



TURNING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON ITS HEAD: *WHY COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM CAN WIN IN 2010*

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Despite current conventional wisdom that says Congress will not pass comprehensive immigration reform this year, immigration actually has the potential to be the “bipartisan breakthrough” issue that surprises pundits in Washington this year. But first, policymakers need to see past the misplaced misconceptions and understand the real politics of comprehensive immigration reform.

Reform is very much in the interest of all Americans, particularly now. With the nation facing a huge budget deficit and revenue shortfalls, what could be better than to create millions of new taxpayers by requiring immigrants in the U.S. illegally—and their employers—to pay their fair share of taxes. And comprehensive immigration reform would generate over \$1.5 trillion in GDP over the next ten years, while at the same time cutting costs for enforcement and deportation by hundreds of billions of dollars.

A series of notable developments since the last attempt to pass comprehensive immigration reform in 2007 underscores the newfound strength of the reform effort. New coalitions were formed; old political alliances were strengthened; non-traditional partnerships were developed, with diverse groups that often work at cross-purposes but see mutual interests in enactment of comprehensive immigration reform. From faith to labor to law enforcement, more and more voices are demanding action on comprehensive immigration reform for the good of their communities and constituencies.

Even more significantly, the country’s demographics have shifted dramatically and Latino voters who care deeply about this issue have found their political voice. The Obama Administration is in power, in part, because of these voters, and understands that immigration reform is a key priority for this constituency group. For this reason and many others, the Administration has publicly committed to working with Congress to pass immigration reform legislation. Meanwhile, reform opponents in Congress saw the effectiveness of their anti-immigrant rhetoric fade in 2008, as the anti-immigrant wedge issue failed for the second straight election cycle.

The Massachusetts special election has clearly contributed to the naysaying in Washington, as if the results of the 2010 Senate race were that Congress should run from tough problems rather than solve some. Some Democrats are scared of the immigration issue in an election year, and some Republicans think that denying the President a win would be the best strategy heading into the 2010 mid-term elections. But smart leaders in both parties understand that these views are so short-sighted as to be counterproductive.

Democrats need to show that they can work on a bipartisan basis to solve tough problems—something that independent voters crave—and come through for a growing constituency of voters that shifted significantly towards Democratic candidates in 2008—something that Latino voters crave.

Republicans need to acknowledge that this issue has brought out the worst in their party in recent years, and has backfired with the fastest growing group of new voters in the country. It will be very difficult for the GOP to win the presidency in 2012 unless their candidate can win 40% of the Latino vote. To have a chance of achieving that goal, Republicans must get this issue off the table, in a bipartisan fashion, and shift the focus of the battle for Latino votes to other issues more favorable to the GOP.

While the forces of opposition to comprehensive immigration reform are formidable, their stranglehold is far from monolithic—and may be weakening. Lou Dobbs, once the most visible and possibly influential of reform opponents, is no longer poisoning the airwaves nightly with his anti-immigrant rhetoric. The relationship of anti-immigrant organizations to the Tea Party Movement is tenuous at best; their mild-to-overtly racist comments during the Sotomayor confirmation debate and the earthquakes in Haiti have severely harmed their credibility, and their ability to swing elections is clearly non-existent.

Yet “conventional wisdom” remains a stubborn foe to efforts to reform immigration laws this year. The following pages explain why conventional wisdom about the policy and politics of immigration reform is dead wrong, and why politicians of all political affiliations would do well to understand the real politics of immigration reform.

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How the Political Environment Has Changed Since 2007

Power of the Immigrant and Latino Vote

The immigrant and Latino vote has continued to grow these last few election cycles, helping determine the outcome of key contests in 2008 and promising to affect both the 2010 midterm elections and congressional reapportionment following the 2010 Census.

In the 2008 presidential race, approximately [10 million Latinos voted](#), an increase of about 2.5 million voters nationwide compared to 2004, and a nearly four million person increase over the Latino turnout of 2000. Compared to 2004, Latino support for the Democratic presidential ticket jumped from 56-40% to 67-31%. Among Spanish-dominant voters, a key swing demographic, support for the Democratic candidate jumped from a 52-48% margin in 2004 for John Kerry to 75-25% for Barack Obama. In Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada—states George W. Bush won in 2004—the Latino break towards Democrats in 2008 was a major factor in Obama’s victories as well as Democratic pick-ups in the House and Senate.

As the Immigration Policy Center [noted](#), “Roughly one out of every ten voters was Latino or Asian in the 2008 election. In other words, one-in-ten voters likely has a personal connection of some sort to the immigration debate that has begun to percolate in Congress.”

In 2009, in the heavily-contested New Jersey gubernatorial election, Latino voters defied conventional wisdom that they would not turn out in an off-year election, and instead comprised the same share of the electorate as they did in 2008 (9%) according to [exit polls](#). Latinos favored Democratic candidate Jon Corzine over Chris Christie by a 65-32% margin. Corzine courted Latino voters heavily and was a consistent advocate for comprehensive immigration reform.

