

# Faithful Voting and Global Concerns:

Global Issue Briefs for the 2020 U.S. Elections



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Issue 5: U.S. Immigration Policy

## Justice for Immigrants in U.S. Policy

*In a series of two-page briefs, Faithful Voting and Global Concerns, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns addresses key global issues for voters to consider for the 2020 U.S. elections. Inspired by the gospel and Maryknoll missionaries' commitment to stand with vulnerable communities around the world, we urge U.S. citizens to consider these issues and vote to advance the cause of peace, social justice, and the integrity of creation.*

### See

People trying to immigrate to the United States [suffer from the failures](#) of an [outdated immigration system](#) and the ongoing [political gridlock](#) preventing reform. The patterns and landscape of immigration to the United States have greatly changed since the framework for our current system was created [in 1965](#), but it has been [30 years](#) since the last significant reform. Experts [across the board](#) continue to call for [comprehensive immigration reform](#), while the current Administration makes every attempt to [block avenues](#) to immigration, including through broad [immigration bans](#), restriction of [access to asylum](#), and other means considered [inhumane](#) and [illegal](#).

The highly complex [U.S. immigration system](#) is founded on principles of family unification, economic need, and humanitarian protection. The number of visas available under each of those categories per year is limited, and the demand far outpaces the supply, leading to huge backlogs in the system. Legal U.S. residents must often [wait decades](#) for visas for their immediate family members to be approved. Similarly, competition for work visas is fierce in subsets of industries, such as in agriculture, construction, and hospitality. Many employers in these industries claim they have no choice but to hire undocumented workers.

Despite heightened border enforcement, the undocumented population in the United States has grown to about 11 million, largely due to the [absence](#) of [legal pathways](#) to immigration and ongoing [“push” factors](#) prompting people to leave Central America and Mexico, including gang and state-sponsored vi-

olence, poverty, and climate change. Data suggest that the [increasing militarization](#) of the U.S.-Mexico border and the efforts to deter undocumented immigrants from the U.S. have been [largely ineffective](#) in reducing the undocumented population. Deterrence efforts have instead [contributed to several humanitarian crises](#) at the southwest border, most egregiously the [family separation crisis of 2018](#), in which at least [2,648 children](#) were separated from their parents upon arrival, some of whom [remain separated today](#).

The United States has historically granted visas for humanitarian reasons, such as for asylum seekers, but [recent policy changes](#) have made it effectively impossible to gain such protection. By law, asylum seekers are offered the same protection as refugees – permanent protection from persecution to due race, religion, nationality, or membership in a social or political group – but they must apply for asylum at a U.S. border or within one year of their arrival in the United States.

### Immigration By the Numbers

- [643,430](#) - number in the in the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) (DACA) program for undocumented youth brought to the U.S. by their parents who seek permanent legal protection (2020)
- [0.6%](#) - asylum approval rate under the “Remain in Mexico” policy, which requires asylum seekers to wait in Mexico between court hearings (2019)
- [\\$27.2](#) billion in taxes were paid by undocumented immigrants in 2017

### Coronavirus Connection

The coronavirus crisis has [disproportionately impacted immigrants](#) in the United States, especially those working in essential services. The president has put a [halt on immigration](#) to the U.S. during the pandemic, and has [closed the U.S.-Mexico border](#) indefinitely, including to asylum seekers.

## Judge

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has a long history of advocating on behalf of immigrants and in favor of just, [comprehensive immigration reform](#), motivated particularly by the [large percentage](#) of U.S. Catholics who are, and historically have been, immigrants.

The [USCCB explains](#) that, according to Catholic social teaching, while nations have a right to enforce their laws and borders, the duty of Christians to “welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person” is paramount. Any efforts to enforce the law must respect the dignity of migrants, the importance of family unity, and the right of persons to migrate when they are unable to support themselves or their families at home. [Catholic social teaching](#) also asserts the duty of wealthy nations to accommodate migration flows.

In addition, Pope Francis and [theologians of migration](#) remind us of our duty to “welcome the stranger” and that the experience of being strangers in a foreign land is deeply woven into the history of our faith. Pope Francis explains that in the migrant we are called [to see the face of Christ](#).

## Act

We can call upon our candidates to include the following positions in their platforms:

- Expand access to the legal immigration system, most urgently for long-term undocumented U.S. residents, especially [DACA recipients](#)
- [Restore and strengthen](#) systems for the fair processing of asylum seekers and protect their human rights and dignity during the process
- Establish a humane immigration enforcement system, including by investing in [alternatives to detention](#) and prioritizing family unity
- Revitalize U.S. contributions to addressing the [root causes of migration](#) in impoverished and struggling nations

Read more about priorities for immigration reform [here](#).

## Maryknoll Experience



“Parents with children, and young adults, were waiting for days, even weeks, on the bridges [between the U.S. and Mexico], sleeping on their belongings or cardboard boxes spread out on the sidewalks... during their unusually long waits to be processed...”

[M]any of those seeking asylum are fleeing violence in the northern triangle of Central America due to gangs that threaten their lives and livelihoods, and due to domestic abuse. The often-corrupt governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, long supported by the United States, ignore the alarming growth of violence against poor families, and especially women, in their countries.”

- [Sr. Ann Hayden](#), MM, Peñitas, Texas, 2018

## Pray

Merciful God...Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters. May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

– [Pope Francis](#)

## Faithful Citizenship

Find out where your candidates stand on U.S. immigration policy and the proposals listed here. If a candidate’s position is unclear, reach out to the campaign and ask. Let candidates know you are concerned about the broken immigration system, get them on the record, and vote to advance the common good!