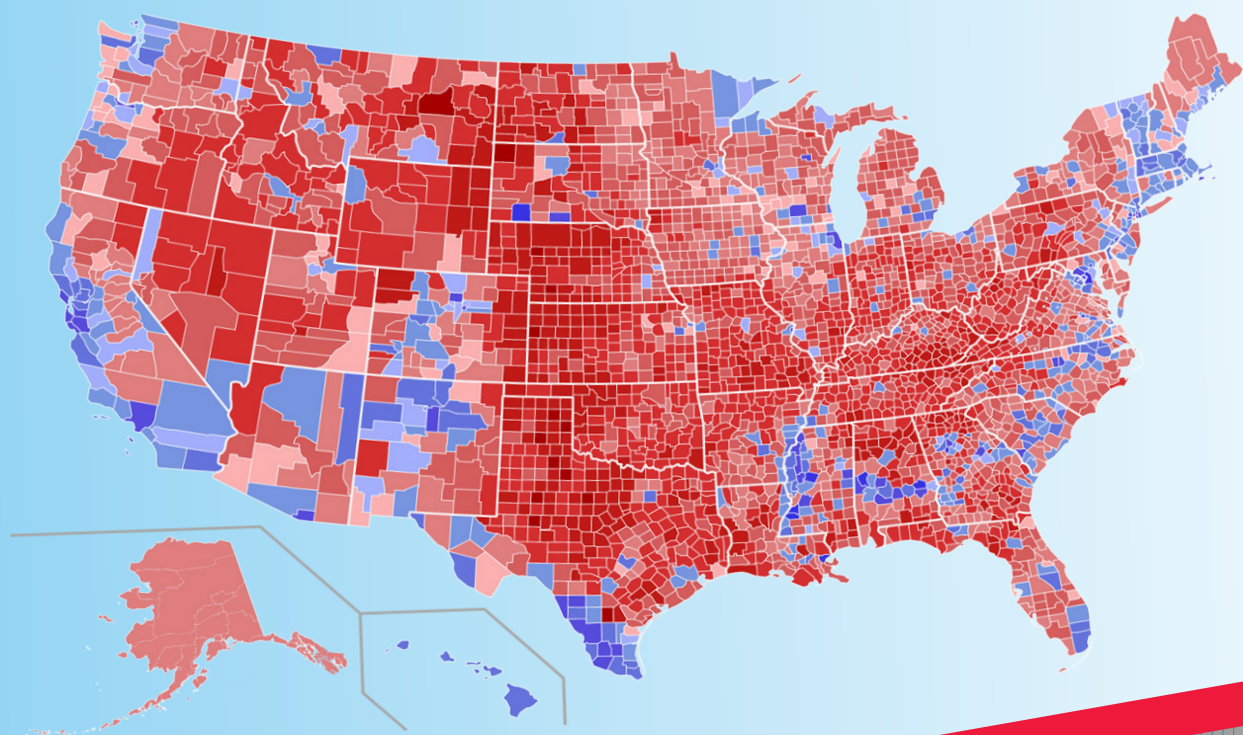
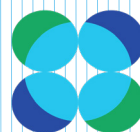


OUT OF MANY, ONE

A DEFINING
MOMENT FOR
**AMERICAN
IMMIGRATION**



NATIONAL
IMMIGRATION
FORUM



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
**More in
Common**

OUT OF MANY, ONE



A DEFINING
MOMENT FOR
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IMMIGRATION**

OCTOBER 2018

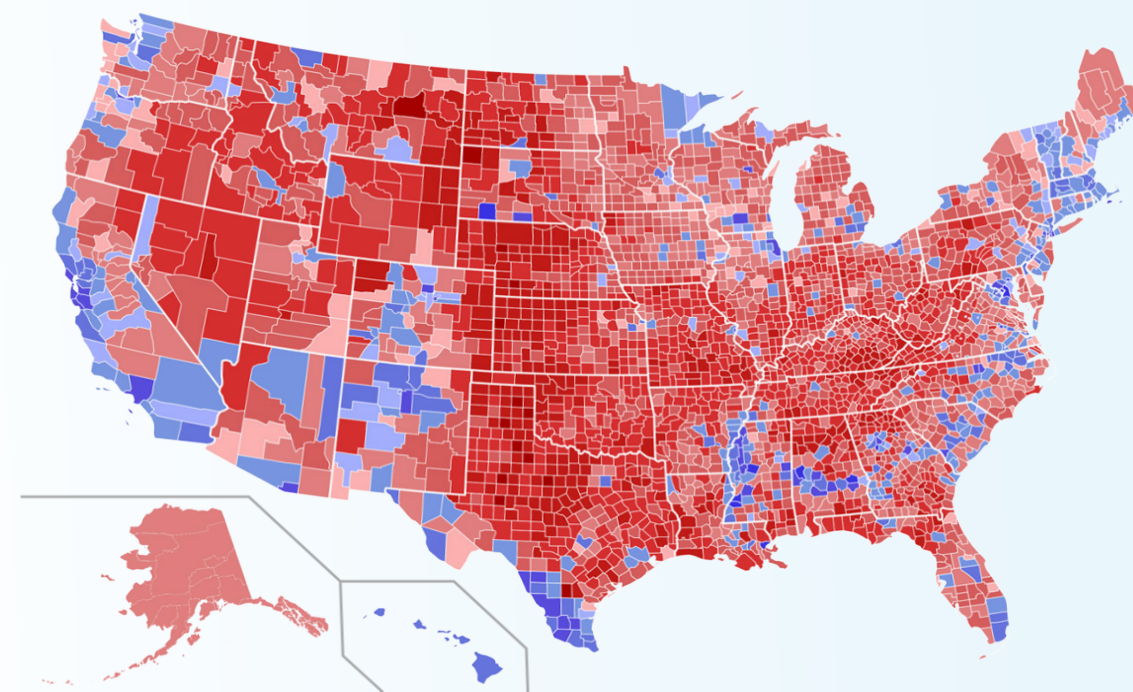
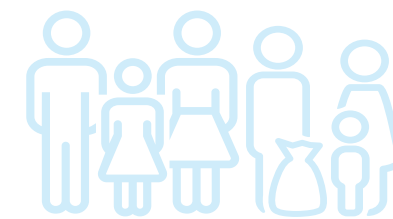


