



The Unfinished Welcome: Equity, Justice and the Immigrant Experience

A Response by The Inclusion Allies Coalition
Written by May Snowden, IAC Advocacy Committee



Immigration Through the Lens of Equity, Justice and Belonging

Immigration is the heartbeat of America's story—a tale of seekers who dared to dream and build a better life. From its earliest days, the U.S. has been shaped by the courage and perseverance of those who journeyed across oceans, seeking refuge, opportunity, and belonging.

Yet, the current anti-immigration dialogue reflects a complex interplay of historical, political, and societal factors that challenge the ideals of equity, justice, and belonging.

To understand the “why” behind this discourse, we must understand the history of immigration, its impact on the nation, and the path forward to fostering a more inclusive society.

"US immigration policy often has very little to do with trends and patterns of immigration... Openness or restrictiveness of US policies is more strongly shaped by prevailing economic circumstances and political ideologies."

Source: Massey & Pren, Unintended consequences of US Immigration Policy



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historical Context

The arrival of the **Pilgrims** in 1620 at Plymouth Colony in search of religious and political freedom symbolizes their own pursuit of equity, justice and belonging, as we understand them today. These English Separatists fled religious persecution, in search of a place to preserve their identity and secure economic stability in the New World. While their story is often celebrated as a cornerstone of America's founding, it also highlights the complex realities of immigration, including their interaction with, and the oppression of indigenous peoples who inhabited the land long before their arrival.

Soon after, waves of newcomers followed—the **Puritans, Quakers, Huguenots**—all seeking freedom and opportunity. Southern colonies like Virginia relied on European indentured servants who worked under grueling contracts to pay for their passage. Meanwhile, the transatlantic slave trade brought millions of Africans to the Americas against their will, leaving a tragic legacy that shaped the nation's economy and social structure.

As the colonies expanded, **Scots, Scotch-Irish, Germans, and Dutch** settlers brought traditions, skills, and perspectives that enriched America's identity. Diversity flourished among European settlers, reflecting a range of languages, customs and religious traditions. However, this expansion of cultural expression remained confined to Europeans, excluding indigenous people and Africans whose presence was shaped by displacement and enslavement. This discrimination, together with exclusionary practices, often clouded the promise of equality, illustrating a tension between the ideals of justice and the realities of exploitation. (8)



Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony
Fleeing religious persecution, these English Separatist's story is complicated by their cruel treatment of native Americans.



Puritans, Quakers, Huguenots
Seeking freedom and opportunity for themselves, some groups relied on indentured servants who worked under perilous conditions to pay their passage.



Scotch, Germans and Dutch
Bringing skills, traditions and perspectives to their new world also resulted in exclusionary practices and discrimination clouding the promise of equality.

Exclusion and Progress

Despite being a nation of immigrants, the U.S. has struggled with exclusionary policies. **The Naturalization Act of 1790** limited citizenship to "free white persons," marginalizing others from the American dream. **The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882** and the **Immigration Act of 1924** further institutionalized racial and ethnic discrimination, favoring European immigrants while restricting others.

But progress emerged. **The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965** abolished quotas rooted in racial bias, welcoming immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This transformative moment highlighted the nation's potential for inclusivity and the value of diversity.

1790

Naturalization Act
Limited citizenship to
"free white persons"

1882

Chinese Exclusion Act
Further institutionalized
racial and ethnic discrimina-
tion

