

First Choice 2004: Know *What You Want Before You Choose Who You Want*

1 Honoring our commitment to newcomers

2 Cutting back to preserve our security and culture

3 Cutting back in response to economic realities



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Most voters' guides compare the candidates. That's useful, but how can you decide who you want in office until you're sure about what you want that politician to do? And these days that's harder to figure out than it should be.

When politicians present their plans, they naturally play up the quick, easy, cheap part of their program and downplay the messy, expensive, risky parts. In reality, however, many problems don't get solved without facing harsh choices; the government can't avoid pleasing some people and offending others.

First Choice 2004 is designed to help you make the most of your vote by having strong, informed opinions about what those choices might be. With these guides, you can find out more about the problems facing the nation and weigh your values against the policies politicians put forward.

With First Choice 2004, we're not claiming to have the "correct" solution to a problem. What you'll find here are some key facts

along with three different points of view about how to address the issue. Each point of view comes with the arguments for and against, along with some potential costs and tradeoffs. We focus on what each problem means to the average person – and because Public Agenda isn't pushing a particular solution, we're not interested in sugarcoating any options or trashing other points of view. We call this section **Chicework**.

That doesn't mean, by the way, that the broad choices we present are the only ways of dealing with a problem. Many people would mix and match from different perspectives, and you may have your own ideas we haven't considered. We're also not suggesting that you should go looking for a candidate who agrees with you on every single issue. What we are suggesting is that it'll be easier to judge the candidates if you've considered where you want the country to go in the next four years – and what you're willing to do to get there.



Originally launched in 1992, "Choose or Lose" is MTV's comprehensive pro-social campaign to inform young adults about the political process, voice their most urgent political concerns, compel leading Presidential candidates to address those concerns, and organize young adults aged 18-30 to register and vote. In 2004 the campaign is dubbed "20 Million Loud," a movement to mobilize more than 20 million people aged 18-30 to vote in the 2004 election.

You can find out more about Choose or Lose at our Web site, www.mtv.com.



Founded in 1975, Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to public opinion and citizen education. Public Agenda's two-fold mission is to help American leaders better understand the public's point of view, while also helping citizens know more about critical policy issues so they can make thoughtful, informed decisions.

You can find out more about us at our Web site, www.publicagenda.org.

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Choicework In Brief: What Are the Options?

Approach One

Honoring our commitment to newcomers

What should be done

- ▶ Maintain legal immigration at current levels.
- ▶ Ensure that all legal immigrants get the benefits that come with citizenship.
- ▶ Use amnesty programs and “guest worker” visas to give illegal immigrants who hold down jobs a way to become legal residents.
- ▶ Let people keep their native languages and customs if they choose to do so.

Arguments for this approach

- ✓ On balance, the cultural and economic benefits we get from immigrants more than outweigh the short-term costs.
- ✓ The concerns about language and culture are overblown. We've always had ethnic neighborhoods and people who cling to their home language.

Arguments against this approach

- ✗ In the past, large waves of immigration were followed by periods where the rules were tightened up. We need a breathing space to absorb the immigrants we already have.
- ✗ Sept. 11 shows that we need better border security. We shouldn't let anyone in this country unless we know who they are and where they're going to be.

Approach Two

Cutting back to preserve our security and culture

What should be done

- ▶ Tighten visa requirements. Increase funding to improve border security, upgrade computers and hire immigration agents.
- ▶ Sharply reduce legal immigration, including student and work visas. Accept only as many immigrants as can be checked out.
- ▶ Reform bilingual education and require immigrant students to learn English as quickly as possible.
- ▶ Deport immigrants who commit crimes in the U.S. and pursue illegal immigrants aggressively.

Arguments for this approach

- ✓ In an age of terrorism, we cannot allow lax immigration policy that allows terrorists to enter the country unchallenged.
- ✓ We can't keep allowing more immigrants in than the authorities can check out, or more than we can integrate into our society.