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**"I FEEL
PROUD
TO BE AN
AMERICAN ...
I DON'T KNOW
IF AMERICA
IS PROUD
OF ME."**

Participant in a
Southern California
Living Room Conversation

I. INTRODUCTION

In May 2018, sitting among ten fellow residents of her Southern California community, a woman of deep faith paused. Tearing up, she quietly remarked that her father and brother resent the change taking place around them: "They're driven out of absolute fear that they are going to lose their sense of security or identity."

How we respond to that absolute fear, amid a period of intensified political tribalism and accelerated demographic, social, and technological change, will define who we are as a country in the 21st century. It will determine how millions of citizens reconcile a deep appreciation for the contribution of immigrants today and throughout our history with an uncertainty around what that contribution means in terms of America's culture, security, and economic future.

And it will answer a straightforward yet profound question: How can the United States be a nation of laws and a nation of grace?


Immigration remains polarizing precisely because we have not yet grasped the emotional, moral, and political sensitivities of Americans in the geographic and political middle of the electorate. For this reason, building on years of work in conservative communities in the Southeast, Midwest and Mountain West, the National Immigration Forum staff spent the first half of 2018 testing assumptions and refining our approach.

We sat down for "Living Room Conversations" with faith leaders, police officers, business owners, immigrants, refugees, and other community members in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Storm Lake, Iowa; Gainesville, Florida; DeKalb, Illinois; Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; and 21 other cities and towns. We set out to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes that shape perceptions of immigration, with a goal of refining and deepening our strategies to advance a constructive immigration narrative and enact meaningful policy reforms.

While we weren't starting from scratch, we certainly learned new things: that the nation's immigration debate is complicated, but certainly not intractable; that conservative and moderate Americans are looking for a different type of leadership than what they see on cable news.

While quantitative data informed our analysis, meeting and engaging people in a setting they trust is what enabled the woman of faith in Southern California to open up about her father and brother. It's what allowed another participant that day, a child of immigrants, to remark, "I feel proud to be an American ... I don't know if America is proud of me."

In the face of deeply polarizing forces, the United States of America faces a fundamental challenge: how to remain "out of many, one."



"AT THE SOUTHERN BORDER, MOVING IMAGES OF THOUSANDS OF UNACCOMPANIED YOUNG PEOPLE FLEEING VIOLENCE IN EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS WERE NOT YET ON NIGHTLY NEWSCASTS."

HAYDN DENMAN / ALAMY STOCK

II. THE ENVIRONMENT

It was not inevitable that we would arrive at this juncture. As recently as 2013, after the U.S. Senate passed comprehensive, bipartisan immigration reform legislation, the Republican-controlled U.S. House was signaling that it would take up a bill. At the southern border, moving images of thousands of unaccompanied young people fleeing violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were not yet on nightly newscasts. The United Kingdom was still firmly in the European Union. The Syrian refugee crisis was yet to horrify the world.

Then history swiftly intervened.

In short order, dramatic events in faraway places reached the palm of our hand. The fragmentation of media and the increasing influence of social media helped bring these changes into sharp focus. For Americans worried their children would not be better off than they are, it felt like the movement of goods, people, commerce, and ideas had accelerated to the point that the world was at the nation's doorsteps.

Old assumptions about what's threatening, or what's promising, were called into question. Images of the Syrian refugee fleeing war, the young Salvadoran family seeking a new beginning, reached Americans who were losing trust in their government. More and more Americans started to perceive that the family they saw on a boat or on a train could become a neighbor in a matter of weeks. By the time Donald Trump descended the escalator and launched an unlikely bid for the presidency in June 2015, the concept of a cohesive American identity was being questioned.

And yet in a historical context, what we're experiencing is not new. In 1890 and again in 1910, the foreign-born made up at least 14.7 percent of the nation's population.¹ Decades of xenophobia and political backlash followed the 1910 crest, resulting in multiple laws restricting immigration.