This high level of Latino political participation and mobilization and their swing toward Democrats has been, in part, due to the tone and tenor of the immigration debates of 2006 and 2007. In a [poll](#) from Bendixen & Associates of Latino voters in thirteen states, 87% of respondents said they would not consider voting for a congressional candidate who was in favor of forcing most of the undocumented population to leave the country. The same poll also demonstrated the damage inflicted to the GOP’s image by the negative tone Republican candidates voiced on immigration during past debates. Only 23% of Bendixen poll respondents trusted congressional Republicans to tackle the issue of immigration reform, while 69% trusted Democrats in Congress.

These results are largely due to these voters’ personal connection to the issue. In the Bendixen poll, 82% of Latino voters said that immigration was “personally important” to them or their family, and 69% reported personally knowing an undocumented person.

Latino political engagement is destined to grow even stronger in the future. Underscoring this trend are projections for the upcoming 2010 Census and subsequent reapportionment process. A November 2009 [report](#) from America's Voice Education Fund showed that Latinos will help drive the results of Census 2010 and the resultant congressional reapportionment. The report examined the states projected to gain or lose representation after Census 2010, and found that Latinos are settling in diverse regions of the country and represent 51% of population growth in the United States as a whole since 2000. In five of the eight states projected to gain seats following the Census, and in all of the eleven states projected to lose seats, Latinos made up a greater share of the overall electorate in 2008 than they did in 2000. Clearly, Latinos are helping to drive an increase in congressional representation in key states, and stemming the tide of further losses in others.

They are also becoming a more potent political force at the polls. Nationwide, Latino voter registration increased by 54% and Latino voter turnout grew 64% between 2000 and 2008.

As political columnists Ronald Brownstein recently [wrote](#) in National Journal: "With Hispanics providing the principal engine, the nation's minority population is not only increasing but also dispersing beyond the big cities where it traditionally congregated. And as minorities enlarge their numbers in the suburbs and even the exurbs, the number of House members representing districts with heavily diverse populations is soaring – probably to – unprecedented heights."

A forthcoming report by America's Voice will examine how Latino voters will impact key battleground races in the 2010 congressional mid-term elections.

Failure of the Anti-Immigration Wedge Issue

The 2008 elections saw, for the second-straight election cycle, the failure of the anti-immigrant wedge issue. A [report](#) from America's Voice found that in twenty of twenty-two key congressional races throughout the country in 2008, the losers advocated a deportation-only agenda and the winners supported more comprehensive policies.

While the hard-line anti-immigrant lobby has proven its ability to deliver angry faxes and phone calls to Congress, they have proven unable to win general elections—a failure that is being noticed by some political strategists. According to the late Richard Nadler, a GOP activist who [studied](#) the role of immigration in ninety competitive House races in 2008: "Immigration was a wedge issue benefiting the Democratic Party, but not the GOP." Nadler's study found that candidates "who were members of, or endorsed by, 'enforcement only' groups underperformed candidates within their own party."

Not only was the immigration wedge issue a colossal failure in 2008, but it was expensive too. According to data from the [Campaign Media Analysis Group](#) (CMAG), in 2008 a total of 234 immigration ads aired in 79 federal and statewide campaigns in 35 states, representing more

than \$27 million in spending. The vast majority advocated a “crackdown” on undocumented immigrants. Yet only 32% of immigration ads favored winning candidates. GOP candidates, party committees and outside group allies sponsored 78% of these ads, but only 17% of their ads benefitted successful candidates.

Hard-Line Opponents of Reform No Longer Drive the Debate

In years past, opponents of comprehensive immigration reform had been in the driver’s seat of the debate, advocating total opposition to any policy addressing the status of undocumented workers that fell short of mass deportation.

While a loud and vocal minority dominated previous immigration debates, the majority of Americans are much more practical when it comes to fixing the broken system. They do not believe it is possible to deport twelve million undocumented immigrants, and prefer approaches that lead to legal status for workers who meet certain requirements, pay taxes, study English, and show a commitment to America.

As discussed earlier, anti-immigrant politicians have also fared poorly in recent congressional elections. In 2006 and 2008, many immigration hardliners [lost their campaigns](#), and the [power of the anti-immigrant lobby in Congress has decreased](#). The number of Representatives in Congress receiving an A grade from Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), one of the leading organizations of the hard-line anti-immigrant lobby, dropped from 151 in the 109th Congress, to 87 in the 110th Congress.