1924

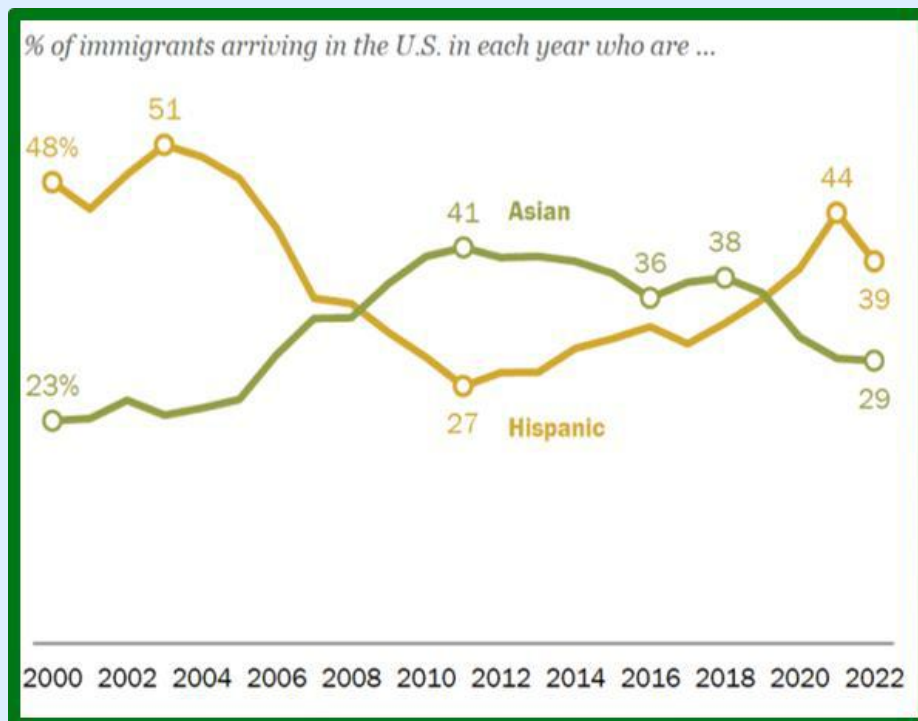
Immigration Act
Favored European
immigrants while
restricting others

1965

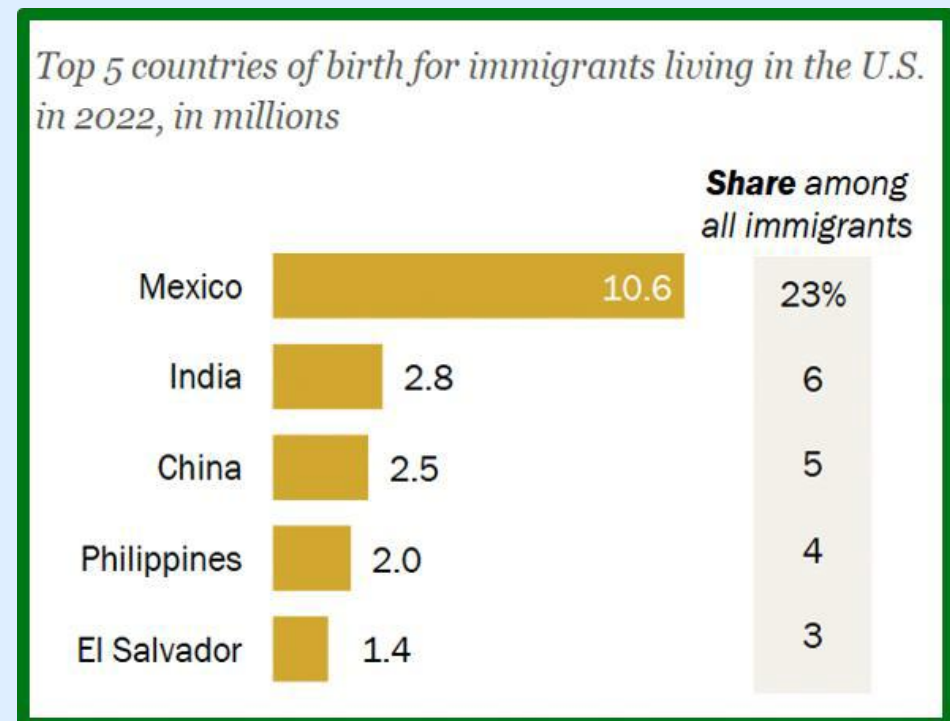
Immigration & Nationality Act
Abolished quotas rooted in racial bias

