old Indian, computer programmer

131 years ■ 30-year-old Mexican, H.S. diploma, sister is US citizen

Sources: Department of State; US Citizenship & Immigration Services

- The government should clear the backlogs of immigrants currently waiting to get into the country and streamline the process by which qualified newcomers—immigrants with families in the United States, refugees fleeing from persecution, high-skilled workers, and others—are accepted into the country.

But *this means more immigrants at a time when competition for jobs is tight, when public resources are strained, and when we already have a difficult time absorbing and integrating new arrivals into American society.*

- Lawmakers should create a roadmap by which immigrants living in the United States illegally can earn full citizenship. For example, they could be required to pay a fine, learn English, perform community service, and get in line behind those already waiting to become naturalized citizens.

But *assisting undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows may have the effect of rewarding people who entered the United States illegally while penalizing those who have long pursued a legal route to citizenship. It may also encourage more illegal immigration.*

- Policymakers should provide legal residency (and the ability to apply for permanent residency) for undocumented immigrants who came here as minors,

who have graduated from a US high school, and who meet other similar requirements. This idea has been debated in the US Congress a number of times, most recently in connection with a legislative proposal known as the DREAM Act.

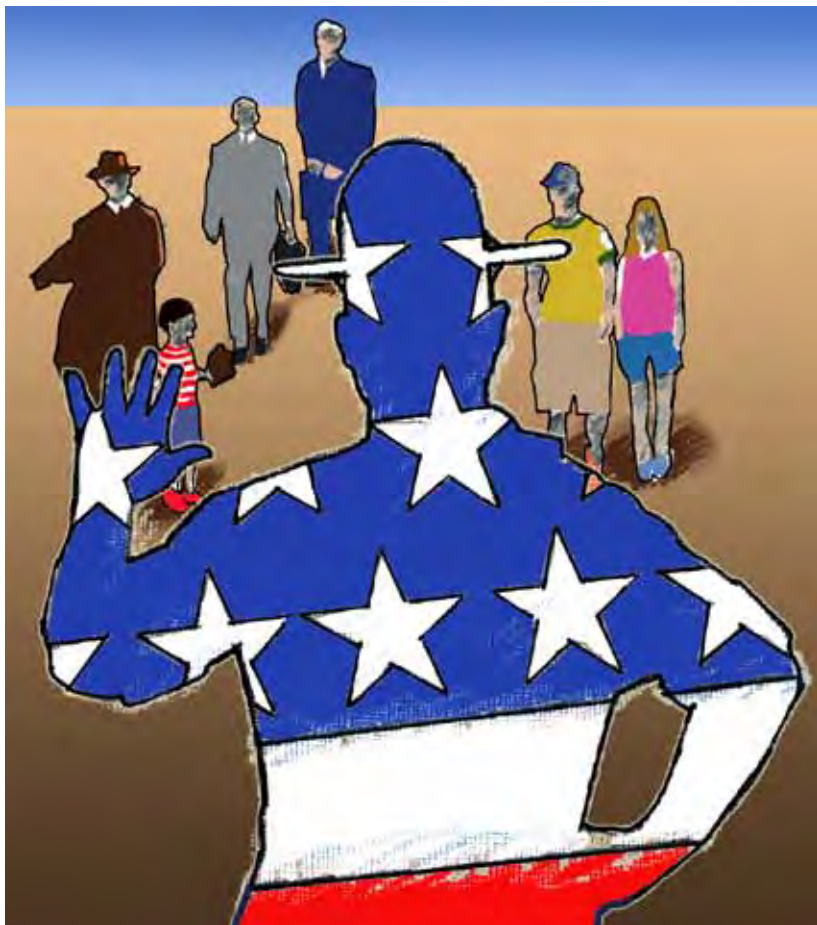
But *such a policy might allow immigrants to use their newly acquired status to seek green cards for the parents who brought them into the country illegally. It would also reward those who broke the law by taking advantage of our taxpayer-financed public education system.*

- State and local governments should strengthen the naturalization process by revising the citizenship test, training immigration coaches, developing web-based learning tools to boost the English language skills of those seeking citizenship, and promoting civic education and volunteerism in order to better integrate current and future immigrants into the fabric of American culture.

