

MOVING THE CULTURE, SHAPING OUR FUTURE

How **10 Years** of Cultural
Strategy Helped Build
and Hold a Pro-Immigrant
Majority in America

10 I **STAND**
WITH **IMMIGRANTS**



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INTRO

IN THE PAST 10 YEARS,

there has been a gradual-but-steady positive shift in the way immigrants are represented and perceived in American culture and media. This shift is due in large part to the work of the immigrant rights movement – led by directly impacted people – which has grown in number, developed an increasingly intersectional analysis of our work and communities, and made its voice even louder in the last decade. This is not to say we aren't still fighting against harmful narratives about our movement and the people we're fighting for — because we are. However, the last ten years have allowed our movement to grow in power and build a more nuanced conversation around immigration in the U.S. than has existed in the past.

We want to take the opportunity, on the tenth anniversary of Immigrant Heritage Month (IHM), to celebrate our movement and all the positive change it has engendered.

Our work within the I Stand With Immigrants (ISWI) Initiative is built on the theory that narrative strategy done well has the power to shape our culture, which in turn can inform the policies that govern our lives. The work we do to uplift directly-impacted people's voices has the potential to transform all of our realities in ways that can sustain increased polarization of our issue and changes amongst political leadership.

In this report, we'll look at three major policy areas that offer protections for immigrants - and which have all experienced substantial changes since 2010: **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and the asylum system.** We recognize of course that TPS and the asylum system have existed previous to our scope, but there has been considerable growth in the utilization and expansion of these programs over the last ten years that deserve to be highlighted. In studying these changes, we'll take a closer look at the I Stand With Immigrants (ISWI) Initiative's work to support to an increasingly more nuanced narrative around immigration; the experiences of directly-impacted people; and the local policies, grassroots activism, and other ways communities across the country have increasingly asserted their solidarity with immigrants.

We find the upward trend regarding America's sentiments toward immigrants important to study and document, especially given our country's most recent history. Even as we lived through a presidency marked by heightened anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric, communities across the country vocalized and acted on their solidarity with vulnerable immigrant communities. They did so in tangible ways that honored the work of advocates before us and further incorporated support of immigrants as part of their social and political identities.

The I Stand With Immigrants (ISWI) Initiative is one part of a broad ecosystem that includes storytellers who show there's no such thing as a model immigrant, and who help override persistent fearmongering about our issue; as well as advocates who craft policy and speak to elected leaders about issues impacting their community members. Together, we have the potential to create a positive impact all across the country by speaking up and taking action — not just during moments of crisis, but every other day during the year.

HOW WE'VE CONTRIBUTED

IN 2013,

the I Stand With Immigrants (ISWI) Initiative joined the push to reshape our culture into one that prioritizes treating everyone with kindness and dignity regardless of their immigration status. At the time, we had wide eyes and big dreams, and in collaboration with directly-impacted people, advocacy organizations, business and nonprofit partners, and artists and entertainers, our goals were threefold:

1

PROVIDE

an additional platform for directly-impacted people and their loved ones to share their stories in the news and on social media;

2

CREATE

opportunities for allies and activists alike to be in community with each other and proudly #CelebrateImmigrants; and

3

SHOW

elected leaders with the power to provide much-needed protections for vulnerable immigrants that this issue is important to their constituents and voters.

1 YEAR LATER

we launched the I Am An Immigrant Campaign (IAAI) and Immigrant Heritage Month (IHM).

We worked with organizations like Define American, Emerson Collective, and many others to craft celebratory digital content, activations, and community events, with the goal of driving uplifting stories about the diverse immigrant experience into the cultural zeitgeist.