In addition, former CNN anchor Lou Dobbs, the most vocal and visible opponent of comprehensive immigration reform outside of Congress, is no longer employed. Interestingly Dobbs, weighing a political future himself, [has recently voiced support](#) for a version of comprehensive immigration reform—including an earned legalization program for certain undocumented workers. While Dobbs’ “transformation” is viewed suspiciously by all, the fact is that the organized anti-immigrant lobby has been severely weakened by the loss of their leading spokesperson, and their inability to demonstrate electoral power in the last two electoral cycles.

Support from Congressional Leaders and President Obama

President Obama has stated his commitment to comprehensive immigration reform [multiple times](#) during the 2008 presidential campaign and since taking office. In June 2009, President Obama hosted a [bipartisan group](#) of over thirty lawmakers to discuss proposed immigration reform, and tasked Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano to serve as the Administration’s point person on immigration reform. In August, the White House hosted a

meeting with immigration advocates, business and labor leaders, and law enforcement officials to discuss immigration policy and the plans for reform.

In the fall, Secretary Napolitano began to step up her role as a visible champion of comprehensive immigration reform. She and her staff traveled the country, speaking with stakeholders from the law enforcement, business, labor, faith, and immigrant communities about the pressing need for comprehensive immigration reform. Napolitano gave a major address at the [Center for American Progress](#), where she detailed all of the enforcement efforts her Department has engaged in since she became head of DHS, and explained why comprehensive immigration reform was needed to restore control and order to the immigration system: "Let me be clear: to do this job as effectively as possible, DHS needs immigration reform."

In December, Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke also spoke at a Center for American Progress [forum](#), this time drawing upon their families' immigrant roots to explain the urgent need for comprehensive immigration reform.

Despite the Administration's stated commitment to comprehensive immigration reform, pundits in Washington have been forecasting the issue's demise practically since President Obama took office. Most recently, many advocates were disappointed with the way immigration reform was brought up in the January 2010 State of the Union address. While stating that the Administration would continue to work on immigration reform, the President did not lay out a specific timetable for getting it done. While this was troubling, the fact is that real work is happening behind the scenes in Congress to hammer out a bipartisan bill, and the Administration has clearly stated that if a bipartisan proposal emerges from Capitol Hill, they will advance the issue this year.

Senate Immigration Subcommittee Chair Charles Schumer (D-NY) is reportedly working with Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) to craft a centrist proposal that can move through the Senate Judiciary Committee and onto the Senate floor this year. The day following the State of the Union, Senate Majority Leader Reid and Senator Schumer told reporters that they were "making good progress" on the bipartisan bill (Schumer) and were committed to advancing reform "as soon as [they] can" (Reid).

In the House, nearly 100 Members of Congress have joined Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) in introducing a ground-breaking immigration [reform bill](#) that is supported by the major labor unions as well as religious organization and immigrant advocacy groups [across the nation](#). "It's my feeling that we just can't wait any longer for a bill that keeps our families together, protects our workers and allows a clear pathway to legalization for those who have earned it," Rep. Gutierrez said during a nationwide conference call on November 18th with 60,000 participants in 45 states.

The cosponsors of the legislation, known as CIR-ASAP, are the most vocal and active advocates for comprehensive immigration reform, and include members of House leadership such as Democratic Caucus Vice-Chairman Xavier Becerra (D-CA).

The key question when it comes to the House is whether some Republicans will break away from the default, anti-immigration position their leadership adopted in earlier years, and come to the table to work on a bipartisan approach. Given the strong support among some Republicans for key pieces of comprehensive immigration reform, like the farm labor-management compromise known as AgJOBS, a bipartisan coalition in the House is clearly possible.

Despite conventional wisdom that immigration reform is dead for the 111th Congress, the fact is that if both parties decide to work together, immigration reform is one of the few issues remaining on the legislative agenda that has a real shot at reviving true bipartisan problem-solving in Washington.

Public Opinion– Including Among Republicans and Independents– Favors Comprehensive Reform

The American people have consistently demonstrated strong support for comprehensive immigration reform, as opposed to enforcement-only alternatives. While Latino voters overwhelmingly favor comprehensive reform proposals—approximately 9 in 10 in recent Bendixen and Associates [polling](#)—overall swing voters and Republicans and Independents also favor comprehensive reform. Public opinion about immigration reform is one of the most misunderstood facets of the debate.

Polling conducted nationwide and in battleground congressional districts in May and June 2009 by Benenson Strategy Group [found](#) that 64% of voters support comprehensive immigration reform. Support jumped to 86% when voters are given the details of comprehensive reform, described as a plan that would “secure the border, crack down on employers who hire illegal immigrants, require undocumented immigrants to register for legal resident status, pay back taxes, and learn English in order to be eligible for U.S. citizenship.” Only 14% opposed the plan.