Historical Context: Recent U.S. Demographic Trends

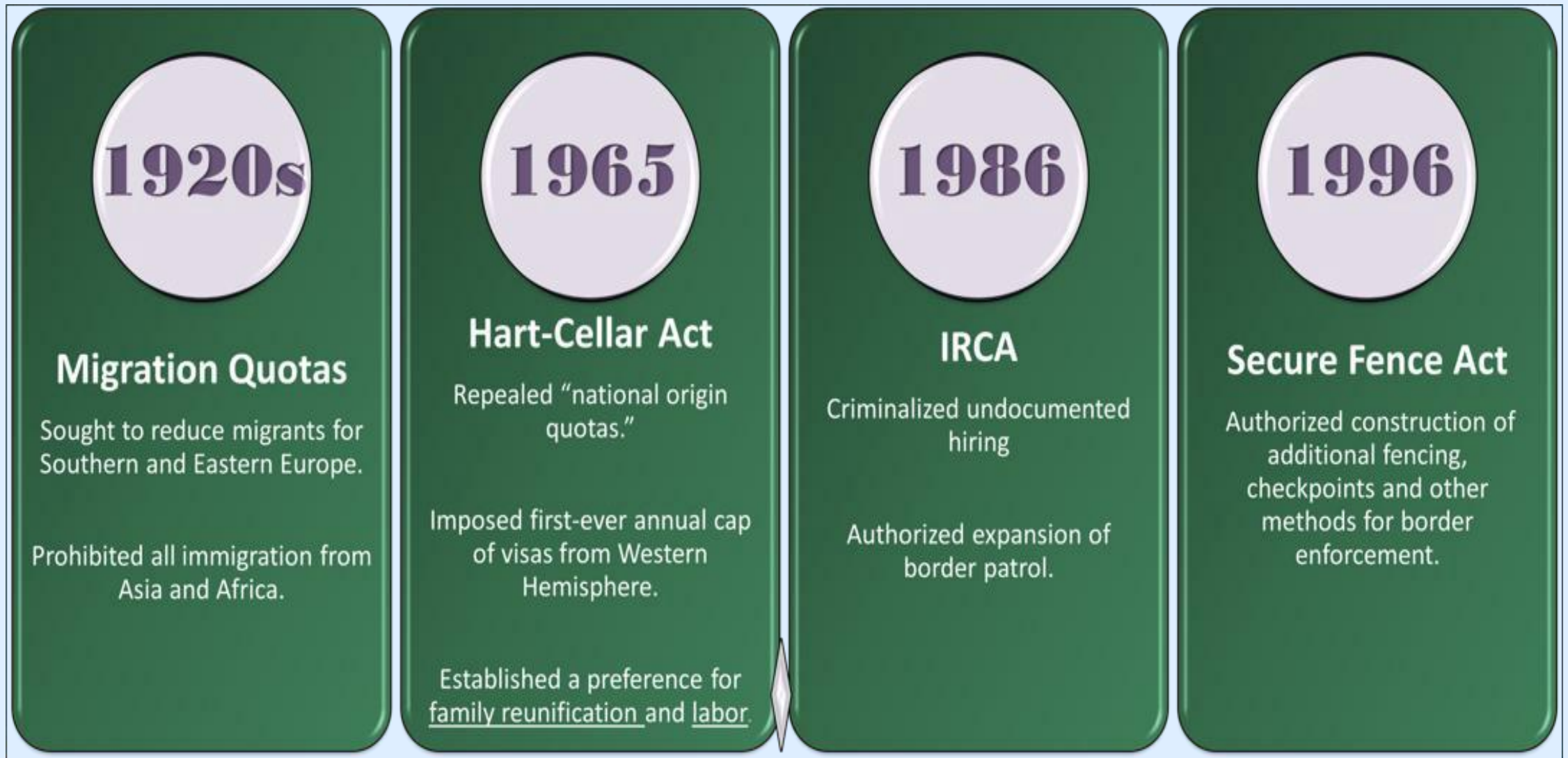
Among new immigrant arrivals, Asians outnumbered Hispanics during the 2010s



Mexico, China and India are among top birthplaces for U.S. immigrants



Historical Context: In the 1900s, Patterns of Demographic Immigration Varied



Sources:

Massey & Pren, *Unintended consequences of US Immigration Policy*

The UN Refugee Agency



THE CURRENT STATE



Executive Orders

- **Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship**
- **Protecting the American People Against Invasion**
- **Securing our Borders**
- **Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border**
- **Protecting the United States from Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats**
- **Guaranteeing the States Protections Against Invasion**
- **Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program**

The Current State

Today, immigration remains a contentious issue. Anti-immigration rhetoric often stems from fears of economic competition, cultural change, and national security concerns. However, these fears are frequently unfounded. Immigrants make up nearly 14% of the U.S. population and contribute significantly to the economy and society. ^(1,2)