Since its inception in 2014, **two U.S. Presidents** have proclaimed June as Immigrant Heritage Month, signifying to the country that we have always and will continue to #CelebrateImmigrants. **48 states, from Alabama to California, have celebrated #ImmigrantHeritageMonth and committed to being in solidarity with immigrants all year long** through events, proclamations, and more. Many of the state proclamations took place during the Trump presidency, particularly at the height of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, when **more than 5.2 million undocumented immigrants risked their lives as essential workers** despite not having any long term protections in this country. **Even more cities — 257 small towns and metropolitan areas all across the country — have joined us in June to celebrate the diversity and sharing of cultures that is crucial to all of our collective history in this country.**

The beating heart of this initiative, however, has always been local communities coming together to eat, fellowship, and celebrate immigrant heritage and culture. Whether it be joining us on our nationwide city tours, where we've brought **art installations** and **food trucks** to cities all across America that boldly declared love for immigrants; or **using Immigrant Heritage month as an opportunity to advocate for policies that provide immigrants greater access to opportunity**, Americans of diverse backgrounds have continuously recognized June as a chance to honor the lives, contributions, and experiences of immigrants from all over the world.



One of our many Immigrant Heritage month tour stops, the city of Philadelphia, elected to keep their I ♥ Philly art installation as a permanent fixture in Love Park, signifying that Philly remains a city where immigrants are celebrated, supported, and welcomed all year round. The I-Heart sculptures were curated by the IAAI Campaign for our cities tour (launched in 2017), and city residents have covered the interactive art in colorful stickers representing hundreds of countries and an extremely diverse group of individuals who live, work, and otherwise make a home in cities all across America.

TEN YEARS OF VOCAL SOLIDARITY

from hundreds of communities all across the nation has helped lead us to today — celebrating an increase in protections for millions of immigrants and their families. This historic month, and the opportunities for community-building and storytelling that it provides, does not exist in a vacuum. Immigrant Heritage Month (IHM) serves as a runway for people to engage with our movement and is just one of many steps in

ensuring that immigrants receive the protections they deserve, and are able to stay safe, with their families, in the places they call home.

THE LAST 10 YEARS

In 2010,

four years before Immigrant Heritage Month (IHM) was first launched, the national discourse around immigration was bleak. Polling at the time showed that only

43% OF AMERICANS

— less than half of the population — agreed that immigrants strengthen the country. In the decade since, during which organizations and advocates have told incredible stories and created evermore powerful campaigns, that number has

RISEN TO 67%,

representing a strong majority of Americans (Pew Research Center, 2010-2020).

Similarly, 7 in 10 Americans polled in 2020 said immigration levels should be kept at present or increased levels, demonstrating that the majority of Americans have and will continue to welcome immigrants to this country (Gallup, 2010-2020). This is in stark comparison to only 5 in 10 Americans who believed the same at the start of the decade.

Through storytelling on various platforms, including digital and print media, meaningful partnerships with a number of businesses and organizations from Airbnb to Spotify, and pop-culture engagement in collaboration with influencers and celebrities, we've helped build an increasingly large community of people who proudly stand in solidarity with and #CelebrateImmigrants.

Simply put: during the past decade, in part thanks to the work of people fighting to change our culture, the majority of Americans are now firmly pro-immigrant.