But *improvements in the naturalization system would add to the costs of integrating new immigrants at a time when essential social services like education and health care are already stretched thin. We may need to allocate our public dollars to more pressing needs.*

OPTION TWO

Failure to stem the tide of illegal immigration undermines our national security, stiffens competition for scarce jobs, and strains the public purse. We need tighter control of our borders, tougher enforcement of our immigration laws, and stricter limits on the number of immigrants legally accepted into the country.



>> Protect Our Borders

THE UNITED STATES WAS FOUNDED as “a nation of laws, not of men,” in John Adams’ famous words. Yet our current immigration system does a poor job of upholding those laws. By failing to stem the tide of illegal immigration, according to this option, we have in some ways subtly encouraged a system of widespread neglect and abuse.

Some of the most serious social and economic problems in America are exacerbated by the influx of undocumented immigrants. Take the high unemployment rate, for example. A growing number of Americans born in this country now find themselves in direct competition with undocumented newcomers for hard-to-find jobs.

Undocumented immigrants are not authorized to work in the United States, but many do anyway by getting paid under the table or using false or stolen documents purchased on the street. With so many American citizens

out of work, it’s unacceptable that some eight million jobs are currently held by people with no legal right to be here.

The costs of illegal immigration are social as well as economic. At a time when many American communities are struggling to integrate immigrants coming to America legally, growing numbers of undocumented newcomers threaten to break the bonds of unity—the common ideals of language and democracy—that define our political institutions.

Immigration also puts a strain on essential public services. Consider that some 43 percent of noncitizens under 65 have no health insurance. This means that the costs of their medical care—an estimated \$20 billion a year—is passed on to American taxpayers.

The same holds true for other forms of public assistance, such as temporary assistance to needy families, food stamps, public housing, Head Start, the Social Service

Block Grant, and other subsidies. Studies show that immigrants, both legal and illegal, have a higher dependence on these kinds of welfare programs than nonimmigrants.

Stricter Enforcement of Immigration Laws

Option Two says that any attempt to stem the tide of undocumented immigration has to begin with securing our borders—especially the 2,000-mile border that the United States shares with Mexico. But we can't stop there. We also have to step up enforcement of our immigration laws within the country. Some 40 percent of the undocumented immigrants living in America are here on expired tourist or student visas. We need to do a better job of tracking and apprehending these “overstayers.”

Controlling our borders and monitoring foreigners here on temporary visas will do more than reduce the number of undocumented immigrants in the country. It will help protect our national security. Consider the fact that 3 of the 19 hijackers in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were in the United States on expired tourist visas. One of the hijackers had received a student visa to take a language course in California but never showed up for the class.

“The current terrorist threat to the United States comes almost exclusively from individuals who arrive from abroad,” says Steven Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies. “Our immigration policy, including temporary and permanent visas issuance, border control, and efforts to deal with illegal immigration are all critical to reducing the chance of an attack in the future.”

A Pervasive Anger

When Arizona governor Jan Brewer signed Senate Bill 1070 into law in April 2010, it unleashed a wave of protests across the country and reignited an already contentious debate over US immigration reform. The bill was widely regarded as America's strongest anti-immigration measure in decades. It gave police officers wide latitude to detain anyone suspected of being in the United States illegally and made it a crime for immigrants not to carry immigration papers.

While the most controversial parts of the law were blocked by a federal judge just days before it was to go into effect, opinion polls show there is broad support for the measure in Arizona and across the country as a whole. Surveys find that there is a pervasive anger over the rise in undocumented immigration and what many Americans see as the failure of the federal government to address the problem.