Arguments against this approach

- ✗ Experience shows that while some first generation immigrants don't master English, the second generation is almost always fluent and Americanized.
- ✗ This punishes the vast majority of immigrants, who only want a better life, out of fear of a few radicals and terrorists.

Approach Three

Cutting back in response to economic realities

What should be done

- ▶ Cut the total number of legal immigrants.
- ▶ Accept immigrants only if they can support themselves here. Favor newcomers who have useful skills or who are willing to take jobs Americans don't want.
- ▶ Require sponsors of legal immigrants to earn substantially more than poverty-level wages.
- ▶ Grant political asylum only to individuals who can prove that they face persecution.

Arguments for this choice

- ✓ The influx of immigrants is straining public schools, hospitals and other services in the states that get more than their share of newcomers.
- ✓ Many Americans are struggling economically. The government should not make things worse by inviting millions of immigrants to compete for jobs.

Arguments against this choice

- ✗ Immigrants open businesses, create jobs, and bring needed skills to U.S. companies.
- ✗ Relatively few immigrants receive public assistance.
- ✗ Immigrants are willing to take many menial low-wage jobs that native-born Americans shun.

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Chicework: Approach One

Honoring Our Commitment to Newcomers

The United States is a nation of immigrants, and we've never had cause to regret that. It's part of what makes us different from so many more narrow, authoritarian societies, and it's what makes us strong. So we have a special obligation to welcome newcomers. U. S. immigration policy must reflect our ideals, our humanitarian concern and our commitment to the plight of refugees worldwide. Besides, the United States benefits from immigration. Hard-working immigrants start businesses, create jobs, and help the economy grow. Culturally, immigrants enrich America with their arts, traditions, and languages. The U.S. has always gained more by immigration than we've lost and there's no reason to think that will change.

What should be done?

- ▶ Maintain legal immigration at current levels.
- ▶ Ensure that all legal immigrants get the benefits that come with citizenship.
- ▶ Use amnesty programs and "guest worker" visas to give illegal immigrants who hold down jobs a way to become legal residents.
- ▶ Continue to be a refuge for individuals who face political oppression in their home countries.
- ▶ Let people keep their native languages and customs if they choose to do so.

Arguments for this choice

- ✓ On balance, the cultural and economic benefits we get from immigrants more than outweigh the short-term costs.
- ✓ Simple decency ought to require us to take in people fleeing political and social persecution.
- ✓ Immigrants are highly motivated people who contribute to the economy with their entrepreneurial activity and hard work.
- ✓ The concerns about language and culture are overblown. We've always had ethnic neighborhoods and people who cling to their home language. America has coped with this before and we can do so again.

Arguments against this choice

- ✗ Our first obligation is to provide jobs and social services for people already living in this country. We cannot afford to help everyone who wants to come.
- ✗ In the past, large waves of immigration were followed by periods where the rules were tightened up. We need a breathing space to absorb the immigrants we already have.
- ✗ Sept. 11 shows that we need better border security. We shouldn't let anyone in this country unless we know who they are and where they're going to be.
- ✗ Amnesty programs reward people for breaking the law. That's not only a bad precedent, it's also an insult to the many immigrants who followed the rules and went through the red tape to get here legally.

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Chicework: Approach Two

Cutting Back to Preserve Our Security and Culture

We need to control immigration to secure our borders and protect our unity. Sept. 11 showed how our immigration policies have failed to keep criminals and terrorists out of the country. Millions of people have evaded our immigration laws and the government has no idea whether any of them pose a threat to us. In addition, the recent wave of immigration has brought increasing pressure to accommodate immigrants by accepting bilingualism. We should honor diversity, but not at the cost of breaking the bonds of cohesion — common ideals, a common language, and common political institutions — that hold the nation together.

What should be done?

