



Federal Immigration Timeline

This timeline is intended to start conversation on what has been happening in the immigration space and understand it might not include ALL pieces so we encourage everyone to use this to drive conversation.

1882

Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, one of the earliest immigration restriction policies in the U.S.

1953

“Operation Wetback” initiated by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), targeting undocumented immigrants for deportation to Mexico. Over 3 million people were deported, including some US born Mexican American citizens.

1985

Activist groups mobilize and file lawsuits against the federal government over mistreatment of minors in detention facilities, in what would come to be known as the Flores Settlement in 1997, setting immigration detention standards for unaccompanied minors.

1986

Congress passes Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), granting citizenship to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants.

Criminilizes employment of undocumented workers, and introduces I-9 form.



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1990

Congress passes the Immigration Act of 1990, which increased the cap on immigration visas, and introduced the “diversity” visa lottery program and TPS visa for Salvadoreans.

Also expanded border patrol measures and increased penalties for undocumented migrants.

1996

Congress passes:

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant responsibility Act (IIRIRA), expanding deportation efforts to include a broad array of crimes, including non-violent ones. Complicated existing legalization avenues.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, aka the Welfare Reform Act, barring undocumented immigrants from accessing welfare programs.

2001

DREAM Act introduced for the first time. President Bush and Mexican President Fox hold historic talks on immigration, pointing to possible legislation.

9/11 changes the focus of legislative priority from immigration reform to national security. The Patriot Act is passed, expanding gov't surveillance powers and border patrol.

2002

Congress passed the Homeland Security Act, which created the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).



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2004

Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride (IWFR) leads a coalition of groups to travel across the country to bring attention to immigrant rights issues. Engaged in civil disobedience actions by refusing to provide proof of citizenship to authorities in Texas.

2005

Congress passes REAL ID Act, creating new ID standards that make it difficult for undocumented immigrants to obtain and utilize services, like plane traveling.

150 anti-immigration bills introduced in 30 states.

2006

Several actions organized and led by immigration activists, including mass immigration marches across the country, HS student boycotts in various cities, and a national boycotting event on May 1st known as A Day Without Immigrants, highlighting undocumented immigrant's contributions and demand for rights.

2008

United We Dream is founded as a youth led organization, galvanizing support for a path towards citizenship for undocumented youth

2010

DREAMers continue to mobilize support for a DREAM Act. The bill is passed in the House, but fails in the Senate by 5 votes

2012

Activists occupy Obama's Denver campaign office, demanding an end to increased deportations. Obama creates DACA through Executive Order.



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2013

After years of advocacy and actions for comprehensive immigration reform, Reform Immigration for America (RIFA), builds strategic support for the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, securing bipartisan support from the Senate led by the “Gang of Eight”. Bill passed with 68 votes in the Senate, but was never brought to the House floor for a vote.

2017

Trump’s administration announces rescinding of DACA.
Also terminates TPS for Sudanese, Nicaraguan, and Haitian immigrants, and issues Muslim ban.

2018

- Public Charge” rule expanded, denying immigrant’s application for lawful permanent resident status for using certain government service programs.
- TPS terminated for Salvadorians, Hondurans, and Nepalis.
- Forcible separation of families in detention centers.
- Immigrant advocates mobilize across the country in preparation for the midterms.

2020

Entry restrictions extended to Nigeria, Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan and Tanzania.
Continued attack on Sanctuary Cities and asylum process.
Protests at Irwin Detention Center in Georgia after several women reported forced sterilizations and abuse. (Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas announced its closing in May 2021)