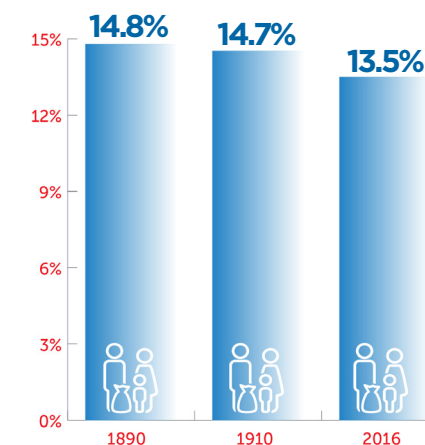
By 2016, the foreign-born share of the U.S. population nosed closer to these historic highs, reaching 13.5 percent. Today, as some 68.5 million people² are physically displaced

¹ "The Foreign-Born Population in the United States," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed October 1, 2018, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/cspan_fb_slides.pdf.

² "Figures at a Glance," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, accessed September 6, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION IN THE USA

U.S. Census Bureau



around the world and international migration has grown to 258 million, the xenophobia and political backlash have returned. As Muzaffar Chishti, director of the Migration Policy Institute at New York University law school, told Steve Levine of Axios, “We’ve begun the 21st century as we began the 20th. The target may be different, but the anxiety is the same.”³

The changes and the anxieties are most pronounced in rural and suburban communities. Take Luzerne County, which includes and surrounds Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The county’s diversity index — which measures the variance of the racial and origin-based composition of a given population — increased by 360 percent from 2000 to 2015. It was one of the counties that saw a dramatic swing from blue to red in 2016. President Barack Obama carried Luzerne County by nearly 5 percentage points in 2012, and President Trump carried the county by more than 19 points four years later.⁴

This divide between rural, suburban and urban communities is only widening. Estimates indicate that by 2040, approximately 70 percent of Americans will live in the 15 largest states. Even as New York City, Los Angeles, and Houston continue to see population growth, the 30 percent of the country’s population — living in smaller states without major metropolitan centers — will hold disproportionate power when it comes to deciding who goes to the Senate, who wins the electoral college, and what type of immigration system we can build together.⁵

What will our democracy look like in 2040? Will it resemble Webster City, Iowa, where a changing community in a red state bands together to save the local theater?⁶ Or will it be a microcosm of Burien, Washington, where, in a blue state, the city’s first Latino mayor was attacked?⁷

To break through the tribalism — essentially, to live up to “out of many, one” — we must heed the words of the woman in our Myrtle Beach Living Room Conversation who reminded us that we must know people, and actively listen to them, if we want to form an educated opinion. Her sentiment applies to all of us, native-born Americans and immigrants alike.

Charting a viable path toward compromise and common purpose requires us to meet people where they are, understand their hopes and fears in the midst of fast-changing communities, and, ultimately, work together to hold elected officials from both parties accountable for divisive rhetoric.

³ Steve Levine, “U.S. could face prolonged era of anti-immigrant fever,” *Axios*, September 20, 2018, <https://www.axios.com/peak-immigration-peak-hysteria-united-states-0dc178c6-3333-4bd7-8374-34056a17a43f.html>.

⁴ Thomas B. Edsall, “How Immigration Foiled Hillary,” *The New York Times*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/opinion/clinton-trump-immigration.html>.

⁵ Phillip Bump, “By 2040 two-thirds of Americans will be represented by 30 percent of the Senate,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/11/28/by-2040-two-thirds-of-americans-will-be-represented-by-30-percent-of-the-senate/?utm_term=.826487ecb26c.

⁶ Jeffrey Fleishman, “Immigration. Technology. Trump. A lot has changed in small-town America. One Iowa town drew the line at its movie theater,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-ca-webster-city-theater-20180916-story.html>.

⁷ Adeel Hassan, “Police May Seek Hate-Crime Charge in Attack on Latino Mayor,” *New York Times*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/24/us/jimmy-matta-attack-sanctuary-city.html>.

III. OUT OF MANY, ONE

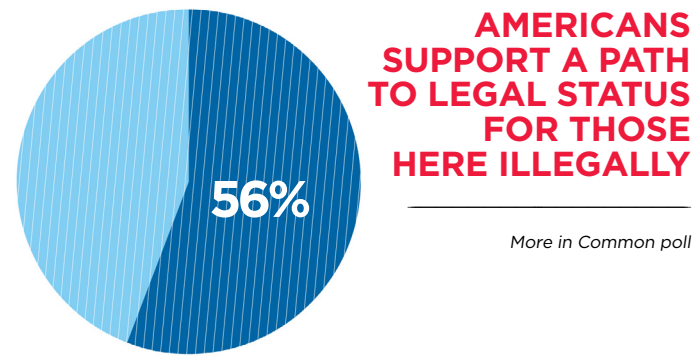
Since 2011, the National Immigration Forum has focused our organizing, communications and advocacy resources on conservative and moderate faith, law enforcement and business leaders living in the Southeast, South Central, Midwest and Mountain West. Realizing that we needed to increase our engagement with voters themselves, in 2017 we expanded our digital footprint to engage conservative voters in key regions. This year’s Living Room Conversations, a learning campaign to help us understand rural and suburban communities experiencing change across demography, culture, and the local economy, was a logical and necessary next step.

For the conversations, the Forum’s organizing team recruited conservative and moderate members of the aforementioned constituencies, as well as military veterans and others. Although participants were not drawn from a random sample, the campaign’s invaluable conversations — open, honest, and authentic — in 26 rural and suburban communities, along with research, polling, and demographic data, gave us a comprehensive perspective.