Similarly, by an almost 3:1 margin (71% to 26%), voters in the Benenson [poll](#) said that turning undocumented immigrants into legal taxpayers would be more beneficial to the economy than forcing them to leave the country because they are “taking jobs.” Sixty-eight percent supported requiring the undocumented population “to register, meet certain conditions, and eventually be allowed to apply for citizenship” versus 20% who supported requiring the undocumented to leave the country and 10% who favored allowing the undocumented to stay on a temporary basis.

Support for reform was overwhelming across all political affiliations. When provided the details of the policies, 89% of [Republicans](#) and 84% of [Independents](#) supported a comprehensive

approach to immigration reform. Additionally, when given arguments for and against tackling comprehensive immigration reform in light of the economic downturn, 59% of Independents/63% of Republicans said we should enact immigration reform while 35% of Independents/32% of Republicans said we should focus on other priorities.

In December 2009, Benenson Strategy Group conducted an [update](#) to its survey that found very similar results, despite even stronger concern among voters about the state of the economy. More than two-thirds of voters continue to support comprehensive immigration reform, and they give even higher marks to specific components of reform like requiring undocumented immigrants to register and pay taxes on their way to becoming U.S. citizens. As in May 2009, voters think it is better for the economy for undocumented immigrants to become legal taxpayers than to deport them because they are “taking jobs.” Support for reform continues to cut across party lines, with significant percentages of [Republicans](#) and [Independents](#) supporting the proposal.

These findings have been confirmed by independent [surveys](#). In April 2009, a *Washington Post* [poll](#) showed that, by a 61%-35% margin, voters nationwide support a program to give the undocumented the right to live here legally after paying fines and meeting other requirements. Support for legalization has actually increased over the years. When asked the same question in June of 2007, 52% supported legalization and 44% opposed. In December 2007, 49% supported and 46% opposed.

In addition, [scores of editorial boards](#) from places as diverse as Missouri, Utah, Colorado, and New York have all weighed in consistently and clearly about the need for swift action on comprehensive immigration reform.

The truth, is the anti-immigration side of the debate does not speak for many Americans. They may be loud and active, but their numbers are few.

How Pervasive Conventional Wisdom is Still Wrong

Conventional wisdom about the politics of immigration has been consistently dead wrong. Immediately following the recent special election in Massachusetts, pundits were pronouncing the death of comprehensive immigration reform, despite the fact that the election results really just mean the loss of one vote in the Senate. The real lesson of the Massachusetts special is not that the Democrats should run and hide from solving tough problems, but that they should tackle more, and do so on a bipartisan basis. Ironically, this should make issues like comprehensive immigration reform more, not less, attractive.

Before turning to why the current pieces of conventional wisdom are wrong, it's worth reviewing the punditry's past failed assessments of this issue. Here are just a few of their recent missteps when it comes to assessing the politics of immigration.

Past Instances of Incorrect Conventional Wisdom on Immigration

* ***The immigration wedge issue would win races:*** In 2005 a new wedge issue—immigration—was born. That year, the Republican-led House of Representatives approved a sweeping bill that would have turned all undocumented immigrants into felons. Beginning in the 2006 election cycle, many pundits thought immigration was the new wedge issue that could deliver electoral victories for those espousing a hard-line stance. However, Democrats took back control of Congress in 2006 and defeated immigration hardliner candidates such as J.D. Hayworth in AZ-5.

The 2008 elections saw the failure of the anti-immigration wedge issue for the second consecutive cycle. A [report](#) from America's Voice found that in twenty of twenty-two battleground congressional races throughout the country in 2008, the winners were those who advocated more expansive immigration policies, not the hardliners who tried to use the issue as a wedge. Notably, the Republican victors in the 2009 gubernatorial elections in NJ and VA also did not exploit the issue as a wedge.

* ***Latino voters do not consistently turn out to vote:*** In the 2008 presidential election, approximately 10 million Latinos voted, a growth of about 2.5 million voters nationwide compared to 2004 and a nearly 4 million person increase over the Latino turnout of 2000. Similarly, in the gubernatorial elections of 2009, Latinos comprised the same share of the electorate in New Jersey as they did in 2008 (9%), despite the fact that it was an off-year. Latino political engagement continues to rise, and politicians who understand what motivates these voters will do well in the growing number of states and districts where their vote matters.

* ***The 2008 Republican nominee will be staunchly anti-immigration:*** In the Republican primaries, many incorrectly believed that John McCain's support for comprehensive

immigration reform would doom his chances of becoming the nominee. While McCain did tack right, he was clearly the most identified pro-reform candidate in the mix, and he won the nomination handily. He did lose badly with Latino voters in the general election, however, who noticed his efforts to downplay immigration reform during the primary.

* ***Barack Obama has a problem with Latinos:*** After a contentious Democratic primary season in which Hillary Clinton received strong support from Latinos, many pundits predicted that Barack Obama would struggle to receive Latino support—especially because he was facing a pro-immigration Republican nominee in John McCain. However, in 2008, support for the Democratic presidential ticket jumped from 56-40% in 2004 to 67-31% in 2008, with the largest swing coming among Latino immigrant voters who follow the immigration debate very closely.