- ▶ Tighten visa requirements. Increase funding to improve border security, upgrade computers and hire immigration agents.
- ▶ Sharply reduce legal immigration, including student and work visas. Accept only as many immigrants as can be checked out by authorities.
- ▶ Reform bilingual education and require immigrant students to learn English as quickly as possible.
- ▶ Deport immigrants who commit crimes in the U.S. and pursue illegal immigrants more aggressively.

Arguments for this choice

- ✓ In an age of terrorism, we cannot allow lax immigration policy that allows terrorists to enter the country unchallenged.
- ✓ We can't keep allowing more immigrants in than the authorities can check out, or more than we can integrate into society.
- ✓ Most countries insist that immigrants enter the cultural mainstream by learning their language.
- ✓ If trends continue, English will no longer be our common language. Without a common language, the U.S. will fracture into separate cultures.

Arguments against this choice

- ✗ Historically, there have always been dire predictions that immigrants are "too different" and won't integrate into society. They were wrong before and they're wrong now.
- ✗ Experience shows that while some first generation immigrants don't master English, the second generation is almost always fluent and Americanized.
- ✗ This favors white Europeans and excludes the rest of the world.
- ✗ This punishes the vast majority of immigrants, who only want a better life, out of fear of a few radicals and terrorists.

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Chicework: Approach Three

Cutting Back in Response to Economic Realities

The first concern should be the economic cost imposed by the huge influx of immigrants and their effects on wages and jobs. The fact is that we need to educate and employ the people already here before we can worry about paying for the education, welfare, and health care of hundreds of thousands of newcomers each year. Plus, the burden isn't spread evenly – most immigrants settle in big cities and Sun Belt states. We should restrict the number of newcomers, and look more closely at how their arrival affects us. The immigrants we do accept should either have jobs waiting here or have the skills to support themselves. The nation's first obligation is to protect the welfare and well being of those who are already American citizens.

What Should Be Done?

- ▶ Cut the total number of legal immigrants.
- ▶ Accept immigrants only if they can support themselves here. Favor newcomers who either have useful skills or who are willing to take jobs Americans don't want.
- ▶ Require sponsors of legal immigrants to earn substantially more than poverty-level wages.
- ▶ Grant political asylum only to individuals who can prove that they face persecution.

Arguments For This Approach

- ✓ The influx of immigrants is straining public schools, hospitals and other services in the states that get more than their share of newcomers. There's only so much we can afford to do.
- ✓ Many Americans are struggling economically. The government should not make things worse by inviting millions of immigrants to compete for jobs.
- ✓ Providing immigrants with generous public services turns America into a magnet for the world's poor.
- ✓ We should take care of American citizens first -- in public services, jobs and education.

Arguments Against This Approach

- ✗ Immigrants open businesses, create jobs, and bring needed skills to U.S. companies.
- ✗ Relatively few immigrants receive public assistance.
- ✗ Legal immigrants pay taxes. They ought to be able to benefit from the public services their taxes pay for, just like any other taxpayer.
- ✗ Many immigrants are working in menial low-wage jobs that native-born Americans shun. They're not depriving anyone of work.

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Status Report: Where Are We Now?

Americans have always had mixed feelings about immigration. As a "nation of immigrants," we get misty over the photos of families arriving at Ellis Island, even as we worry about the impact of immigration on jobs, social services, schools and our security. That's nothing new – when Ellis Island was in full operation, people had the same concerns. The romantic inscription on the Statue of Liberty, erected in 1886, proclaiming "give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," came at a time when Congress had already passed laws excluding "paupers, ex-convicts, mental defectives and Chinese."

That was at the beginning of the greatest wave of immigration in American history, which gave us the enduring analogy of the

"melting pot." Now the United States is in the midst of another great wave of immigration, which brings in roughly 800,000 new residents a year, but hasn't given us another analogy.

More than one in 10 U.S. residents are immigrants, and while that's the highest share of the overall American population since the 1930s, it's still below the high of 15 percent recorded in 1890 and 1910, according to the Census Bureau. Most of the new immigrants come from Latin America and Asia. Like the earlier wave, the influx is likely to change American culture, but many Americans have yet to work through how they feel about it.