“The people are angry and confused—but they're not totally out to lunch,” immigration expert Jonette Christian told the *Christian Science Monitor*. “They know that

something really big and bad has been happening to their country, and they never asked for it.”

What We Could Do

Option Two argues that we need to strengthen our borders, uphold our laws, and safeguard our national unity by reining in immigration, both legal and illegal. Here are some practical steps that could help us do that, along with some of their potential trade-offs.

- Reduce legal immigration through strict limits and eligibility requirements. A practical first step toward this end would be to eliminate or redefine the categories used to determine who is eligible for a green card—as some nonexceptional immigrant workers and foreign investors now are. Another way would be to restrict immigration of family members other than spouses and minor children of US citizens.

But imposing tighter limits on immigration would close the door to many of the workers—the highly trained and the low-skilled alike—that America's economy needs to stay competitive. Changes to the family reunification system would splinter families by denying a person the right to sponsor a foreign relative for a green card.

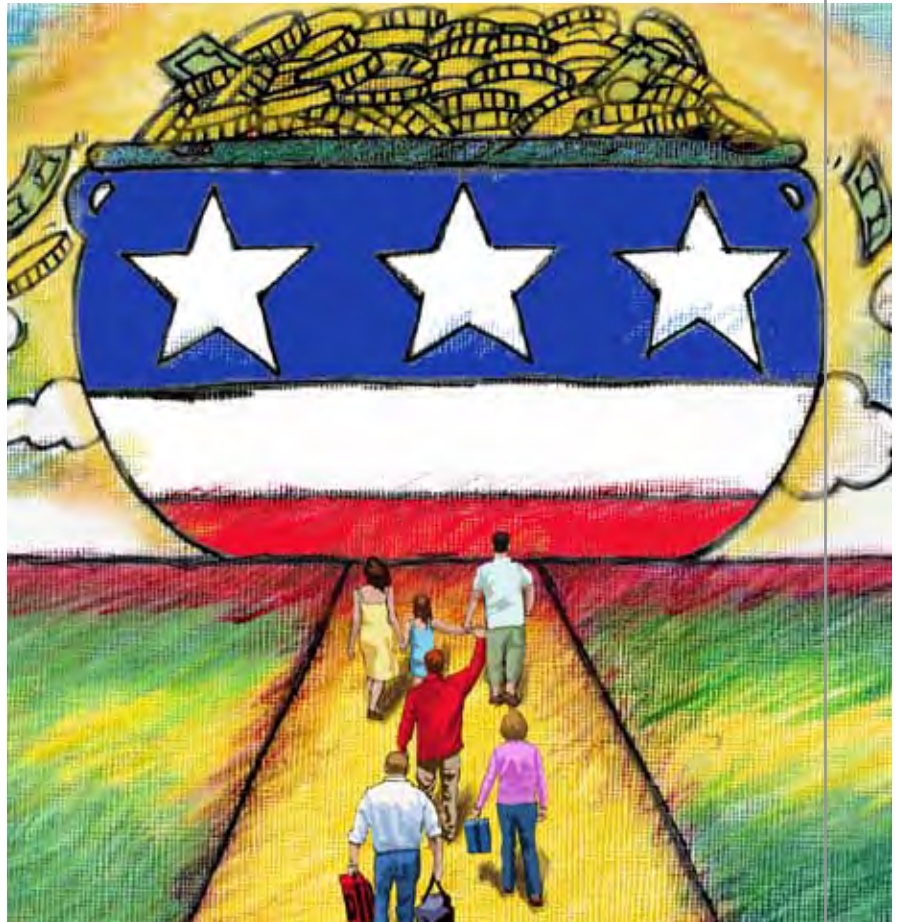
- Beef up security and enforcement along our borders—especially between the United States and Mexico where most of the undocumented immigration takes place—by expanding the border fence, hiring more patrol agents and customs officials, and investing in the latest surveillance technologies.