To complement our findings, we partnered with More in Common, an international initiative to build stronger and more resilient communities and societies, which had just completed an exhaustive quantitative survey of the American public, as well as focus groups and interviews. That work examined the landscape of American public opinion through analysis of seven different population segments they call America’s “hidden tribes.” Forum staff were trained to facilitate conversations utilizing a discussion guide More in Common researchers designed. The guide helped us lead robust and open conversations that included themes of identity, community and polarization, and perceptions about immigrants.



**"MOST AMERICANS
BELIEVE IMMIGRANTS
ARE AN IMPORTANT
PART OF AMERICAN
IDENTITY."**



The Polling

Polling data on Americans' attitudes indicate that most Americans believe immigration is a positive for the country. According to More in Common's poll, 56 percent of Americans believe that America's immigrant population is good for our country.⁸

People want leaders to hear their concerns. They seek information they can trust. While many express skepticism, there is an unambiguous desire to rise above polarization and divisiveness in order to build coalitions and make overdue policy reforms. In the same poll, 60 percent said that we need to heal as a nation rather than "defeat evil" within it.⁹

Half of independents in an August 2018 Morning Consult/POLITICO survey said immigrants strengthen our country because of their hard work and talent.¹⁰ A recent report by the Bipartisan Policy Center and Luntz Global found that although clear majorities prefer "strong enforcement both at the border and interior, 69 percent of respondents also support a path to legal status for those here illegally."¹¹ Passing a Dream Act — to ensure young people who came to this country as minors can stay legally and ultimately gain citizenship — consistently polls near 80 percent approval.¹²

If the political polling suggests broad agreement on immigration policy, why does our immigration debate seem fractious?

Is it because those in the middle — the suburban, exurban, rural and independent-leading voters who will play an outsize role in determining the nation's legislative agenda for decades to come — are split on which party they trust on immigration? Yes and no. While 35 percent of this segment trust Democrats and 34 percent trust Republicans,¹³ often, Americans who belong to this part of the population hold nuanced views and can see value in both sides of the arguments. The reality is their perceptions of immigration are more complicated than polling allows us to understand.

One example lies in a new concept known as "racialized economics" that emerged during the 2016 election season. The authors of a new book, *Identity Crisis*, define the term as "the belief that undeserving groups are getting ahead while your group is left behind."

⁸ Hawkins, S., Yudkin, D., Juan-Torres, M., & Dixon, T. (2018), "Hidden tribes: A study of America's polarized landscape." Report prepared for More in Common.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cameron Easley, "Independents See Immigration As Defining Partisan Issue," *Morning Consult*, August 16, 2018, <https://morningconsult.com/2018/08/16/independents-see-immigration-defining-partisan-issue/>.

¹¹ "BPC Data Points to a New Middle on Immigration Reform," *Bipartisan Policy Reform*, July 17, 2018, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/press-release/bpc-data-points-to-a-new-middle-on-immigration-reform/>.

¹² "New Poll: Latino, AAPI, Native American, Black, and White Voters in Battleground Districts," *Latino Decisions*, July 24, 2018, <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2018/07/24/new-poll-latino-aapi-native-american-black-and-white-voters-in-battleground-districts/>.

¹³ Cameron Easley, "Independents See Immigration As Defining Partisan Issue," *Morning Consult*, August 16, 2018, <https://morningconsult.com/2018/08/16/independents-see-immigration-defining-partisan-issue/>.

As Washington Post columnist Dan Balz explained, "Issues of identity — race, religion, gender and ethnicity — and not economics were the driving forces that determined how people voted, particularly white voters."¹⁴

We need to move past arguments of either-or, e.g. culture or economics. As our conversations demonstrated, Americans in these segments often do not see it as either one or the other, or in black or white terms. Framing immigration solely through the lens of economics is not likely to help. Overlooking people's economic concerns would be an error, but so would underestimating the power of identity considerations.

Identity

We know from recent data that 69 percent of Americans — including 56 percent of Republicans — believe immigrants are "an important part of American identity."¹⁵ But what shined through in our conversations was that the concept of "identity" speaks as much to people's hopes as to their fears.

In Corpus Christi, Texas, we heard about the loss of American identity, while in Memphis, Tennessee, we heard that the church can be a powerful entity that organizes efforts to build transformative and inclusive national identities. In Gainesville, Florida, a man told us that "we are tribal and can't handle difference," whereas up the road in Tallahassee, we heard, "One of America's proudest and most beautiful things is that it is a melting pot of cultures." In Bentonville, Arkansas, a participant remarked, "You're a little bit of everything, and that's really what America is ... and that is the beauty and some of the angst in America ... that you don't want to give up your heritage."

Numerous participants told us their identities were tied to their local communities, their neighborhoods, their sense of place. And with change taking hold all around them, we watched law enforcement officers, small business owners, pastors — in real time — soul-searching around what these changes mean to their own identities. Those who were hopeful saw their identities tied up in larger themes of values and ideals. Those who were fearful saw "an identity crisis" around them.

Both were looking for a type of political leadership that is in short supply these days.

More in Common's research offered valuable insight to these complexities of identity. They concluded, "To bring Americans back together, we need to focus first on those things that we share, and this starts with our identity as Americans." Questions of race, religion, and patriotism led to competing frames. But, "One belief that brings Americans together is a sense that the country is special."