The current immigration system faces challenges, including a backlog of asylum cases, restrictive policies, and heightened enforcement measures. For instance, **Executive Order 14159: Protecting The American People Against Invasion** expanded the use of expedited removal and imposed stricter penalties on undocumented immigrants, affecting their legal status and procedures. Meanwhile, **Executive Order 14218: Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Open Borders** introduced strict verification measures for access to public benefits, further marginalizing vulnerable populations

These orders aim to tighten immigration enforcement and reduce access to public benefits for undocumented immigrants. We expect more Executive Orders on immigration in the near future. These actions create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, not only for undocumented immigrants but also for their families and communities. The impact extends to citizens, as racial profiling and community tensions undermine social cohesion. ⁽³⁾

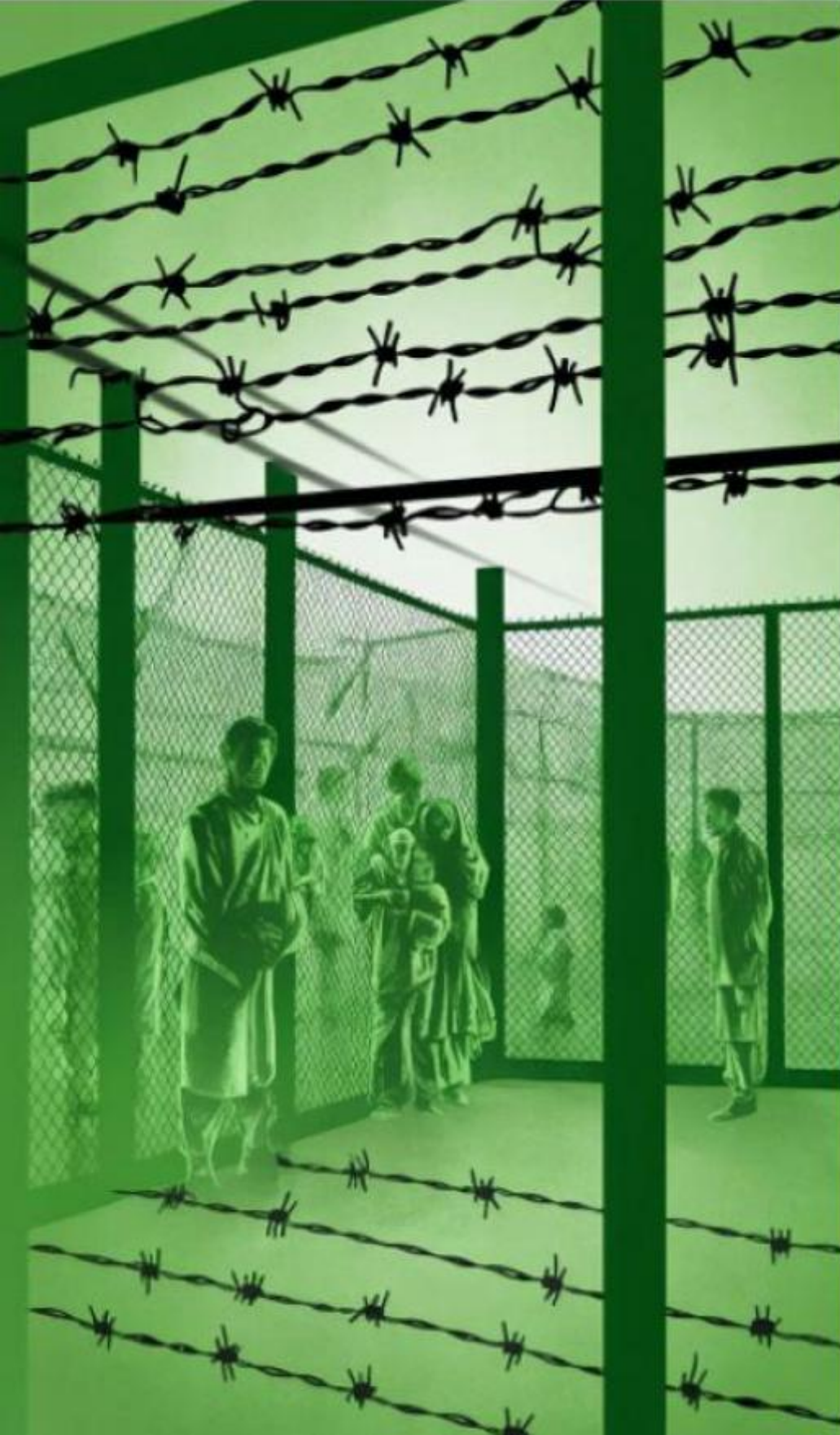
Executive Order 14159: Protecting the American People Against Invasion

PURPOSE: To enforce immigration laws and enhance national security.