But stepped-up enforcement is likely to drive more activity underground, generate more violence along the border, impose costs on law-abiding employers,



OPTION THREE

To remain competitive in the 21st-century global economy, we need to acknowledge the key role that immigrants play in keeping the US economy dynamic and robust. This option favors a range of flexible measures, such as annual adjustments to immigration quotas, that put a priority on our economic needs.



>> Promote Economic Prosperity

FOR GENERATIONS, America has been a magnet for the best and the brightest from around the globe. Immigrants come to America to take part in its unique culture of ingenuity and entrepreneurship. This influx has enriched not only our social and cultural life but also our economy.

According to a 2012 study by the Small Business Administration, immigrants are twice as likely to start a business than nonimmigrants and they represent one out of every six new business owners in America. Immigrants who flourish here not only make a better life for themselves and their families, they contribute to their communities and strengthen the economy.

But the gains from immigration are not spread equally. For example, it often harms the workers with whom immigrants compete, especially in tough economic times. In some cases, it also brings down wages.

Option Three makes the case that protecting American jobs while at the same time increasing economic competitiveness requires a multifaceted immigration strategy—one that acknowledges the important contributions made by high- and low-skilled immigrants alike, but does not

depress the wages of disadvantaged American workers or drain our public resources, especially when the economy is in a slump.

Immigrant Entrepreneurship

Historically, immigrants have been a source of some of America's greatest innovations. The scientific breakthroughs of Albert Einstein, the inventions of Alexander Graham Bell, and the ventures of Andrew Carnegie were all made possible by immigrants.

This is no less true today than it was in the past. Many distinguished Americans immigrated to America before making their mark on the world, including political figures like Madeleine Albright and Elaine Chao, journalists like Ted Koppel and Christiane Amanpour, sports stars like Sammy Sosa and Anna Kournikova, and virtuoso musicians like Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman.

Sergey Brin, a Stanford PhD student who had immigrated from Russia as a boy, developed an innovative data mining system in the 1990s with his friend Larry Page. When the search engine became popular on campus,

they took a break from their studies to start up Google in a rented garage. Today the Internet giant is one of the most highly valued companies in the world.

Brin's story is not unlike that of other immigrant entrepreneurs. Studies have documented the scientific and economic contributions made by skilled immigrants to the high-tech and biotech industries. Twenty-five percent of the technology and engineering businesses launched in the United States between 1995 and 2005 had a foreign-born founder, according to a study by researchers at Duke University and UC Berkeley. In California, this percentage was 39 percent. And in Silicon Valley, the center of the high-tech industry, a full 52 percent of the new tech start-ups had a foreign-born owner. "Immigrant-founded companies produced \$52 billion in sales and employed 450,000 workers in 2005," according to the researchers.

The same study found that nearly a quarter of the international patents filed from the United States in 2006 were based on the work of foreign-borns living in America. Many of these patent-holders held degrees in science, technology, engineering, or math and were educated at American universities. Fifty-three percent of them received their highest degree from a US university.

These findings suggest that there is great value in bringing foreign-borns to America, educating them, and keeping them here. In order to remain competitive in the burgeoning global marketplace, the United States should continue to attract talented, skilled, and industrious workers from other parts of the world.

Low-Skilled Labor

Option Three holds that just as highly skilled immigrants are important, so too are those who are less well educated and have fewer employment skills. Studies show that these immigrants are crucial to meeting the needs of the labor market, especially when the economy is strong.

From a demographic perspective, low-skilled immigrant workers offset the effects of aging and increased education on the US workforce. Many of the children of unskilled Americans—immigrants and nonimmigrants alike—no longer wish to follow in their parents' footsteps. And for those with a college degree or a technical certificate, wider opportunities mean they no longer have to. As they become socially mobile, the pool of young workers needed to fill the expanding unskilled labor market gets smaller.

The US Department of Agriculture reports that approximately half of the nation's 750,000 farmworkers are undocumented workers. While many Americans worry that immigrants are taking jobs away from those born here, several studies have found that foreign-born workers often are doing jobs that American citizens don't want to do.