% saying immigrants strengthen the country



% saying immigrant levels should be kept at present or increased levels



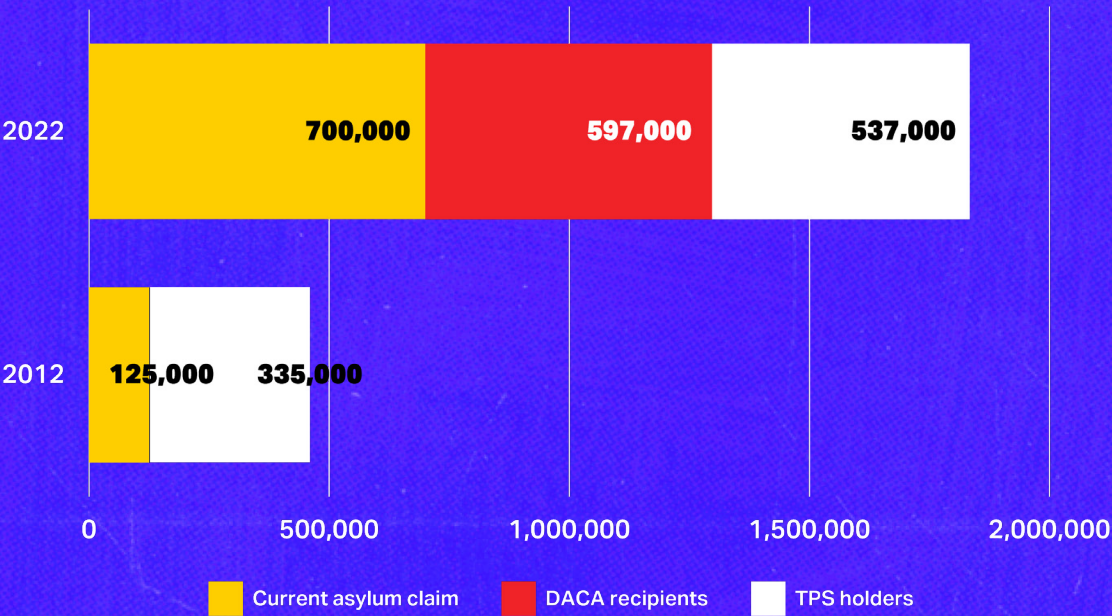
■ 2010 ■ 2020

Source: Pew Research Center and Gallup data

Buoyed by the strong and increasing public support for immigrants, three key programs have expanded protections for undocumented immigrants in this country over the last ten years:

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and the asylum system. Nearly two million people, representing nearly 1 in 5 of all undocumented individuals, currently rely on these and similar protections to continue providing for their families, contributing to the communities where they live and work, and creating a life in the country they call home.

Number of undocumented immigrants with immigration relief quadruples within a decade



Source: Congressional Research Service (TPS holders), USCIS (active DACA recipients), DOJ EOIR court statistics (pending affirmative and defensive asylum claims)

DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA)

IN 2012,

the Obama Administration implemented the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program**, an executive order which has granted work permits and protection from deportation to over 800,000 unique individuals who came to the U.S. as children. This program has helped undocumented people who came to this country as children build careers and families in the United States, and live without the fear of deportation. Although the program itself has hung in limbo since its initial repeal in September of 2017 and has faced continuous legal challenges since, many recipients of the program have been able to hold on to their protections because of broad public support for the program. Unfortunately, public support has not resulted in the creation of a pathway to citizenship, an act only Congress can do. As a result **DACA recipients remain at risk** of losing their protections and being torn away from their families and homes as the program faces urgent legal threats.

DACA is a hugely successful program that has provided people like Edvin the opportunity to **"make money, start building a foundation — to know that my dad's life wasn't in vain."**

Edvin was born in former Yugoslavia during social unrest that ultimately resulted in a civil war — the same civil war that forced his parents to relocate in order to ensure the safety and future of their family. Unfortunately, after eight years in this country — during which both of Edvin's parents worked overnight jobs to provide for their family while appealing deportation orders — Edvin's father passed away in a tragic accident. This forced Edvin, his mother and his little brother — the only U.S. citizen in their mixed-status family — to pursue a different immigration pathway. Luckily in 2012, the Obama Administration announced the DACA program, Edvin applied, and earned his work permit and protections from deportation. **In the aftermath of his father's death, Edvin had to step up and help take care of his family, which he was able to do in large part because of the DACA program. And while DACA has been a crucial part of Edvin's life and story, one that has afforded him an abundance of opportunity in this country, it is only temporary.**



Edvin

“By sharing our stories, we can change the public perception of who Dreamers are — who immigrants are... the older I’m getting, [the more] I’m trying to bring all of myself to these conversations and share who I am.”



TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS (TPS)

Congress established **Temporary Protected Status (TPS)** as part of the Immigration Act of 1990 to provide protection from deportation and work authorization to certain immigrants who are unable to return to their home countries because of war, natural disaster, and other extraordinary circumstances. TPS currently provides much-needed safety and certainty for more than **half a million people** from **16 different countries**, many of whom have been in the United States for nearly two decades. Furthermore, they live with a collective 400,000 U.S. citizen children who currently rely on them for the care and safety they provide. TPS is a form of life-saving relief to vulnerable individuals who have been unable to access other protections, but without permanent solutions they remain at risk of being torn from their families and communities.

