U.S. Immigration Policy: What Should We Do?

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.
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.