Executive Order 14218: Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Open Borders

PURPOSE: To prevent illegal immigrants from accessing taxpayer-funded benefits.





Executive Actions

- Stop Work Order for the U.S. Refugee Program
- Shut Down of Safe Mobility Offices
- DHS expands expedited removal to the Extent Authorized by Statute
- Rescission of Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or near Sensitive Location
- Border Patrol agents directed to halt “notices to appear” and “release on recognizance”
- Group Humanitarian Parole ended
- CBP ends the use of the CBP app
- Administration denies extension of temporary protected status for Venezuelans
- Enforcement of the Laken Riley act
- Use of Guantanamo naval base, Cuba, for the detention of violent felon undocumented immigrants



IMPACT ON TOTAL COMMUNITY

Impact on Total Community: *Healthcare and Agriculture*

Healthcare

Immigrants are indispensable in the U.S. healthcare system, especially in underserved areas. They serve as doctors, nurses, and home health aides, addressing critical shortages in medical personnel. For instance, foreign-born physicians make up a significant portion of the workforce, particularly in rural and low-income communities where access to healthcare is limited.

Nationally, 15.6% of all nurses and 27.7% of all health aides are immigrants. (4) Their contributions not only improve patient outcomes but also ensure the sustainability of healthcare services. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the country will face a shortage of 134,940 healthcare providers by 2036.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector heavily relies on immigrant labor, with foreign-born workers comprising a large percentage of the workforce.

They perform essential tasks such as planting, harvesting, and processing crops, ensuring a stable food supply for the nation. Nationwide, 54.3% of graders and sorters of agricultural products are immigrants, as are 25.3% of workers in the agriculture industry overall. (4)

In some state, immigrants are more than half of the agricultural workers. Without their efforts, many farms would struggle to meet.





Impact on Total Community: *Construction and Entrepreneurs*

Construction

In the construction industry, immigrants are key players, filling roles that are often in high demand. One in four workers in the construction industry were immigrants in 2022. In California and Texas, the percent of immigrants doing construction work is over 40%. They contribute to building infrastructure, homes, and commercial spaces, driving economic growth and urban development. The Associated Builders and Contractors trade association estimates a shortage of about 500,000 workers in the construction industry in 2025. (4) Immigrants, again, are key to filling these roles and working to address housing shortages. Their skills and labor help address labor shortages, enabling the completion of critical projects that benefit communities nationwide.

Entrepreneurs

Immigrants are more likely than native-born individuals to start their own businesses, ranging from small enterprises to major corporations. Despite making up just 13.8% of the population, in 2022 immigrants made up more than one in five entrepreneurs (22.6%) in the United States, generating over \$110 billion in business income. (4) Additionally, immigrant entrepreneurs often bring diverse perspectives and ideas, fostering creativity and progress in various industries. These ventures create jobs, stimulate local economies, and drive innovation. Companies like Google, founded by immigrant entrepreneurs, exemplify the transformative impact of immigrant-led businesses. (5,6)

Broader Economic Impact

Beyond these sectors, immigrants contribute to public benefit programs like Social Security and Medicare by paying taxes, ensuring the sustainability of these systems for future generations. Their participation in the workforce boosts economic growth, fills critical labor gaps, and enriches cultural diversity, making the United States a more dynamic and resilient nation. production demands, leading to disruptions in food supply chains and economic losses.



IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

Impact on Individuals

We need to be aware of the impact this is having on members of the trans community so that we can reach out and “be there” for our family, friends, and colleagues. These attacks intersect with racism, sexism, ableism, and classism which reflect the lived reality of many trans people.

A permission structure for violence against trans people. Research shows an increase in anti-LGBTQ+ violence in states with restrictive anti-trans policies.