Current Conventional Wisdom: Immigration as Healthcare Redux?

Now, pundits are claiming that immigration reform is too risky for 2010 because it will become just another contentious and protracted debate like health care. But the only thing the two issues have in common is that Congress needs to fix them both.

Most Americans are satisfied with their health insurance coverage, but most Americans are dissatisfied with our current immigration system. Also, unlike health care reform, comprehensive immigration reform enjoys consistent support across party lines. Conventional wisdom aside, immigration reform is actually an issue that provides an opportunity for Washington politicians to prove they can work together.

Republicans have good reasons to ensure that immigration reform is not viewed as a solely Democratic endeavor. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) is currently working with Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) to [introduce bi-partisan immigration reform legislation](#) in the U.S. Senate. Additionally, many smart [GOP strategists and elected officials](#) are recognizing that Republicans need to improve their brand image among Latinos if they want to be viable in a growing number of races, and that a more sensible position on immigration reform is a crucial step toward improving their image.

Current Conventional Wisdom: An Economic Non-Starter?

The other piece of misplaced current analysis—that immigration reform is a political non-starter during times of high unemployment—gets it equally wrong. In fact, every day that Congress delays, is a day that the situation grows worse for all workers and honest businesses who are undercut by unscrupulous employers.

Several economic reports have shown how comprehensive immigration reform would help the economy. One report released by the Immigration Policy Center and [Center for American](#)

[Progress](#) found that fixing the nation’s broken immigration system would have far-reaching economic benefits that would help American workers and promote economic growth.

We will not be able to fully rebuild a strong, robust economy on top of a broken immigration system. The current broken immigration system pits workers against one another, rewards bad actor employers, leaves billions in taxes uncollected, and leaves millions of hard-working immigrants and their families without a mechanism to legalize their status.

The IPC/CAP [report](#), authored by UCLA professor Raul Hinojosa, found that the U.S. Gross Domestic Product would rise by \$1.5 trillion over ten years if Congress enacts comprehensive immigration reform. The report concluded that granting legal status to undocumented immigrants and updating legal limits on future immigration flows would also raise the “wage floor” for all workers and generate enough consumer-spending to support nearly one million jobs. The report also found that the option preferred by anti-immigrant groups and congressional hardliners—forcing the twelve million immigrants in the United States illegally out of the country—would reduce GDP by 1.46 percent annually, amounting to a loss of \$2.6 trillion over ten years.

Done right, comprehensive immigration reform will create a stronger and fairer economy, with a level playing field for workers, employers, and taxpayers who follow the rules. Reform will give honest employers who offer jobs that pay decent wages and good benefits the chance to survive and thrive rather than lose out to employers who seek out cheap undocumented immigrants to gain an unfair advantage. Reform will also raise billions in tax revenues by adding millions of new taxpayers and making everyone pay their fair share, increase the U.S. GDP by [\\$1.5 trillion over ten years](#), and give millions of immigrants already in the U.S. the opportunity to become legal residents full American citizens.

The fact is, there’s a good [reason](#) that organized labor has lined up in support of comprehensive immigration reform—because it will benefit all workers in America, immigrant and native-born.

Current Conventional Wisdom: Enforcement-Only Policies Will Eventually Work

Many opponents of reform dismiss the need for new immigration legislation in 2010 by stating that if we just continue to enforce current immigration laws, we will eventually get control. This sentiment neither grasps the very real improvements in border security that have been made over the past few years, nor the fundamental truth that we need comprehensive immigration reform to restore the rule of law to our immigration system.

In a November 2009 [speech](#) at the Center for American Progress, DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano highlighted improvements in border security made over the past three years, saying: “many of the benchmarks these members of Congress set in 2007 have been met.” She [noted](#) that illegal entries into the U.S. have dropped, that the U.S. Border Patrol has added

more than 20,000 new officers, and that seizures of smuggled drugs, cash and illegal weapons had increased sharply.

Despite the progress on security, Secretary Napolitano warned that the recent steps forward are not enough—we also need comprehensive immigration reform in order to resolve the status of the 12 million undocumented immigrants living and working in the U.S. “If you really want to deal with immigration it is best to take up the whole problem,” she said.

Napolitano’s assessment echoes those of other security experts. On a [telephonic conference call](#), James W. Ziglar, former Commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute joined with Stewart Verdery, former Assistant Secretary for Border and Transportation Security Policy at DHS, and now an adjunct fellow at the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CSIS), to highlight the fact that while border security progress is very real, true control over our immigration system will not be achieved until Congress passes comprehensive immigration reform.

