

# Should Undocumented Immigrants Get a 'Path to Citizenship'?

**M**ost Americans agree that the nation's immigration system needs fixing. But Congress has been unable to pass immigration reform. The major sticking point has been what to do with the 11 million immigrants who are already in the United States illegally. Most Democrats, including President Obama, favor allowing undocumented immigrants to take steps to legalize their status and ultimately become U.S. citizens. But critics, including many Republicans, say that offering a "path to citizenship" is essentially giving amnesty to lawbreakers. Immigration reform is already an issue in the 2016 presidential campaign.

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**YES** Our immigration system is badly broken. Far too many people illegally cross our borders, and we turn away too many people who want to legally enter our country—people who could invent new technologies, create jobs, and boost our economy.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to immigration reform is this knotty question: What do we do with the 11 million undocumented people who live in the shadows, fearing deportation each day, most of them working to earn their sons and daughters a chance at the American Dream?

The status quo is unsustainable. Without reform, our immigration laws threaten to tear apart families and force our government to expend precious resources to deport millions. Without reform, these 11 million continue to live in a state of uncertainty and fear. The vast majority of them want to get right by the law, but there is no achievable pathway for them to do so.

That's why I've been fighting to pass immigration

reform. We need to modernize and fix our immigration system, to ensure that the door to America remains as open to future generations as it was for our ancestors. We also need to give the millions of undocumented workers a chance to settle their debt to society and earn legal status.

In 2013, the Senate passed a bill that would have done just that. Our reform bill would have established a tough but fair pathway to citizenship. By fulfilling reasonable requirements such as paying fines, learning English, and waiting their turn to be considered, these immigrants could become law-abiding citizens.

Unfortunately, the House of Representatives never even voted on this comprehensive immigration reform bill.

From my home in Brooklyn, I can see the Statue of Liberty, which welcomed my ancestors so many years ago. That statue is a symbol of hope to the world. For it to remain so, we must keep fighting to pass immigration reform, including a solution for undocumented immigrants who are already here.

**—SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER**  
Democrat of New York

**Leslye Osegueda**  
was born in Mexico and brought to the U.S. illegally at age 5. She's now 24 and a community organizer in Los Angeles.

**Without reform, our immigration laws threaten to tear apart families.**





## Undocumented Immigrants BY THE NUMBERS

### Where they come from:

1. **MEXICO**  
6.8 MILLION
2. **EL SALVADOR**  
660,000
3. **GUATEMALA**  
520,000
4. **HONDURAS**  
380,000
5. **CHINA**  
280,000

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY,  
OFFICE OF IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

# 27%

PERCENTAGE of the  
42 million immigrants in the  
U.S. who are undocumented.

SOURCE: MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE

# 8 million

NUMBER of undocumented  
immigrants in the U.S.  
workforce.

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

**NO** A pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants is blanket amnesty that not only pardons those who've broken the law, but also rewards them. Rewarding lawbreakers by handing them the very thing they're after can only encourage more people to break the law.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan tried this approach. At the time, I opposed the legislation that ultimately provided amnesty to 3 million immigrants who were in the U.S. illegally. Reagan said the measure was a one-time offer and that after that, the country's immigration laws would be vigorously enforced so there would no longer be a problem of a large population of people living here illegally.

That's not what happened then, and it's not what would happen now if we tried another round of amnesty. With hindsight, we can see clearly that the 1986 law did not solve America's illegal immigration problem. The U.S.-Mexico border was not strictly patrolled, and in the three decades since, the number of immigrants who have crossed illegally has soared to 11 million.

**To stop illegal immigration, we should punish those who break the law.**

Rather than arbitrarily welcoming as citizens whoever happens to have snuck across the border, we should be thinking about what we want America to look like in 2050. How many immigrants do we want, and what kind of job skills and education do we want them to have? Those

are some of the considerations that should inform any immigration reform we enact.

I oppose providing a pathway to citizenship because you can't offer incentives for breaking the law without expecting more laws to be broken.

It's a basic law of economics: When you reward a behavior, you get more of it; when you punish something, you get less of it.

If we want to solve America's problem with illegal immigration, we should punish those who break the law. We should systematically deport all those who are living in the U.S. illegally. Doing so would restore the rule of law and finally solve the problem.

**—CONGRESSMAN STEVE KING**  
Republican of Iowa