

# KNOW THE FACTS

## UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRATION

Immigration has shaped American history, and immigrants are a fundamental part of our social fabric. Yet, popular discourse has painted international migration as a growing concern, evoking all sorts of anti-immigrant sentiments. Consequently, many of us are divided between appreciating and fearing what immigration represents. The Immigration Committee is working on a series of informative posts about contemporary immigration challenges, and we invite you to learn more about immigration myths and facts. This month's post is about [immigration and border security](#).

### MYTH: Our borders are not secure

Most Americans agree with protecting the U.S. borders, and border security usually receives bipartisan support. However, the idea that our borders are not secure is a myth. This myth is supported by two assumptions: first, that massive flows of undocumented immigrants continue to clandestinely enter the United States; and second, that not enough attention (or funding) has been allocated to enhance border security. This myth can be debunked by two facts:

- 1) **Illegal crossings have been steadily declining:** For almost a decade, the number of border apprehensions has been declining. Unlike past crossings, most immigrants currently arriving at the US-Mexico border are seeking asylum and often turn themselves in to the Border Patrol seeking refuge. These immigrants do not intend to break the law when seeking asylum – they come to the border because they believe that the U.S. has a commitment to human rights and it is a country capable of protecting those in need.
- 2) **The U.S. Border Surveillance System relies on top technologies:** The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has experienced substantial growth since its creation in 2003 – while the former “Immigration and Naturalization Services” had an \$11 billion budget, DHS is receiving more than \$92 billion for 2020. Security enhancement consumes a chunk of these funds, with expansion of a complex Border Surveillance System (BSS). In addition to having more than 60,000 employees, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) deploys thousands of underground sensors and hundreds of cameras surveilling the border 24/7, dozens of aircraft and marine vessels, and several mobile and stationary radar units, in addition to “Predator B” drones.

### FACT: Border detention has created a crisis

While our border is protected by an incredible security apparatus, we lack appropriate facilities and staffing for adequate processing of immigrants. As immigrants continue to be detained before a hearing under the “Zero Tolerance” policy, the number of individuals held at the border (and transferred to detention centers elsewhere) has skyrocketed. The focus on detention, without an effective plan for reviewing and processing cases, has created the border crisis.

- 1) Families arriving at the US-Mexico border are being held at facilities that are unequipped for providing basic assistance. In addition to overcrowding, these facilities do not provide appropriate nutrition or health care. As a result, several immigrants, including children, have died while under U.S. custody.
- 2) Immigration petitions, including those of asylum seekers, take too long to be processed. There are not enough immigration judges despite growing caseloads, thus slowing down the processing of those who are detained. Notably, the overburdened system also makes it difficult for those who are detained to be granted asylum, as they often do not speak English or have legal counsel and have only a few minutes to defend their case in front of a judge.

The focus on detention has exacerbated the border crisis, and not taking action to assure that immigrant petitions are examined diligently, fairly, and in a timely fashion will only augment the issue. Therefore, the League of Women Voters believes that Congress must pass “immigration policies that end the crisis at our border, end the separation of families, and provide a path to citizenship.”

Sources: 1) <http://theconversation.com/todays-us-mexico-border-crisis-in-6-charts-98922> 2) <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/fy-2020-budget-brief> 3) <https://www.today.com/news/how-necessary-it-build-wall-across-mexican-border-t101108> 4) <http://www.aijustice.org/reports>

The LWV PBC Immigration Committee meetings are open to all, and the next one is scheduled for August. For more information, please email Barbara Eriv [eriv6296@bellsouth.net](mailto:eriv6296@bellsouth.net) or Renata Bozzetto [rrbozzetto@gmail.com](mailto:rrbozzetto@gmail.com)