Ziglar and Verdery noted that since the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created, the annual budget for the Border Patrol has increased by more than 75%, the number of Border Patrol agents stationed along the Southwest border has increased 77%, and the U.S. has dramatically improved its biometric and surveillance capabilities. However, as Ziglar stated, “[b]order enhancements are only part of the equation. While we have made unprecedented investments in security at the border, more resources alone will not make us more secure. We must find a way pragmatic way to prevent future unlawful immigration and deal with the existing undocumented population already here by enacting comprehensive immigration reform.” Verdery noted that “[c]omprehensive immigration reform will allow law enforcement to focus on the most serious threats to security and public safety” because it will register the undocumented workers and allow better deployment of enforcement resources.

The experts also noted that mass-deportation scenarios—those requiring law enforcement to round up and deport the estimated twelve million undocumented persons currently in our nation—are unrealistic, inadvisable, and expensive. According to the [Center for American Progress](#), mass deportation would cost more than \$200 billion in taxpayer dollars to implement. The Hinojosa [study](#), mentioned earlier, found that deporting the undocumented workforce would result in \$2.6 trillion in lost economic activity over ten years, and create further job losses as millions of workers and consumers are removed from the country. A study last year by [The Perryman Group](#) also concluded that mass deportation would shock local economies, resulting in \$1.8 trillion in annual lost spending, \$651.5 billion in annual lost output, and millions of lost jobs.

Similarly, mandatory use of the government’s employment authorization system, E-verify, would be expensive to implement and lead to widespread job loss for legal workers and American citizens, as the databases that feed the program are riddled with errors. The [Congressional Budget Office](#) estimates that mandatory use of E-verify by employers would reduce federal tax receipts by \$17.3 billion over ten years, as more employers pay more

workers off the books. Also, expanding E-verify without reforming our immigration system will only push more workers into the underground economy.

How the Campaign Behind Comprehensive Immigration Reform is Stronger than Ever

New Sources of Support from Faith, Labor, and Law Enforcement Leaders

The coalition of supporters behind comprehensive immigration reform has always been diverse and bipartisan, including leaders from the business, labor, faith, civil rights, and immigrant communities. But in recent years, an even stronger and broader consortium of religious groups, labor unions, and leaders in state and local law enforcement have emerged as a powerful voice urging Congress to act.

Faith Community

The faith community has always been a major supporter of comprehensive immigration reform. However, since the failure of reform legislation in 2007, support has deepened and broadened even among moderate and conservative denominations and organizations. This is reflected in a significant increase in grassroots activity, with local faith groups and congregations stepping up their efforts to call on Congress to pass reform.

For example, in 2009 the Board of Directors of the conservative National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) approved a [resolution](#) calling for immigration reform. The NAE represents 40 denominations, dozens of evangelical organizations and millions of American evangelicals. Leith Anderson, president of the NAE, was unequivocal in his endorsement of CIR: “Our current immigration system is broken,” he said. “Efforts to maintain secure and efficient borders have been ineffective and, too often, inhumane. Our visa system for legal immigration is antiquated, bureaucratic and insufficient to meet both labor force and family reunification needs. Those who want to play by the rules, both employers and employees, often have no realistic options.”

The Catholic Church has continued its steadfast advocacy for immigration reform and has announced plans for even greater engagement. As the [Catholic News Service](#) and numerous other religious and secular publications have reported, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) recently launched a postcard campaign to “urge Congress to take up as its next priority comprehensive immigration reform that would reunite families, regularize the status of an estimated 12 million people in this country illegally and restore due process protections for immigrants.”

As of early January, the USCCB’s [Justice for Immigrants campaign](#) reported it had 1.5 million postcards in circulation in Catholic parishes. The postcards will be distributed starting in February to Congressional lawmakers’ offices as a show of moral and political force.

"We want to increase Catholic grass-roots support for immigration reform," said Antonio Cube, national manager of the project. "But we also want to show members of Congress a strong Catholic voice and strong Catholic numbers in support of immigration reform."

Across the country, local faith leaders of various denominations have also added their support to immigration reform efforts. Their grassroots [activities](#) included a "Month of Action" organized by the [Interfaith Immigration Coalition](#), which generated more than 100 events, such as prayer vigils and visits to Congressional district offices, in 26 states during September 2009. The coalition also coordinated a February 2009 week of action, in which 167 faith communities around the country gathered to organize prayer events for immigration reform.

Organized Labor

In 2007, a number of labor unions were concerned about the details of the immigration bill under consideration in the Senate. Comprehensive immigration reform is, at its core, about protecting all workers in the workplace, and some key programs in the 2007 legislation failed to meet that mark. In preparation for the next immigration debate, the nation's two largest labor federations, AFL-CIO and Change to Win, hammered out a [joint framework](#) for comprehensive immigration reform last year. Their position includes a path to legal status for undocumented workers and the creation of a commission to regulate the entry of workers in the future. It also includes labor protections and enforcement to guard against bad actor employers, who subvert labor and immigration laws to hire undocumented workers for low pay and drive down the wages of all.