Evelyn is one of 191,000 El Salvadoran TPS holders living in the United States, having immigrated to the states in 1992. Evelyn's story is similar to other TPS holders from El Salvador, most of whom have been in this country, on average, for 27 years and live with a collective 289,000 U.S. citizens. Their home is here, with their families, loved ones, and communities. For Evelyn, her home is with her husband and three children in California, where she's lived for over thirty years.

When she was just 19 years old, Evelyn and her family had endured a tumultuous civil war and were struggling to survive. Although Evelyn was in school at the time, her family could no longer afford the tuition and other basic needs to live in a country still dealing with violence, political instability, and economic strife. **That's what prompted Evelyn to make the journey to the U.S., so that she could "support [her] family over there... [her] parents and their parents as well."** Temporary Protected Status for El Salvador was not implemented until almost a decade later, in 2001, and until then, life for Evelyn was marked by uncertainty. For years, she fought deportation orders while working hard to provide for her three sons, all of whom were born in the U.S. After a long application process that included rigorous background checks, Evelyn **"finally received deportation protections and could stay in the United States, living and working safely in this country."** For hundreds of thousands of people like Evelyn, TPS provides life-saving respite in this country, allowing them to continue building their lives and taking care of their families.



Evelyn

10 STAND WITH IMMIGRANTS

Since 2001, I've been involved in my community. I was involved in my kids' school and was part of a campaign to build more schools in our neighborhoods. LA is my home... We are a community, a multicultural community.



ASYLUM & REFUGEE

The refugee and asylum framework came about during post-World War Two as an outcome of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which introduced the principle of non-refoulement. Non-refoulement asserts that a person seeking asylum should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. While during the pandemic the U.S. saw a near total shutdown of asylum and refugee processing, the Biden Administration began rolling back a number of harmful policies in 2021 — including admitting particularly vulnerable populations impacted by anti-immigrant policies at the border into the U.S. to seek asylum — while electing to keep others. However, pressure from community organizers and advocates, alongside a number of court orders, resulted in **at least 700,000 people having active asylum claims in immigration courts at the end of 2022, compared to 125,000 a decade earlier (U.S. Department of Justice)**. It will take continued calls for **urgently-needed reforms to our asylum and refugee system**, and for the U.S. to recognize its historic role in global relations — particularly in countries where people are fleeing war, famine, and natural disasters — in order to ensure that all immigrants are treated with kindness and dignity.

Asylum has been instrumental in providing people like Oliver much needed safety during times of deep uncertainty in life. **In 2016, Oliver came to the U.S. from Cameroon, where he was experiencing violent marginalization and “being treated as a second-class citizen... When we protested, they’d shoot us, kill us, and put us in jail. That’s why I came to America.”** Oliver’s journey to this country was long and dangerous, as is the case for many immigrants seeking refuge in the U.S. After escaping Cameroon, he walked to Nigeria, flew to Spain then South America, before finally making his way to the States. When he arrived, he was held in a detention center for ten months before being granted asylum. In 2019, Oliver was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a type of cancer that if left untreated would have killed him. **Thanks to the protections afforded by the asylum program, and eventually being granted permanent residency in the U.S., Oliver was able to receive the life-saving care that he needed.** Now he’s living a thriving and fulfilling life in Denver, Colorado with his wife and two daughters.



