OPPORTUNITY 08 | Candidate Issue Index

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Candidates on Immigration

Compiled by Brookings Institution experts, this chart is part of a series of issue indices to be published during the 2008 Presidential election cycle. The policy issues included in this series were chosen by Brookings staff and represent the most critical topics facing America's next President. Available voting records and statements vary based on time in office. For candidates who have not been a Member of Congress, public statements are noted when available.

CANDIDATES

Barack Obama (D)
Senator from Illinois

John McCain (R)
Senator from Arizona

Candidates	Obama (D)	McCain (R)

Border Security	"We're going to have to secure our borders. And this past year, the Senate invested billions of dollars in improving border security. I think that's important because I think all Americans think that we should be able to regulate who comes in and out of this country in an orderly way, not only for the sake of our sovereignty, but also to avoid the hundreds of people who have been dying across the desert, the enormous costs that are placed on border states and border towns. I also think that we've got to be serious about employers' obligations to check to see whether somebody is here legally or not...There hasn't been a serious program of employer sanctions. That has to be put in place." – New York Times Read more	"One thing we would all agree on, the status quo is not acceptable. We have to secure our borders. But we also need a temporary worker program, and we have to dispose of the issue of 12 million people who are in this country illegally. This issue is an important and compelling one, and it begins with national security. But we also need to address it comprehensively." – New York Times Read more
Temporary Worker Program	"There are legitimate concerns on the part of some, including myself, that this is a way for corporations to avoid a unionized workforce, or a workforce that has the ability to demand proper wages and benefits. Nevertheless, there is a feeling that if we can at least provide for some of these guest workers to come in, they may not want citizenship; they may simply want the opportunity to work here, and then go home." "[W]e must also replace the flow of undocumented immigrants coming to work here with a new flow of guest workers. Illegal immigration is bad for illegal immigrants and bad for the workers against whom they compete. Replacing the flood of illegals with a regulated stream of legal immigrants who enter the United States after background checks and who are provided labor rights would enhance our security, raise wages, and improve working conditions for all Americans." – Obama.senate.gov Read more	The plan proposed by Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) would create a guest worker program for up to 400,000 foreign workers. There would be a computerized registry to match them up with U.S. businesses, and those companies would have to show that they could not find an American to do the same job. Participants in the guest worker program would have to work for six years before they could apply for permanent residency (a so-called green card). They'd have to wait another five years to apply for citizenship. – NPR.org Read more
Legalization/Amnesty	"[We] have to recognize that we've got 12 million undocumented workers who are already here. Many of them living their lives alongside other Americans. Their kids are going to school. Many of the kids, in fact, were born in this country and are citizens. And so, it's absolutely vital that we bring those families out of the shadows and that we give them the opportunity to travel a pathway to citizenship. It's not automatic citizenship. It's not amnesty. They would have to pay a fine. They would have to not have engaged in any criminal activity. They would have to learn English. They would have to go to the back of the line so that they did not get citizenship before those persons who had come here legally." – New York Times Read more	"Now, what do you do with the 11 million people that are already here? [M]ake them earn citizenship because they have broken our laws. My friends, that's not amnesty. Amnesty is forgiveness. We're not forgiving anything." – New York Times Read more

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Candidates	Obama (D)	McCain (R)
Worksite Enforcement/ID Card	"Too often illegal immigrants are lured here with a promise of a job, only to receive unconscionably low wages. In the interest of cheap labor, unscrupulous employers look the other way when employees provide fraudulent U.S. citizenship documents". What is needed is "a simple, foolproof, and mandatory mechanism for all employers to check the legal status of new hires." – Obama.senate.gov Read more	McCain's co-sponsored bill required tamper-proof identification cards and an electronic employment verification system. "All workers must be certified as eligible for employment using the new electronic system. It won't be enough to just say that an employer looked at documents, which may have been falsified." – JohnMcCain.com Read more
Admissions System	"We cannot weaken the very essence of what America is by turning our backs on immigrants who want to reunite with their family members, or immigrants who have a willingness to work hard but who may not have the right graduate degrees." Believes family reunification should be a guiding principle in immigration policy." – Obama.senate.gov Read more	A combination of family- and skills-based: The Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (introduced by Senators John McCain and Edward Kennedy) would more than double both family and employment based limits; The bill would exempt immediate relatives (spouses, children, parents) of U.S. citizens from counting against the annual ceiling of 480,000 family-based visas and distribute the visas elsewhere. – Politifact.com Read more
English Language	Voted NO to declare English as the national language of the Government of the United States, and for other purposes. Read more "Everybody is going to learn to speak English if they live in this country. The issue is not whether or not future generations of immigrants are going to learn English. The question is, how can we come up with both a legal, sensible immigration policy. And when we get distracted by those kinds of questions, I think we do a disservice to the American people." –CNN.com Read more	Voted YES to declare English as the national language of the Government of the United States, and for other purposes. Read more

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Candidates	Obama (D)	McCain (R)
Actions	Voted YES on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues. Voted YES on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border. – New York Times Read more	Voted YES on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border. – New York Times Read more
Proposed Legislation	Co-Sponsored the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2005 and 2007, which would allow states to give illegal immigrants in-state tuition for higher education and let the homeland security secretary confer legal resident status on some illegal immigrant students. Sponsored the Citizenship Promotion Act 2007, which would require the federal government to freeze the fee that legal immigrants pay for each application for services at current levels and called for $80 million a year to promote citizenship. – New York Times Read more Co-sponsored the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005. – Library of Congress Read more	Sponsored the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005. – Library of Congress Read more Co-Sponsored the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2005 and 2007, which would allow states to give illegal immigrants in-state tuition for higher education and let the homeland security secretary confer legal resident status on some illegal immigrant students. Co-Sponsored and voted yes on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues. – New York Times Read more

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