We observed that when Living Room Conversations participants with different religious or political beliefs felt their individual concerns were being heard, the tension in their voices dissipated, and their faces brightened. The discussions turned to a need for solutions, not divisions. In our conversations, we saw the same challenge More in

¹⁴ Dan Balz, "A fresh look back at 2016 finds America with an identity crisis," *The Washington Post*, September 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/a-fresh-look-back-at-2016-finds-america-with-an-identity-crisis/2018/09/15/0ac62364-b8fo-11e8-94eb-3bd52dfc917b_story.html?utm_term=.50bae1a13332.

¹⁵ NPR Press Room, "NPR/Ipsos Poll: American Views on Immigration Policy," *NPR*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/629415700/npr-ipsos-poll-american-views-on-immigration-policy>.

Common found in their data: a need for new approaches and a different conversation on immigration that help people come together.

Three Fears

To meet this challenge, we must address head-on the fears that polarize the immigration debate. We used the Living Room Conversations to better understand three areas in which fears can influence Americans' perceptions of immigrants and immigration:

1. CULTURE:

**Are immigrants and refugees *isolating or integrating*?
Do they live in isolated enclaves, or are they immersed in the community, learning English and becoming American?**

A participant in El Paso, Texas, captured the tension around culture: "It's just easy to be American, and that is what this country is about, that we assimilate and unite as Americans ... and I see that as a problem with some immigrants that want to isolate themselves and try to continue their own cultural behaviors — styles and behaviors ... while they want to take advantage of the privileges of America ..."

Culture is difficult but important to define in the context of the immigration debate. For some, issues of race and ethnicity were central. For others, language determined whether an immigrant was integrating into American culture. Diversity and inclusion were also a consistent theme; as one participant in Fresno, California, said, "We don't celebrate diversity ... and too often it's been us and them."

In Appleton, Wisconsin, we heard that immigration "grows our culture, makes us more educated, [and] better people." In Lubbock, Texas, a participant remarked, "I think [immigrants] bring a lot to our community by way of service and family values." But in Las Vegas, Nevada, we heard that although immigrants are viewed as patriotic and hardworking, there were anxieties around a loss of cultural and language unity.

The conversations echoed More in Common's findings that freedom, equality and the American Dream were consistently identified as beliefs that make someone American. Also, among the More in Common "tribes" to the middle and right of the spectrum, the ability to speak English becomes more valued as an important factor in someone being seen as American, which is similar to what we have observed.

"ONE BELIEF THAT BRINGS AMERICANS TOGETHER IS A SENSE THAT THE COUNTRY IS SPECIAL."



2. SECURITY:

**Are immigrants and refugees *threats or protectors*?
Are they national security or public safety threats, or do they make positive contributions to communities, even serving in law enforcement and in the military?**

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, security and terrorism concerns have loomed large in the nation's immigration debate. More recently, the administration's enforcement actions at the border and in the interior, along with progressive efforts to "Abolish ICE" and create "sanctuary cities," have further polarized the debate. Our conversations indicated that, to a certain degree, personal relationships mitigated fears that center on security. But many participants indicated that portrayals of immigrants as security threats are pervasive throughout the media — even if these participants believe that such portrayals are misleading.

Some 65 percent of Americans, including 42 percent of Republicans, do not believe that undocumented immigrants are more likely to commit serious crimes, according to Pew Research.¹⁶ In the border town of El Paso, we observed a tension between some Americans wrestling with being compassionate as they fear threats posed by unauthorized immigration. The conversation in Mesa, Arizona, which included a handful of local law enforcement officers, revealed that although issues of legality and criminality continue to plague local residents' perceptions and attitudes, participants generally agreed that immigrants do not pose an increased security threat. In Parker, Colorado, the sense among participants was that the broader community believed immigrants pose security threats.

While we did not specifically examine participants' perceptions of refugees, other research points to concerns that are worth highlighting. Sixty-four percent of Americans are concerned that the refugee screening process "is not tough enough to keep out possible terrorists," but 63 percent simultaneously believe that "people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including America, to escape from war or persecution."

3. ECONOMY:

**Are immigrants and refugees *takers or givers*?
Are they taking jobs and benefits, or are they economic contributors?**

As American Action Forum President Douglas Holtz-Eakin said in 2016 before the House Ways and Means Committee, from World War II to 2007, the economy grew fast enough that GDP per capita — a crude measure of the standard of living — doubled on average every 35 years, or one working career. Coming out of 2008's Great Recession, projections indicated that it would double every 75 years. And, in 2016, those households

¹⁶ "Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration Into the U.S.," Pew Research Center, June 28, 2018. <http://www.people-press.org/2018/06/28/shifting-public-views-on-legal-immigration-into-the-u-s/#fewer-are-bothered-by-contact-with-immigrants-who-speak-little-english>

that worked full-time for the full year saw zero increase in their real incomes. As Holtz-Eakin put it, “The American Dream is disappearing over the horizon.”¹⁷

In this context, it is not surprising that American parents are worried their children’s standard of living will not exceed their own. Therefore, their fear that the new immigrant family living next door is going to take from America is legitimate. This fear manifested in different ways in our conversations across the country.