Labor's unity in support of comprehensive immigration reform severely undermines the claims of the mass deportation [lobby](#), who insist that immigration reform would hurt American workers and cost Americans' their jobs. According to the real experts on worker protection—organized labor—comprehensive immigration reform will reduce illegal immigration and ensure that workers are here legally, punish unscrupulous employers who undercut their honest competitors, restore fairness to the labor market, establish a level playing field for all workers, and restore tax fairness. In short, it will benefit all workers and taxpayers in America, both immigrant and native-born.

A recent policy study from leading labor organizations also made the case for comprehensive immigration reform by showing the costs of not fixing the broken immigration system. Authored jointly by the AFL-CIO, American Rights at Work, and the National Employment Law Project, ["ICED Out: How Immigration Enforcement Has Interfered with Workers' Rights,"](#) described in devastating detail the problems with putting immigration enforcement ahead of labor law enforcement: "The single-minded focus on immigration enforcement without regard to violations of workplace laws," the authors concluded, "has enabled employers with rampant labor and employment violations to profit by hiring undocumented workers who are too terrified to complain about substandard wages, unsafe conditions, and lack of benefits, or to demand their right to bargain collectively."

Law Enforcement

During the 2007 debate, opponents of comprehensive immigration reform were successful in framing the debate from a “rule of law” perspective, despite the fact that comprehensive reform is the real “law and order” proposal. In 2009, the tide began to change as leading law enforcement figures and organizations began to speak out more forcefully in favor of federal action on comprehensive immigration reform. These leaders say that the current immigration system harms community policing, since many undocumented immigrants are afraid to work with police if doing so could lead to their deportation. Based on their experiences policing our nation’s streets, these leaders believe that federal action on comprehensive immigration reform is needed, and want to be part of developing a solution that works for America.

For example, former Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton penned an op-ed in the [Los Angeles Times](#) in October 2009 calling for comprehensive immigration reform and noting the harm that local immigration enforcement has had on community policing. “We must pass immigration reform and bring our neighbors out of the shadows so they get the police service they need and deserve,” Bratton wrote. “When officers can speak freely with victims and witnesses, it goes a long way toward making every American neighborhood much safer.”

Also in 2009, the former Police Chief of Sacramento, CA, Arturo Venegas, helped convene police leaders from across the country to speak out on behalf of immigration reform through the [Law Enforcement Engagement Initiative](#) (LEEI). Through LEEI, law enforcement leaders in jurisdictions as diverse as Sacramento, CA, Miami, FL, Atlanta, GA, Polk County, IA, Topeka, KS, New Orleans, LA, North Charleston, SC, Arlington, TX, and Austin, TX, among others, have been vocal about the need to reform the immigration system comprehensively.

Other law enforcement organizations have been weighing in on behalf of immigration reform for reasons of community safety. In July 2009, at the [National Summit on Local Immigration Policies](#), hosted by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), dozens of police chiefs concluded that the federal government needs to reform our immigration laws. PERF is currently organizing stakeholder meetings in areas across the country to continue the dialogue about immigration policy and federal reform. Resolutions in favor of comprehensive immigration reform were also passed in 2009 by the [National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives](#) (NOBLE) and the [National Latino Peace Officers Association](#) (NLPOA).

In May 2009, the Police Foundation, a research and training organization, released a [report](#) that found that “local law enforcement executives say civil immigration enforcement by local police undermines their core public safety mission, diverts scarce resources, increases their exposure to liability and litigation, and exacerbates fear in our communities.”

Enhanced Field Effort to Mobilize Support for Reform

In 2009, hundreds of immigrant rights, labor, faith, and community organizations came together to form the Reform Immigration FOR America campaign. The campaign's goal is to win comprehensive immigration reform in 2010, and it has developed a sophisticated plan using communications, field, legislative, and online strategies to enact broad-based immigration reform this year. The campaign is supported over 700 faith, labor, business, and community organizations that are getting active in a coordinated way.

The Reform Immigration FOR America campaign has organizational capacity from Anchorage to Miami, with sixty-four organizers and more than 1,000 volunteers in addition to a network of hundreds of organizations, with the ability to quickly organize and mobilize in thirty-nine states and sixty-six target congressional districts.

Last November, the campaign organized more than 1,000 house parties in forty-five states that reached more than 60,000 Americans, who listed to a national teleconference town hall featuring Representatives Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), and Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chairwoman Nydia Velazquez (D-NY).

In January 2010, the campaign kicked off its [current effort](#) with 150 events in forty-one states. Overflow crowds participated at Reform Immigration FOR America events in Detroit, Denver, Philadelphia, Santa Fe, Charlotte, Cleveland, Little Rock, and Chicago, among others. Partner organizations in California held events in all fifty-two Congressional districts. Plans are already underway for another series of coordinated actions in February and again in March.

