



March 21, 2019

TO: Immigration Reporters

FROM: Ali Noorani, Executive Director

RE: Questions for Democratic Presidential Candidates

Background

The following memorandum provides a series of suggested questions for members of the media to consider when asking Democratic presidential candidates about immigration. The purpose of these questions is to provide voters a more realistic picture of the immigration solutions that can garner the bipartisan support necessary to become law. A clear majority of Americans [value immigration](#) and would like to see a consensus package that combines smart, effective security and enforcement measures with a compassionate approach to newcomers who hope to make a contribution to American life.

Due in large part to President Trump's actions and rhetoric, immigration has emerged as a defining issue for the 2020 presidential election. The assumption is that Democrats are wholly against the administration's actions and seek an "open borders" solution. But voters are tired of polarization, and they want answers to nuanced immigration questions that address not only policy, but also the cultural debate raging across their newsfeeds.

The National Immigration Forum spent the last year studying not only public opinion research on the topic of immigration, but holding in-person conversations with voters in 26 suburban and rural communities nationwide, as well. We sought to hear directly from ordinary people in all walks of life how they feel about immigration, and what they hope to see accomplished on the issue. What we found, which we detailed in our [Out of Many One Report](#) last fall, is that most Americans want a "tough, but fair" system – as one, older white man told us. Broadly we observed that:

American identity is being reshaped as perceptions related to culture, security, and the economy are shifting. Quickly changing demographics are not solely responsible; the industries of the past are giving way to the industries of the future, and the transition from a post-industrial to a knowledge-based economy is disruptive. New technologies, social norms and conventions are accentuating the way many Americans view issues such as immigration. When it comes to identity in the context of culture, security, and the economy, there is both optimism and concern.

Thus, the challenge for candidates is to articulate a practical and moral argument, in a global context, that is sensitive to those who sense profound change taking hold around them, but also honest about the fact that even in the Trump era, clear majorities ([62% in a recent Pew poll](#)) say immigration strengthens America.

Questions

Thus, we encourage reporters who are talking to Democratic presidential candidates to stay away from more polarizing questions that garner headlines (ie. #AbolishICE), and focus instead on questions that create the conversation most Americans want, and where the most viable policy options live. (Please contact [Cathleen Farrell](#) for access to policy expertise or visit our [website](#).)

Questions to consider:

- What will you do to bring people together, counter polarization and unite us around the idea that America is special? How will you help Americans understand that we are stronger when we join together as one? How will you ensure that “Out of many, one” remains the core of the American identity?
- How will you lead a conversation about immigration that unites people around America as a nation of laws and a nation of grace?
- How will you acknowledge people’s concerns about their changing communities — concerns about culture, security and the economy — in ways that bring us together?
- We’ve seen an increase in the number of migrants coming to the southern border in recent months, especially from Central America. How will you address this challenge in a way that values U.S. security and human dignity? Given the difficult situation Central American countries face, what are the policy solutions you would put forward that ease the factors driving this migrant flow?
- In order to pass immigration reform legislation, a bipartisan compromise is needed. What is the path to compromise you would advocate for? How would you balance the tradeoffs between legalization for the undocumented, a functioning legal immigration system and the need for security at the border and in the interior?
- Many Democrats — including Obama, Biden, Clinton and Schumer — voted for “fencing” in the 2000s. Do you oppose all fencing and all walls today? What do we need to do to make sure we have “smart” border security? Do we need more physical barriers, added security at ports of entry, new technology, more CBP officers?
- What will you do to reduce illegal immigration, and ensure that sure our legal immigration system works for our economy and American workers?

About the National Immigration Forum

Founded in 1982, the National Immigration Forum advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to our nation. The Forum works to advance sound federal immigration solutions through its policy expertise, communications outreach and coalition building work, forging powerful alliances of diverse constituencies across the country to build consensus on the important role of immigrants in America. For more information, please contact [Cathleen Farrell](#), Director of Communications at 202-403-4190.