We often hear that immigrants have a bootstraps mentality — they work as hard as they can to build a better life. Data suggest that these participants are echoing national sentiment. A 2017 Gallup Poll found that 45 percent of Americans believe immigrants make the economy better overall, compared with 30 percent who believe immigrants make the economy worse overall.¹⁸ It’s a sentiment that lines up with the contributions immigrants make to the U.S. economy: According to New American Economy, immigrants paid \$105 billion in state and local taxes, and around \$224 billion in federal taxes, in 2014.¹⁹

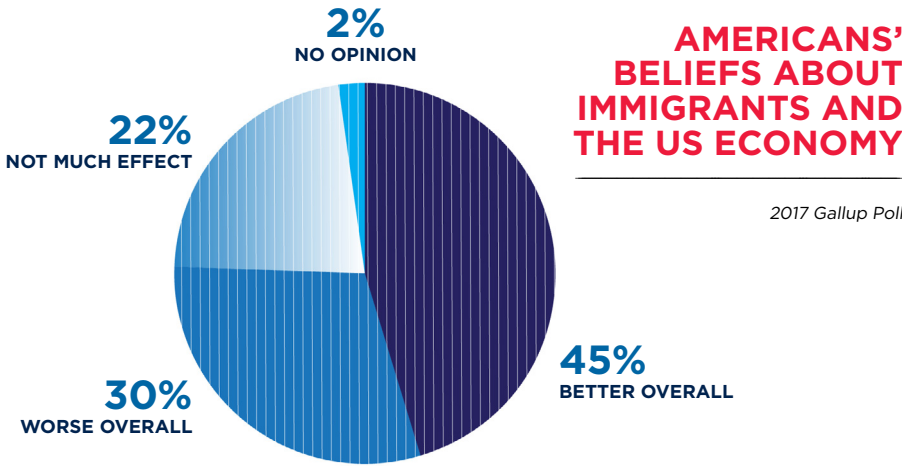
Participants in southern border communities, where the economy is closely tied to Mexico and to immigration, recognized the economic benefit of immigration. In San Marcos, California, participants saw that the economy is dependent on the ability of businesses to buy and sell in both the U.S. and Mexico. There was general agreement among participants in Corpus Christi that immigrants were an economic benefit. On the other hand, in Spartanburg, South Carolina, participants remarked that some in the community invoked the economy as a reason to close borders and deport people here without authorization.

Fears related to the economy can be persistent. We can address questions of culture and security only to have questions about jobs and trade linger. In the end, many Americans fear that the Mexican immigrant next door, or the Mexican in Mexico, will take their job.

Taken together, the 26 Living Room Conversations left us with a powerful realization: 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.

“It’s very easy to hate from a distance,” one participant in Spartanburg said. But as people get to know the immigrant family next door, at their child’s Little League games, or one pew over at church, they come to understand them, appreciate them, love them, and value their individual contributions to the larger American story. The challenge in front of us is whether we can bridge the personal relationships with a broader perception of immigrants.

¹⁷ Douglas Holtz-Eakin, “Addressing the Growth Challenge,” United States House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, February 2, 2016, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/20160202FC-Holtz-Eakin-Testimony-CLEAN.pdf>.
¹⁸ “Immigration,” Gallup, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>.
¹⁹ “Taxes and Spending Power,” New American Economy, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/taxes-spending-power>.



IV. A DEFINING MOMENT

Corpus Christi resembles a demographic version of America we may see in the decades ahead. Over 60 percent of the city is Hispanic, but just under 9 percent of the overall population is foreign-born.²⁰ Participants in the Corpus Christi conversation were as diverse as the city, conservative-leaning and appreciative of the immigrant community’s contribution and relationship to Mexico. But they also were wary of unauthorized immigration. The engaging discussion turned tense at times. Attendees were later asked what type of immigration system they would like to see. An older white man, who had voiced skepticism of immigration throughout the conversation, said he wanted a system that is “tough but fair.”

That seems reasonable.

The challenge is to articulate a practical and moral argument — in a global context — that is sensitive to millions of conservative and moderate Americans who appropriately ponder the cultural and economic changes they see around them and what these changes mean for them, their families and their communities. This challenge traces back to concerns about identity vis-a-vis culture, the economy, and security. Only when we successfully assuage people’s fears on these three issues, and peg each of them to the widespread benefits that immigration offers, will we be able to accomplish long overdue policy reforms.

Those reforms fall along three lines around which consensus can supplant fear. First, our legal immigration system needs to be modernized and strategically expanded so that it serves the needs of America’s economy and workforce, and helps all Americans thrive. Second, we need a system that protects the country’s borders and ports of entry, and keeps out of our country those who would do us harm, but at the same time upholds the country’s values, principles, and moral authority. Third, we need to create an opportunity for undocumented men and women already here working, studying, and contributing to earn legal residency and eventual citizenship.

These are straightforward solutions caught in what seems to be an impossible situation. How do we communicate them to an American public that, in the words of a recent

²⁰ United States Census Bureau, “QuickFacts, Corpus Christi city, Texas,” accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/corpuschristicitytexas>.

