



The Importance of Citizenship

As the House begins to consider what to do with the broken immigration system, there are differences of opinion as to whether any reform that becomes law should include a path to citizenship. It is important to keep in mind that citizenship is not just a benefit to immigrants; it provides an additional boost to the nation's economy. By legalizing immigrants without providing them an opportunity to become citizens, we lose out on the additional economic boost the path to citizenship would bring to the U.S.

Another reason a path to citizenship makes most sense is that, eventually, immigrants want to become citizens and most do so. Institutionalizing a situation where some immigrants are never allowed to become citizens guarantees political conflict down the road.

Finally, a path to citizenship that includes conditions, such as paying taxes, paying fines, and learning English—conditions already incorporated in legislation now being considered—is broadly supported by the American public.

Immigration Reform with a Path to Citizenship Would Mean Big Gains for the Economy

Researchers have found that immigrants who become citizens earn more.

- Naturalized immigrants in general have much higher median incomes (nearly 50 percent in 2007) and much lower poverty rates (more than 10 percent) than non-citizen immigrants.
- Even taking other factors into account, such as differences in educational levels, immigrants who become citizens earn between 8 and 11 percent more than similarly situated immigrants who are not citizens.

The increase in income as immigrants become citizens has a ripple effect on the economy. Immigrants who gain citizenship will bolster America's private sector by creating more demand for goods and services. All this in turn creates more jobs and greater income for all Americans. For every \$1 increase in immigrants' incomes, there is a \$1.17 increase in GDP. Higher income also means higher tax payments.

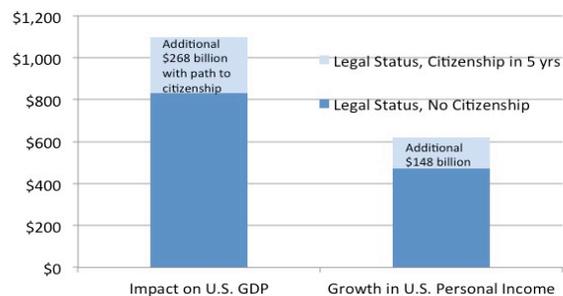
- Providing a path to citizenship to undocumented workers would generate about \$13 billion per year in state and local taxes, according to estimates by the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy.

- According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the additional taxes paid by new and legalizing immigrants would not only offset the costs of broad immigration reform, but would be enough to reduce the deficit by nearly \$850 billion over the next 20 years.

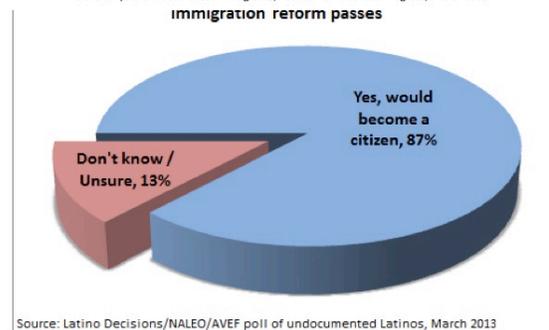
Providing legal status with no opportunity to acquire citizenship would leave money on the table—there would be less of a positive impact on our economy. For example immigration reform with no opportunity for citizenship would provide less of an economic impact than immigration reform with the opportunity to attain citizenship after five years.

- There would be 38,000 fewer jobs annually for all U.S. workers.
- There would be an increase in income for all Americans, but it would be \$148 billion less over a ten-year period than it would be if immigrants could attain citizenship after five years.
- The increase in U.S. gross domestic product over a ten-year period would be \$268 billion less in the no citizenship scenario.

Growth in Growth Domestic Product and U.S. Personal Income
Providing Legal Status Only vs. Legal Status and Path to Citizenship
Billions of Dollars



Source: Robert Lynch and Patrick Oakford; "The Economic Effects of Granting Legal Status and Citizenship to Undocumented Immigrants," Center for American Progress, March 2013



Immigrants Want to Become Citizens, and Most Eventually Do So

When asked, immigrants who are *currently undocumented* will say that they are more interested in being able to live and work in the U.S. legally than they are in citizenship. In reality, however, immigrants who are legally living and working in the U.S. eventually want to become citizens, and most eventually do so when given a chance. Public opinion surveys of immigrants bear this out.



- In one recent poll conducted in the fall of 2012 that included legal and undocumented Latino immigrants, 93 percent of respondents said they would become a citizen if they could.
- Another poll, conducted by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), found that 87 percent of *undocumented* immigrants said they would become citizens if given a chance.

Immigrants who are eligible for citizenship do become citizens.

- About two-thirds of immigrants who were eligible for U.S. citizenship in 2010 had already become citizens.
- The longer immigrants have lived in the U.S., the more likely they are to have become citizens. Just over 40 percent of immigrants who arrived in the 1990s are now citizens. The percent is double that for immigrants who arrived in the 1960s.

Immigration reform that precludes U.S. citizenship for undocumented immigrants will eventually set up political conflict in the future, as those immigrants and their supporters, advocate for citizenship.

Public Support for Immigration Reform with a Path to Citizenship is Strong

Since the most recent immigration reform debate began in Congress in early 2013, the public has been asked repeatedly by mainstream media organizations how it feels about immigration reform with a path to citizenship. [In poll after poll](#), when asked whether undocumented immigrants should be allowed to stay and eventually apply for citizenship, the result is the same: there is majority support for providing a path to citizenship for immigrants. This pattern has held up through 2013 and continues this year. All in all, 38 surveys have been conducted by a variety of outlets including Fox News, Gallup, CBS, USA Today, and ABC. No matter how the question is asked, in all 38 polls the majority of the public, by a very strong average percent of 68%, supports a road to citizenship for the undocumented.