In less than a year, the Reform Immigration FOR America campaign has also built an enormous number of online supporters—nearly 300,000—who have pressed their members of Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform often.

Pro-Immigrant Forces Expand their Online Capacity

After the Senate failed to advance immigration reform in 2007, outlets like the [New York Times](#) gave the lion's share of credit for the bill's defeat to a "little-known" Internet group called Numbers USA. The anti-immigration organization now claims to have 1.2 million members, whom they frequently urge to email, fax, and call Congress through email blasts and a heavy web presence (the organization conducts all of its work online). Along with other anti-immigration organizations, such as Americans for Legal Immigration (ALI-PAC), the anti-immigration groups were [credited](#) for creating an online "echo chamber" where divisive and often violently anti-immigrant rhetoric outpaced and outnumbered pro-immigration reform messages.

Since 2007, the pro-immigrant advocacy community has invested heavily in new media and social networking strategies in order to better influence the coming immigration debate. A whole new community of enthusiastic bloggers has taken the cause of immigration reform online and engaged their readers to rally support.

According to analysis by the [Opportunity Agenda](#), conducted during the summer of 2009, there has been a sea change in online engagement on immigration issues. The research group “scanned” social media and blogging sites back in 2007 and again last summer, and found “major progressive-leaning blogs to be unsafe territory for immigration [reform] advocates” in 2007, but today “the pro-immigration–specific blogosphere is thriving.”

Comprehensive immigration reform is emerging as a major progressive priority online, which will only help bolster reform supporters in Congress during the next immigration reform debate. In January, the Center for American Progress, Netroots Nation, and America’s Voice hosted an event targeting the progressive online community. Entitled, “[Up Next, Comprehensive Immigration Reform: How We Will Win](#),” the event featured immigration reform and labor advocates alongside thought leaders from the progressive blogosphere, including Markos Moulitsas, founder and publisher of the popular progressive political site, *Daily Kos*; Nico Pitney, national editor of the Huffington Post; and Faiz Shakir, editor-in-chief for the influential progressive blog, *Think Progress*.

Netroots Nation, the organizing body that facilitates year-round “salons” and panels as well as a large yearly convention for progressives, now lists comprehensive immigration reform as one of its top three issues.

The increasing prominence of immigration reform in online discussions has led to increased online advocacy in support of pro-immigration reform government policies. In spring 2009, a coordinated effort to target Maricopa County (AZ) Sheriff Joe Arpaio for abusive practices toward immigrants resulted in local protests, 40,000 signatures on online petitions that garnered national media attention, and an investigation by both the House Judiciary Committee and the Department of Justice.

Last November, the [Reform Immigration FOR America](#) Campaign, the major hub for mobilizing supporters of reform, organized a national teleconference town hall with Members of Congress via a savvy blend of traditional organizing, national bilingual SMS lists, and email blasts. The integrated electronic town hall outreach resulted in over 1,000 house parties in forty-five states, and it was broadcast in dozens of radio markets, reaching over 60,000 listeners.

A final notable development in the pro-reform movement’s online capacity is the success of the campaign to hold CNN accountable for Lou Dobbs’ biased and negative immigration coverage. The [BastaDobbs.com](#) and [DropDobbs.com](#) coalitions gathered over 100,000 signatures on petition to demand that CNN drop Lou Dobbs. America’s Voice raised thousands of dollars from online activists to air an ad on national television telling CNN to “[Drop the Hate](#).” Only months after the campaign began in earnest, Lou Dobbs was let go from his contract at CNN.

As Congress prepares to tackle immigration reform, the expanded online capacity of pro-reform organizations, coupled with the increased prominence of the issue among progressives, will be potent forces that simply did not exist during previous debates.

CONCLUSION

Despite conventional wisdom to the contrary, comprehensive immigration reform is achievable this year if congressional lawmakers get serious about working together on legislation that serves the interest of the American people.

Bringing the estimated twelve million unauthorized immigrants living and working here into the mainstream of American society will be good for the country, good for the economy, and good for American workers. It will make new taxpayers and equal citizens out of undocumented immigrants and remove the incentive for abusive employers to hire them, undercut honest employers, and depress the wages of all workers. Reform will strengthen our nation, not weaken it, but politicians need the courage to act and the will to understand the real politics of immigration reform.

Immigration reform should happen because it upholds American values and moves the country forward. But it will happen because at the end of the day congressional lawmakers will have to explain to the American people why they allowed a broken, costly and dysfunctional immigration system to continue to operate when the alternative was clearly so much better: improved national security; increased tax collections; millions in savings spent on wasteful immigration enforcement policies that don't work.

Congress has punted this issue for far too long, and now is the time to fix the broken immigration system for the good of American taxpayers, workers, communities, businesses, and families.