“WHEN PEOPLE ENCOUNTER COMPLEXITY, THEY BECOME MORE CURIOUS AND LESS CLOSED OFF TO NEW INFORMATION. THEY LISTEN, IN OTHER WORDS”

Amanda Ripley, Journalist

Washington Post headline, “want the anger to stop but can’t stop being angry”?²¹ Journalist Amanda Ripley offers sage advice:

The lesson for journalists (or anyone) working amidst intractable conflict: complicate the narrative. First, complexity leads to a fuller, more accurate story. Secondly, it boosts the odds that your work will matter — particularly if it is about a polarizing issue. When people encounter complexity, they become more curious and less closed off to new information. They listen, in other words.²²

It is important but not enough to continue to tell all Americans that immigration has always been central to our nation and that immigrants have powered what has become the most dynamic and entrepreneurial economy in the world. We must continue to listen to people with valid concerns, especially those whose communities are changing rapidly. We need to engage with them and find common ground around the notion that we’re all striving for the same thing, no matter where we come from. Our conversations revealed that everyone shares a common dream to provide for themselves and their family, a common patriotism, and, as a result, a common American identity.

V. REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

A deeply polarized environment serves the goals and ambitions of many elected officials on both sides of the aisle; they exploit gerrymandered congressional districts, fragmented media, and low voter participation rates. As a result, it can be challenging to realize the ideal that *out of many, we are one*.

Nevertheless, for three reasons, immigration has the potential to serve as the issue that reunifies the country.

First and foremost, the American story is the immigrant story. “To bring Americans back together, we need to focus first on those things that we share, and this starts with our identity as Americans,” More in Common found.²³ We have an opportunity to modernize the notion of America as a nation of immigrants as part of this shared identity.

²¹ Greg Jaffe, “American paradox: Voters want the anger to stop but can’t stop being angry,” Washington Post, September 16, 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/americas-anger-paradox/2018/09/11/2bc9a-f7e-b231-11e8-aed9-001309990777_story.html.

²² Amanda Ripley, “Complicating the Narratives,” The Whole Story (Solutions Journalism Network, June 27, 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://thewholestory.solutionsjournalism.org/complicating-the-narratives-b91ea06ddf63>.

²³ Hawkins, S., Yudkin, D., Juan-Torres, M., & Dixon, T. (2018), “Hidden tribes: A study of America’s polarized landscape.” Report prepared for More in Common.



“IMMIGRATION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO SERVE AS THE ISSUE THAT REUNIFIES THE COUNTRY!”

Second, the faith community has an opportunity to take the lead in addressing questions and concerns around culture. As we saw in our conversations, the majority of which included evangelical Christians, pastors are crucial in introducing communities to one another. According to recent data from the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, “While 58 percent of *secular* Trump voters agree that ‘these days I feel like a stranger in my own country,’ almost the same share (55 percent) of *religious* Trump voters disagree.”²⁴ Our nation’s faith institutions are uniquely positioned to address the central question of identity in a way that brings people together.

Finally, of the issues that polarize the American politic today, immigration is the only one with a modern history of legislative bipartisanship. For example, even as the Trump administration drastically cuts refugee admissions, we see members of Congress as conservative as Senator James Lankford (R-Oklahoma) working with progressive colleagues such as Senator Michael Bennet (D-Colorado) to advocate for those fleeing persecution.


While our ultimate goal is policy change, getting there requires engaging specific audiences through a diverse menu of constituency, communications, and advocacy strategies that involve three steps: Explain, Engage, Envision.

Public data and our experience indicate that more Americans than ever are asking about immigration, and they are looking for information they can trust. We have a tremendous opportunity to creatively **explain** the issues to targeted audiences, paying close attention to message, messenger and medium.

As the public’s understanding of immigration builds, opportunities to **engage** also increase. This can include participation in events or meetings, sharing of content and information through one’s social networks, or engagement of policy makers.

Given the unprecedented interest in immigration, the Forum’s unique vantage point, and the increasingly urgent need to engage with moderates and conservatives, we also have an opportunity to **envision** a new approach to American immigration. Such an approach, based on a range of data points, would combine updated messaging research (quantitative and qualitative) and lay the groundwork for new policy frameworks.

²⁴ Emily Ekins, “Religious Trump Voters,” *Democracy Fund Voter Study Group*, September 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publications/2018-voter-survey/religious-trump-voters>.



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Throughout our history, immigration ensured new people could usher in new ideas to reinvent and unleash America’s economy and foster its cultural dynamism, allowing the United States to serve as a beacon of hope around the globe. It’s a component of our country’s DNA that has set us apart from the rest of the world. That’s why, a few months before Trump won the 2016 election, Elder Patrick Kearon issued a challenge to his congregation during the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ biannual General Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. Kearon concluded his talk about the role of the church in welcoming and resettling refugees: “This moment does not define them, but our response will help define us.”²⁵