Also as in the wave of a century ago, immigration makes us ask fundamental questions. Does the



More about the work experience of immigrants is available in our [issue guide on immigration](#).

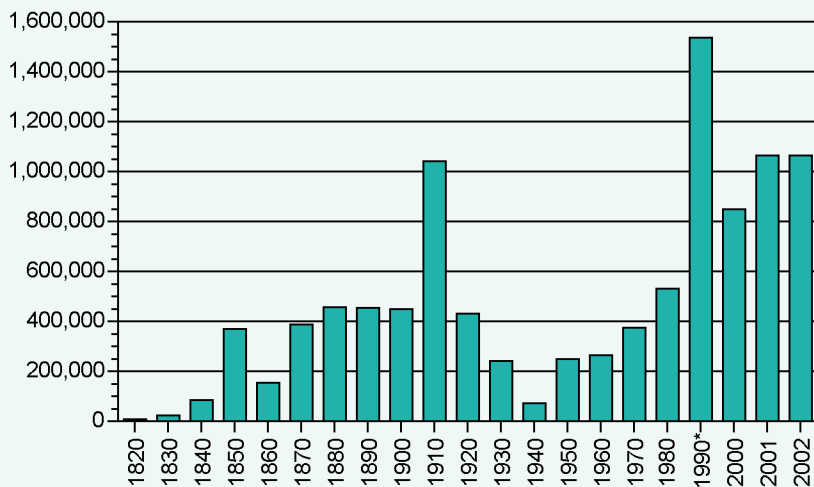
U.S. benefit from their talents and hard work, or do they take jobs away from people who are already here? Does it matter where immigrants come from, or whether they speak English? To what degree should they hold on to their culture or blend into American society? At a basic level, immigration policy is about deciding what kind of country the United States is going to be.

Watching the gates

Sept. 11 has put a new urgency into immigration policy. Some critics point to the fact that three of the 19 hijackers were in the U.S. with expired visas; others find it equally disturbing that the remaining 16 hijackers were able to roam the country at will, even though some of them should have raised suspicions. At least two of the hijackers were on a U.S. government "watch list" of people suspected of having links to terrorists and should never have been allowed to enter the country.

Immigration to the United States

Legal immigrants admitted to the United States, fiscal years 1820-2002



*1990 figure includes undocumented workers legalized under the 1986 amnesty law

Note: Between 1820-2002, about 68.2 million legal immigrants were admitted to the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security estimates that about 350,000 unauthorized immigrants enter the U.S. each year.

Source: "2002 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics," October 2003, Department of Homeland Security

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In the aftermath of Sept. 11, immigration regulations were one of the first tools the federal government turned to in its efforts to combat domestic terrorism. As the government took steps to bolster border security, it secretly detained hundreds of Middle Easterners on immigration violations. The government also targeted young male immigrants from specific Middle Eastern countries for special questioning and review. That raises many concerns, including: Was it fair to immediately focus suspicion on immigrants? Did the detention of young Middle Eastern men amount to racial profiling?

Coming to America

The current wave of immigration has its roots in 1965, when Congress overhauled immigration laws. The 1965 law placed a new emphasis on reuniting families and granting asylum to refugees, while also favoring immigrants with job skills and ending a longstanding preference for Western Europeans.