Trend analysis of FBI crime data and social media harassment indicate an uptick in violence against LGBTQ+ people following anti-transgender legislation, which is substantiated by first-hand reports from youth, caregivers, and medical providers. which is substantiated by first-hand reports from youth, caregivers, and medical providers.

What does it feel like to be part of this community during this thunderstorm of attacks?

Documented & Undocumented

Heightened Fear

Policies like expedited removal under EO 14159 amplify fears of deportation, discouraging individuals from reporting crimes, seeking medical care, or engaging with public services, even when legally eligible.

Documented & Undocumented

Economic Strain

EO 14218's restrictions on access to public benefits deepen financial struggles, particularly for low-income undocumented families relying on essential resources like food assistance or healthcare.

Documented

Increased Scrutiny

Documented immigrants may experience greater vetting during visa renewals or travel due to heightened enforcement measures, causing delays and uncertainty.

Documented

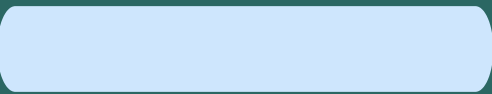
Social Discrimination

The broader anti-immigration rhetoric fosters stereotypes that can lead to workplace bias, housing discrimination, or community tensions, even for immigrants who are lawfully present.

Impact on Documented and Undocumented Immigrants

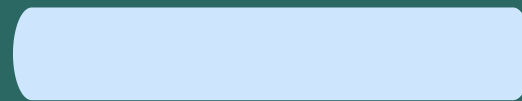
Both narratives and policies create ripple effects that extend beyond individual immigrants, affecting families, communities, and the nation's social fabric.

SHARED IMPACTS



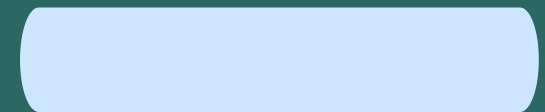
Sense of Exclusion

The broader anti-immigration rhetoric fosters stereotypes that can lead to workplace bias, housing discrimination, or community tensions, even for immigrants who are lawfully present.



Community Strains

Mixed-status families often face separation or other disruptions, eroding emotional and social stability.



Anti-Immigration Rhetoric

Anti-immigration rhetoric carries tangible consequences. It fosters division, marginalizes immigrant communities, and perpetuates systemic inequities. For non-immigrants, this rhetoric can erode trust and solidarity, weakening the social fabric that binds the communities together.

Impact on Individual Immigrants: An IAC Advocacy Committee Member Shares Her Story

Left Israel for a Better, Safer Life

My parents and I emigrated from Israel to the U.S. when I was a child, after the Persian Gulf War. They wanted me to have a better, safer life with opportunities, based on the American dream. Had we stayed in Israel, because we did not have high socioeconomic status, I wouldn't have been able to pursue higher education like I was able to after becoming a U.S. citizen, which also allowed me to find reasonably paying jobs to support myself.

Threat of Being Upped From Our Roots Triggers Generational Trauma

For a nation of immigrants and a melting pot, our current trajectory worries me, as it is just not in line with our founding principles. We are all worthy humans, regardless of our national origin, and deserve the opportunity to live, work, study, and not only survive, but thrive. No person or family makes the decision to leave a homeland lightly, and they each have a story and reason. For us to be scapegoated and under threat of being upped from the roots we've planted here is hard and triggers generational trauma for at least some of us. There are too many uncomfortable parallels to World War II and authoritarianism/fascism. I am also afraid of a repeat of this nation's history of the Japanese internment camps using Census data.

Even Though I am a Citizen, I Now Travel with My Passport

Even though I am a citizen, I now travel with my passport, though I am still worried and feel I have to be cautious of where I go in the nation, if I am suddenly not seen as an American and then deemed as less than worthy of my legal rights and civil liberties. What about those who tend to our food supply, between farms and processing plants? They do hard and often dangerous work for little pay-- work that we as citizens are unwilling to do and are privileged enough to be able to afford to opt out of better paying roles in safer industries and better conditions. They do the work without medical coverage or assistance, without access to safety net programs, all for better prospects for their families, regardless of what they may have done in their counties of origin.