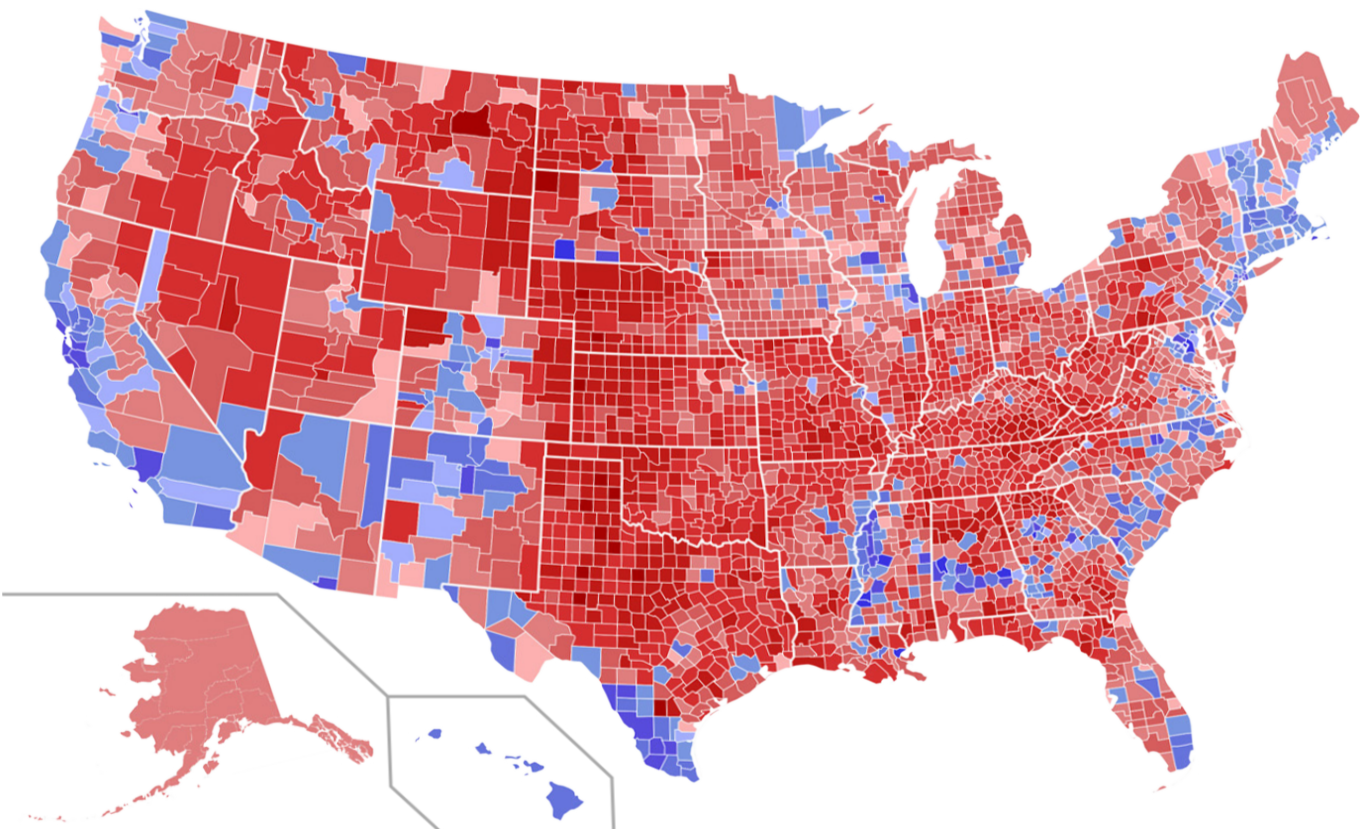
It will be the response of those Americans living in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Marietta, Georgia; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and similar communities nationwide who, in decisions big and small, will decide whether we can remain a nation of laws and a nation of grace — and whether, out of many, we can remain one.

²⁵ Elder Patrick Kearon, “Refuge from the Storm,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 2016, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2016/04/refuge-from-the-storm?lang=eng>.

APPENDIX

Living Room Conversations

APRIL-JUNE 2018



April 10	Myrtle Beach, SC	May 17	DeKalb, IL	June 6	Storm Lake, IA
April 11	Coeur d'Alene, ID	May 17	Bentonville, AR	June 6	Columbia, SC
April 19	Memphis, TN	May 21	Tallahassee, FL	June 7	Appleton, WI
April 23	Las Vegas, NV	May 22	Gainesville, FL	June 12	Lincoln, NE
April 24	Corpus Christi, TX	May 24	Mesa, AZ	June 14	Marietta, GA
April 25	Fresno, CA	May 24	Tulsa, OK	June 20	El Paso, TX
April 26	San Marcos, CA	May 29	Grand Rapids, MI	June 27	Lubbock, TX
April 30	Spartanburg, SC	June 4	Parker, CO	June 28	Sugar Land, TX
May 9	Irvine, CA	June 5	Raleigh-Durham, NC		

ABOUT THE NATIONAL IMMIGRATION FORUM

Founded in 1982, the National Immigration Forum advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to our nation. In service to this mission, the Forum promotes responsible federal immigration policies, addressing today’s economic and national security needs while honoring the ideals of our Founding Fathers, who created America as a land of opportunity.

The Forum has worked to advance sound federal immigration solutions through its policy expertise, communications outreach and coalition building work, which forges powerful alliances of diverse constituencies across the country to build consensus on the important role of immigrants in America.

ABOUT MORE IN COMMON

More in Common is a non-profit organization that was founded in 2017 in the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. More in Common’s mission is to build resilience against the threats to democracy from polarization and social division. We focus on helping address social fracturing by connecting people across the lines of division and communicating narratives that help to unify people. We work in partnership with a wide range of civil society groups, as well as philanthropy, business, faith, education, media and government.

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