

“Where They Are Coming From” on Immigration Policy

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The press is full of articles on immigration, and virtually every article quotes “experts.” But no one is neutral on the subject of immigration. On the contrary, the main players in this debate almost always have their own interests in the immigration issue. Sometimes these interests are openly expressed, but often the agenda is hidden.

Note carefully that this applies also to academic “experts” and those in nonprofit “think tanks.” Everyone has a bias one way or the other.

This document is intended to give a brief guide to many of the major players and their motivations.

- **The business community:**

- Immigration produces more consumers.
- Immigration produces a large—and thus cheaper—labor supply. This is true both for low-skilled and high-skilled labor.

- **Labor unions:**

- Membership has been declining in the last decade or two, so blue-collar immigrants are seen as a way to reverse the loss.
- Unauthorized immigrants are subject to mistreatment, a major union concern, especially since this means they probably won’t join unions. Moreover, they will probably not become citizens, and thus can’t support the unions politically.
- Labor has opposed temporary work visas, notably the H-1B visa used often by tech employers, as it tends to produce *de facto* indentured servitude among the workers, again making them subject to exploitation, resulting in problems similar to those described for unauthorized immigrants above.

Another problem with the immigration of engineers and the like is that unions see them as less likely to be pro-union if/when they become citizens.

- Labor has supported family immigration, as it is disproportionately blue collar.
- Professional organizations have tended to support immigration of skilled workers, thereby increasing their political clout. However, the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers-USA, has been a strong opponent of the H-1B program.

- **The Democratic Party:**

- Immigrants have generally voted Democratic, so immigration may give Democrats an advantage.

- The Democratic Party considers the poor to be one of its clientele groups, so the Party has supported family immigration, which as noted above tends to be poorer on average.
- The Party philosophy includes the romantic notion of “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses...”

- **The Republican Party:**

- The Party tends to be pro-business and thus pro-immigration for the reasons cited above for the business community.
- The Party has traditionally been less supportive of family immigration, for the opposite reasons as discussed for the Democrats above.
- The same statement applies to unauthorized immigration.
- The libertarian (not to be confused with liberal) wing of the Party philosophically believes in open borders, as it means less government.
- Many in the Party feel that a larger America is a stronger America on the world stage.
- Some immigrant groups, such as the Vietnamese, Japanese and Cubans, have tended to be staunchly Republican, thus a potential edge for the Party, especially in swing states like Florida. Moreover, the Party views Latinos as potential Republicans too, due to “family values,” views of abortion and religion, etc.
- During the Cold War, the Party saw immigration from communist countries as good world PR and as a way to build dissident groups.

- **Religious organizations:**

- As with the unions, many religious organizations look on immigration as a remedy to declining memberships. For instance, Catholic leaders see Latino, Filipino, Polish and Vietnamese immigrants in this light, while Jewish leaders are especially interested in immigration from the former Soviet Union.
- Some religious leaders cite biblical passages which call on people to “Welcome the stranger.”

- **Ethnic organizations:**

- Asian and Latino groups (the Organization for Chinese Americans, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, etc.) consist largely of immigrants.¹ Thus they believe that the more immigration the nation has, the more political clout their ethnic groups will have.

¹About 70% of Asian-Americans are foreign born.