We Need to Hold True to Our Founding Principles

We owe them gratitude, and they deserve better, not for what they do for us, but because they, too, are people, humans just like us. I can only hope we remember and treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve, showing them and ourselves we still hold true our founding principles and values of justice, equity, inclusion, and belonging."

Impact on Individual Immigrants

Fear and Anxiety

- ◆ *"I've never been scared like this before. Our city and surrounding areas have seen raids before. But this feels different. The way he and supporters are riled up. There's a shift happening."*
- ◆ *"I am a pregnant woman from Latin America and am worried that my child will be a citizen of nothing. It would be impossible for me to get my child citizenship in my home country while my asylum case in the US is pending. I don't know what will happen. What can I do? What can I do for my child?"*
- ◆ *Every single person in my life I've been talking to about this has told me: "No way, you're not getting deported. It's a well-intentioned – or perhaps a self preserving – notion. The people who love me don't want to see me taken away. Until recently, I had the same thought – I came to the US as a small child with my family, who were fleeing a wave of femicide in Mexico."*
- ◆ *"Last weekend, when I returned from a trip to Mexico City where I spoke about my experience as an immigrant and DACA recipient – I worried about asking my parents to pick me up from the airport. We had been expecting some of these policies for a while, and we've been preparing here, so I didn't think I was going to cry on my return trip to the States, but I did. I couldn't stop that anxiety."*

Business Implications

- ◆ *"I don't have a criminal record. I have a business, where I employ five US citizens," I always felt like I'm that example immigrant. Why would they want to go after me?" Now, I'm not so sure. I've had trouble keeping up with the litany of new restrictions on immigration."*
- ◆ *"The American people love us because we work so hard to help the community prosper and grow. I raised three children here. This was a safe place."*
- ◆ *"I have three businesses here. I shut down my companies for a week, resulting in tens of thousands of dollars in losses. This is not what life in America was supposed to be. I question why the U.S. government doesn't value the \$100,000 I pay annually in taxes nor the jobs my businesses have created. I don't know how the U.S. survives without us."*
- ◆ *"Many of my workers didn't show up for four days after the ICE operation. Now we're behind, and it's slowing everything up."*

Ice Raids

- ◆ *"They came and abducted people... even those who weren't criminals—families, laborers. "They came while people were going to work... it disrupted everything – closed businesses, kids stayed home from school."*
- ◆ *"It's easy to judge immigrants without legal status before learning the stories that brought them to the United States. My students dodged bullets in the desert and crossed continents to reach the U.S. ICE's brand of immigration enforcement is a kind of state-sponsored psychological torture. I am constantly watching for ICE cars. I can't sleep at night.""*



HOW YOU CAN HELP

How You Can Help

The future of immigration in America depends on action—collective efforts to embrace diversity and foster belonging.

Immigration is not just history, it's an ongoing narrative of courage, resilience, and hope. Together, we can ensure that this story continues to honor equity, justice, and belonging. Let's build a future where every newcomer finds a home in America, and every community thrives on the strength of diversity.

Here's what organizations and individuals can do:

Advocate for Justice



Support policies that prioritize family reunification, pathways to citizenship, and protection for undocumented immigrants.

Build Bridges



Engage with local initiatives that unite immigrant and non-immigrant communities, breaking down barriers of misunderstanding.

Celebrate Contributions



Amplify the achievements of immigrants in your own community and highlight their essential role in the nation's success.

Educate and Inspire



Share the true immigration story with friends, families, and networks, fostering empathy and awareness.

References

1. How Does Immigration Affect the United States, www.ucdavis.edu
2. [Current State of U.S. Immigration Policy and Its Impact](http://www.forwardpathway.us), www.forwardpathway.us
3. The U.S. [Immigration Debate-Council](http://www.cfr.org) on Foreign [Relations](http://www.cfr.org), www.cfr.org
4. Immigrants are Key to Filling US Labor Shortages, www.immigrationimpact.com
5. Are Immigrants More Innovative? Evidence from Entrepreneurs, www.census.gov
6. A New Look at Immigrants' Outside Contribution to Innovation in the U.S., www.gsb.stanford.edu
7. American Immigration Council Maps the Impact of Immigrants With New Data on the United States and All 50 States, www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org
8. The Problem With Calling the U.S. a Nation of Immigrants" - Time Magazine (Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz)