



What's at Stake

America is the most generous country in the world and [is home to more immigrants](#), legal and illegal, than any other nation. Yet, our immigration system is broken. [The legal pathway to citizenship is convoluted](#) and exceedingly difficult to navigate, deterring many people from pursuing legal entry. As the issue stands currently, [there are three main legal pathways](#) to citizenship in the United States: employer-based immigration, family-based immigration, and asylum. Each of these has stringent requirements.

Coupled with an insecure border, many individuals, well intentioned or not, are [tempted to cross illegally](#) rather than endure the complex legal pathway to citizenship. An insecure border also [creates backlogs](#) in the legal pathway that divert resources to manage the influx of undocumented migrants. Until the second Trump administration, this was a strain that left the U.S. Border Patrol [grappling with the issues](#) of recruitment, retention, and morale.

Despite these challenges, legal immigration has economic benefits. Immigrants [fill in where there are critical job shortages](#), boost productivity, and raise GDP, which enhances incomes for themselves and native born citizens. There is also [a notable rise in high-skilled immigration](#), which drives innovation—particularly in STEM fields where there is a concentration in research, development, and entrepreneurship often outpacing native citizens.

A Better Approach

[Enhancing border security](#) will help reallocate resources to simplify the legal immigration process. There have also been efforts to [increase morale and incentives](#) for recruiting and retaining Border Patrol agents with up to \$30,000 of incentives on the table.

Making legal immigration more [transparent and efficient](#) can help reduce the incentive to cross illegally. This can be done in several ways, though one way could be [through reworking the employment-based](#) visa system. The [Bipartisan Policy Center \(BPC\) found](#) that Republicans, Democrats, and Independents were more willing to compromise on reforming employment-based visas than the issues of legalization or border security. The BPC also suggested that legal immigration [could be simplified](#) by creating more temporary-to-permanent pathways to citizenship.

We must address the root causes of illegal immigration—such as human rights violations, violence, and political instability—by developing a strong national security plan. There must be [a bipartisan effort](#) in place to sustain meaningful solutions to immigration issues.

Addressing Misperceptions

MISPERCEPTIONS	FACTS
<p>Anyone who is legally in the United States has a pathway to citizenship.</p>	<p>There are <u>two main categories of visas</u>, nonimmigrant visa and immigrant visa, with almost 50 subcategories between them. Nonimmigrant visas are for people here temporarily, whether for traveling, working, or education. Immigrant visas are for people who seek to become naturalized citizens through employment or family or for those who have been granted asylum or refugee status.</p>
<p>There is a universal “queue” for legal immigration, and anyone can join.</p>	<p>The immigration system has very specific categories with very strict eligibility requirements. Many people cannot apply, including undocumented immigrants. Further, “<u>demand exceeds supply</u>,” meaning the caps for employment-based and family-based visas, with the United States issuing 140,000 and 226,000, respectively, have led to a backlog of nearly 7 million.</p>
<p>Legal residents have the same rights as U.S. citizens from the start.</p>	<p>Legal permanent residents (LPRs) <u>have many rights</u>, like working, receiving Social Security benefits, using public schools, having a driver’s license, and paying taxes. However, they cannot vote in federal elections, must wait three to five years before applying for citizenship, and <u>must wait five years for federal entitlement benefits</u>. LPRs <u>can vote in state and local elections</u> if the jurisdiction does not require U.S. citizenship to vote.</p>