



# “Know how to respond...”

(PIRKEI AVOT 2:14)

## “WE HAVE TO SECURE THE BORDER.”

Which border? It is a racist assumption to think only about the land border with Mexico. In addition to the Canadian border, all U.S. ports of entry—including airports (which have their own racist and Islamophobic security procedures to contend with)—are legally considered borders.

## “SECURING THE BORDER IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY AND FIGHTING TERRORISM.”

This adds an inaccurate and unnecessary (yet frightening and therefore politically effective) national security lens to what has historically been an economic argument (and we consider primarily a moral argument) about immigration. In fact, in 2017, most of the 2,554 people on the terrorist watch list who were encountered by U.S. officials tried to enter through airports (2,170) or by sea (49).<sup>1</sup> As of July 2017, the State Department said there was “no credible information that any member of a terrorist group has traveled through Mexico to gain access to the United States.” Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans, and legal immigrants are even less likely to.<sup>2</sup>

## “WE HAVE TO SECURE THE BORDER FIRST; THEN WE CAN TALK ABOUT A MORE JUST IMMIGRATION SYSTEM.”

This is a fallacy that both Democrats and Republicans have accepted as self-evident. In fact, having a 100 percent secure border where we control absolutely everything is impossible. Experts across the political spectrum<sup>3</sup> have said as much; there is even lack of clarity around what it would mean to have a secure border, making this a moveable goalpost. (Blas Nuñez-Neto of the RAND Corporation writes, “[D]espite the billions that have been spent on securing the border since 9/11, the U.S. still struggles to define what a secure border looks like.”<sup>4</sup>) The question should instead be what constitutes reasonable border security and to what lengths are we willing to go to achieve it. Demanding 100 percent security as a precondition for any reform is code for never considering reforms.

1 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/07/trump-administrations-misleading-spin-immigration-crime-terrorism/?utm\\_term=.4dfb454ac7f4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/07/trump-administrations-misleading-spin-immigration-crime-terrorism/?utm_term=.4dfb454ac7f4)

2 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/two-charts-demolish-the-notion-that-immigrants-here-illegally-commit-more-crime/>

3 See, e.g., <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/border-impossible-to-secure-experts-says> and <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126887021>

4 <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/world-report/articles/2017-12-05/the-us-needs-a-better-understanding-of-border-security>

# AN ANTI-IMMIGRATION AGENDA INCLUDES A WELL-HONED SET OF ARGUMENTS THAT COLLAPSE UNDER CLOSE SCRUTINY.



## “PEOPLE JUST NEED TO STOP COMING HERE ILLEGALLY.”

We shouldn't pretend that people come here on a lark; leaving one's home to start a new life is not a light undertaking but often an act of desperation. There are some 68 million displaced people worldwide, mostly living in countries neighboring those from which they escaped. Rather than simply focus on what happens when people get here, we need to look broadly at the connections among foreign policy, economics, climate change, and international migration. Furthermore, when people arrive here seeking asylum or refugee status, we have an obligation to respond to them in a humanitarian fashion, in line with our international treaty agreements.

## “MY FAMILY CAME HERE LEGALLY. WHY CAN'T THEY GO TO THE BACK OF THE LINE AND WAIT THEIR TURN?”

As noted on p. 12, before 1924, nearly all immigration was legal, so there was not a choice to be made. For many immigrants today, there is no “line” to go to the “back” of, because there simply is no path to citizenship, even for people who have lived here for decades. Those who are eligible can still face multi-year backlogs and painfully inefficient and complex processes.

## “DEFUNDING OR ABOLISHING ICE WOULD LEAD TO CHAOS AND LAWLESSNESS.”

ICE is a young federal agency, created in 2002 in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and it has come to embody an ethos of terrorizing immigrant communities. There is no reason it could not be disbanded and replaced by a new agency with a different orientation and culture. Perhaps we could reimagine ICE along the lines of the Coast Guard—a generally well-respected agency whose main work includes helping people in unsafe conditions at sea and intercepting drugs being smuggled into the country.

## “YOU'RE CALLING FOR OPEN BORDERS.”

Border control is not an all-or-nothing proposition. A country can control its borders without being inhumane or spending excessive taxpayer dollars on border security.