Oliver

10 **THE STAND WITH IMMIGRANTS**

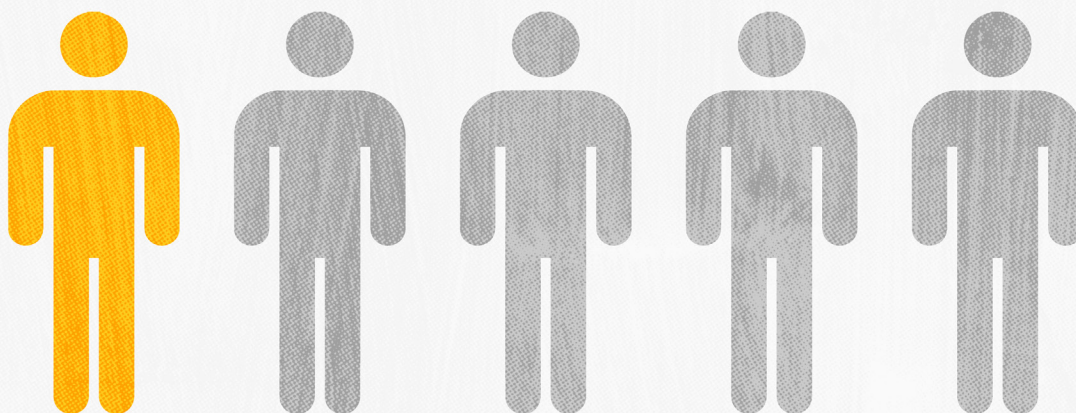
**I'm just glad to be here in America
where it's safe... where there
are beautiful people and lots of
opportunities. If I wasn't here, I
would be dead.**



The story of immigration in America is complicated and full of ups and downs, complexities and nuances. But all in all, the number of undocumented immigrants who have received some form of protection has and continues to grow.

In 2022, nearly 1 in 5 undocumented immigrants, or roughly 2 million people, had deportation protections and access to work permits, compared to only slightly more than half a million in 2012, even as the total number of undocumented immigrants has remained about the same during the past decade.

1 IN 5 UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS



HAVE PROTECTIONS

Source: FWD.us analysis

While national policies and programs have had a huge impact in the lives of immigrants, local governments have also taken great strides toward protecting and providing opportunities for immigrants over the last decade through the implementation of state driver's licenses, in-state tuition, and professional licensing for undocumented immigrants.

SINCE 2010...

17 STATES

have passed laws allowing certain groups of undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, bringing the total number to 19 plus the District of Columbia.

16 STATES

plus the District of Columbia have passed laws allowing certain groups of undocumented immigrants to access in-state tuition, bringing the total number to 23.

17 STATES

have passed laws allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain professional licensing in crucial fields such as law, teaching, and counseling.

(National Immigration Law Center, 2023)

This increase in protections on both the federal and local levels happened alongside a rising number of Americans who support a legal pathway for undocumented immigrants. Around 2010, polling showed that only a slight majority, or around 6 in 10 Americans, supported creating a pathway for undocumented immigrants to receive legal protections in the U.S. According to a FWD.us analysis of Roper data, that number has steadily increased over the years, with combined polling showing a strong majority, or **roughly 8 in 10 Americans are now in favor of creating legal pathways for undocumented immigrants to be protected in the country they call home.**

Because dips and rises in mass public support are inevitable, and even expected within our work, we understand the importance of remaining steadfast and consistent. The last decade has shown us that we must continue making noise and showing up for immigrant communities every day. In doing so, our activism — whatever form that may take — allows us to proudly showcase our solidarity with vulnerable communities and build the frameworks and foundations for us to protect as many people as possible during moments of crisis.

CONCLUSION

Things like “culture” and “social discourse” can be hard to quantify, but the increased number of undocumented immigrants who have received some form of protections over the last decade is not. The number of elected officials throughout the country who have committed to creating programs and institutions that support immigrants and their loved ones is simple enough to calculate. In doing so, we can connect the dots between our dinner-table conversations, pop culture media, and the policies that govern our lives. The fight to build a society where families can stay together and have the ability to thrive in the place that they call home is long and we have far to go. But it is a worthwhile venture to take a step back and celebrate the progress to which our collective efforts have greatly contributed.

If the last ten years is any indication, changing the narrative on immigration is slow, but highly rewarding work. As storytellers and shapers of culture, we need long spans of time to best understand our role in this movement and the value of it. We may not be able to see big changes over a month, or even a year or two, but as long as we continue pushing, we will continue moving forward. Every action, big or small, counts toward protecting vulnerable people who deserve safety, stability, and kindness — regardless of their immigration status or heritage.

As we head into the next ten years of Immigrant Heritage Month (IHM), the I Stand With Immigrants (ISWI) Initiative recommits ourselves to finding new ways to uplift immigrants, showing our solidarity with them in whatever form that takes, and taking care of ourselves and each other along the way.

We hope you'll join us.