What We Could Do

Option Three argues that we need to develop an immigration strategy that is responsive to the changing needs of the US economy. It says that we should reprioritize our immigration laws with an eye toward strengthening our competitiveness in the 21st-century global economy. Here are some actions worth considering, along with their potential trade-offs.

- Make annual adjustments to the number of immigrant workers allowed into the United States depending on the overall strength of the economy. Adjustable quotas could be established for different sectors of the labor market. These could be increased during times of economic growth and low unemployment, and decreased when times are hard and competition for jobs is tight.

But *many immigrants choose to come to the United States for reasons other than economic or professional opportunity. They may not be willing to work here if they were only allowed to stay for a limited period of time, or until there was a change in the economic forecast.*

- Issue green cards, or permits to live and work here permanently, to foreign students who have earned graduate degrees from American colleges and universities—especially those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—to encourage them to stay in the United States and contribute to our economy.

But *offering green cards to foreign graduates may have the opposite effect of stiffening competition for hard-to-find jobs and placing US workers at a disadvantage.*

- Create a seasonal or temporary visa program for agricultural workers to provide an accessible labor pool for farmers and other growers.

But *increased dependence on foreign workers can drive down wages, lower productivity, and compromise workers' rights in the agriculture industry, while at the same time take jobs away from US farm workers.*

- Grant temporary "start-up" visas to foreign entrepreneurs willing to invest capital and start new ventures in the United States. Issue green cards to those whose start-ups create jobs and generate revenue.

But *such a strategy would allow people to buy their way into the country, in effect selling the privilege of living and working in America to the highest bidder.*

- Shorten the wait time for employer-sponsored green cards to encourage more high-skilled workers to contribute to the US workforce. Improve the system for determining whether foreign workers qualify to work in the United States in order to attract more high-skilled professionals from abroad.

But *carrying out criminal and other background checks takes time and expediting the visa process could pose risks to our national security. Different states and regions also have different workforce requirements and a universal law may be impossible to implement.*

>> Immigration in America

How Do We Fix a System in Crisis?

THE UNITED STATES has long been defined as a land of opportunity, a refuge from persecution, and a nation of immigrants. Throughout its history, the United States has welcomed millions of immigrants from every part of the world. While this influx has stimulated our economy and strengthened our culture in the past, some wonder whether it's still good for the nation.

As we work our way out of a tough economic recession, many worry that newcomers are compromising our quality of life, exacerbating competition for scarce jobs, and threatening our security and sovereignty as a nation.

Most Americans agree that our immigration system needs an overhaul. Too many immigrants slip across our

borders undetected and too many are here on expired temporary visas. Backlogs and bureaucracy prevent high-skilled foreign workers from getting the permits they need and hinder family members from being reunited with their loved ones in the United States.

Tackling the immigration issue requires that we take a fresh look at it and get beyond the polarized debates that too often divide the country rather than bring it together. Our challenge today is to build a system that reflects our essential values as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. This issue guide explores three different options for doing that.

OPTION ONE

Welcome New Arrivals

America is a nation of immigrants, a people welded from many nations and races, bound together by a common vision of opportunity and freedom. That diversity has always been the backbone of America's strength. A 21st-century immigration system must reflect these characteristic values along with a humanitarian commitment to refugees and those seeking freedom from persecution.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

Clear the backlog of immigrants currently waiting to get into the country and streamline the process by which qualified applicants are granted visas.

Create a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants who reside in the United States by requiring that they pay back taxes, learn English, and get in line behind those already waiting to become naturalized citizens.

Strengthen America's commitment to refugees and other vulnerable people around the world through increased assistance, protection, and health services.

Provide temporary legal residency (and the ability to apply for permanent residency) for unauthorized immigrants who were brought to the United States as minors.

Strengthen the naturalization process by revising the citizenship test, training immigration coaches, and developing web-based learning tools to boost the English language skills of those seeking citizenship.

SOME CONSEQUENCES AND TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER

Making it easier for those waiting in line means accepting more immigrants at a time when jobs are tight, public resources are strained, and when we have trouble absorbing and integrating the high number of immigrants already here.

Assisting undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows may have the effect of rewarding people who entered the United States illegally while penalizing those who have pursued a legal route to citizenship. It may also encourage more unauthorized immigration.

Focusing more of our attention and resources on refugees could divert them away from the millions of people within our borders who are in need.

Such a policy might allow immigrants to use their newly acquired status to seek green cards for the parents who brought them into the country illegally. It would also reward those who broke the law by taking advantage of our taxpayer-financed public education system.

Improvements in the naturalization system would drive up the already high costs of immigration and divert money away from more urgent priorities like education and health care.

OPTION TWO

Protect Our Borders

Some of America’s most serious social and economic problems are exacerbated by the influx of unauthorized immigrants. By failing to control illegal immigration, we’ve undermined our national security, stiffened competition for scarce jobs, and strained the public purse. This option argues for tighter control of our borders, tougher enforcement of our immigration laws, and stricter limits on the number of immigrants legally accepted into the country.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

SOME CONSEQUENCES AND TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER

Restrict the number of immigrants legally admitted into the United States by imposing tougher eligibility requirements, for instance by restricting immigration of family members other than spouses and minor children of US citizens.

Stricter limits on immigration would close the door to many of the workers that America’s economy needs to remain competitive.

Step up security along our borders by expanding the Mexican border fence and hiring more patrol agents and customs officials.

Tougher enforcement along the border is likely to drive more activity underground, increase violence, and penalize employers.

Give states greater latitude to crack down on illegal immigrations through measures like Arizona’s tough new immigration law.

Strict anti-immigration laws may promote racial profiling and hamper law enforcement by discouraging witnesses from reporting crimes.

Invest in education, communications, and infrastructure in Mexico to improve its economy and stem the tide of immigrants coming here in search of a better life.

Bolstering the economy of Mexico could cost the United States jobs by making it more attractive for American companies to move their operations south of the border.

Rein in benefits, including health care and public assistance, to undocumented immigrants and their children.

This would compromise our humanitarian values by denying medical care and other help to people in need or at risk.

Hold employers accountable if they break the law by deliberately hiring and exploiting workers without legal papers.

The economy depends on undocumented immigrants who carry out low-skilled work. Denying them access would drive up wages and hurt the economy.

OPTION THREE

Promote Economic Prosperity

Protecting American jobs, while at the same time increasing economic competitiveness, requires a multi-faceted immigration strategy, one that acknowledges the important contributions made by high- and low-skilled immigrants alike, but does not depress the wages of disadvantaged American workers or drain our public resources, especially during economic hard times.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

SOME CONSEQUENCES AND TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER

Make annual adjustments to the number of immigrant workers allowed into the United States depending on the overall strength of the economy.

Many immigrants choose to come to the United States for reasons other than economic or professional opportunity. They may not be willing to work here if their visas were provisional.

Issue green cards to foreign students who graduate from American colleges and universities, particularly in fields like science and technology—to encourage them to stay in the United States and contribute to the economy.

This would stiffen competition for hard-to-find jobs and put American workers at a disadvantage.

Create a seasonal or temporary visa program for agricultural workers to provide an accessible labor pool for farmers and other growers.

Increased dependence on foreign workers can depress wages, lower productivity, and compromise workers’ rights in the farming industry.

Grant temporary “start-up” visas to foreign entrepreneurs willing to invest capital and start new ventures in the United States and reward them with green cards if their companies do well.

This would allow people to buy their way into the country, in effect selling the privilege of living and working in America to the highest bidder.

Shorten the wait time for employer-sponsored green cards to attract more high-skilled professionals from abroad.

Carrying out criminal and other background checks takes time and expediting the visa process could pose risks to our national security.