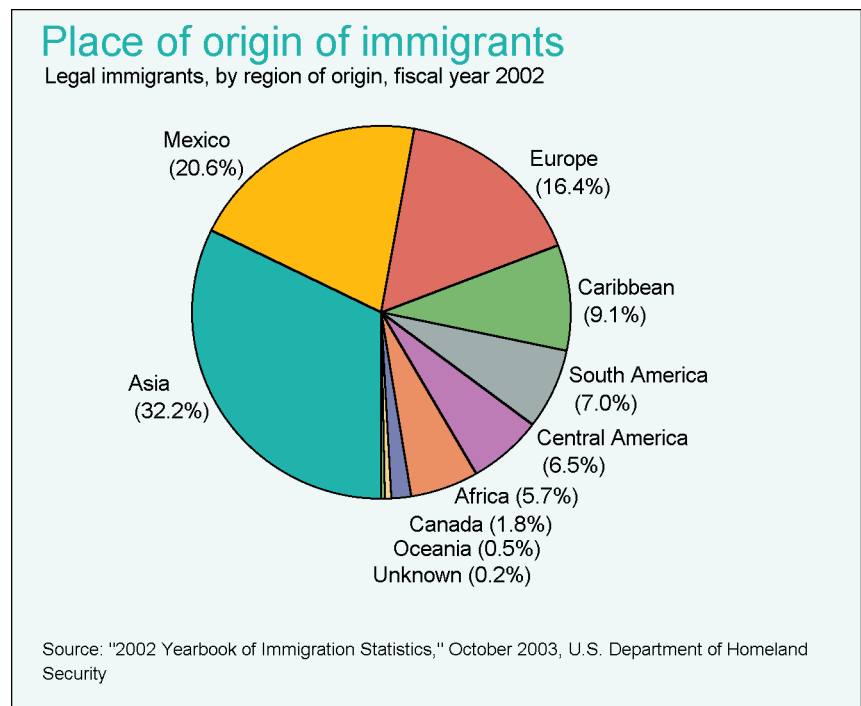
The law not only increased the rate of legal immigration — from 297,000 in 1965 to 850,000 in 2000, — it also produced a dramatic shift in immigrants' country of origin. Prior to 1965, nine out of 10 legal

immigrants to the U.S. were from Europe or Canada. Now, more than half come from Asia or Mexico.

Those figures don't include unauthorized immigration, which federal officials estimate at 350,000 a year. The lure of a better life in the United States — in spite of the risks of illegal immigration — has always

been strong, but it became even stronger in the economic boom of the 1990s. During that one decade, the number of illegal immigrants in the U.S. more than doubled, hitting 8.7 million, according to the Census Bureau.

Some suggest that illegal immigrants exact a high cost on society without making a contribution,



The Public's Viewpoint

When you look at the public opinion surveys, you can see the conflicting impulses people feel in the immigration debate. Many people seem to simultaneously hold positive and negative attitudes about immigration.

Attitudes have been shaken by the Sept. 11 attacks - the number of Americans who say immigration should be curtailed took a 20-point jump after the attacks. Even before Sept. 11, the public was divided on whether immigration helps or hurts the country.

Yet some surveys suggest people really want better enforcement of immigration laws. In a recent Public Agenda survey, **eight in 10 said immigrants have a greater appreciation for the Constitution than native-born Americans.** But other surveys show the public also says immigration lowers wages and weakens the national character.

The public generally draws a sharp distinction between legal and illegal immigration. The public looks more favorably on immigrants

perceived as "playing by the rules." **Illegal immigrants are viewed with much less sympathy.** Half of those surveyed by Public Agenda say giving the government the power to detain legal immigrants indefinitely in the war on terrorism "goes too far," but six in 10 say illegal immigrants who are detained "don't deserve such protections because they are here illegally." What's more, six in 10 also say illegal immigrants should be deported immediately after being caught, without recourse to the courts.

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since they often work in the “cash economy” and don’t pay taxes. That belief drove many of the attempts to tighten immigration policy in the 1990s, such as California’s Proposition 187, passed by voters in 1994, which would have denied almost all benefits to illegal immigrants, including public education. Most of those efforts have been overturned in court or tempered by later decisions.

Supporters of more open immigration say illegal or “undocumented” immigrants play a vital economic role by taking hard, unpleasant jobs many Americans don’t want, particularly in agricultural work. The fact that the North American Free Trade Agreement envisions more open borders between the U.S., Mexico and Canada adds yet another complexity – most of these illegal immigrants are from Latin America.

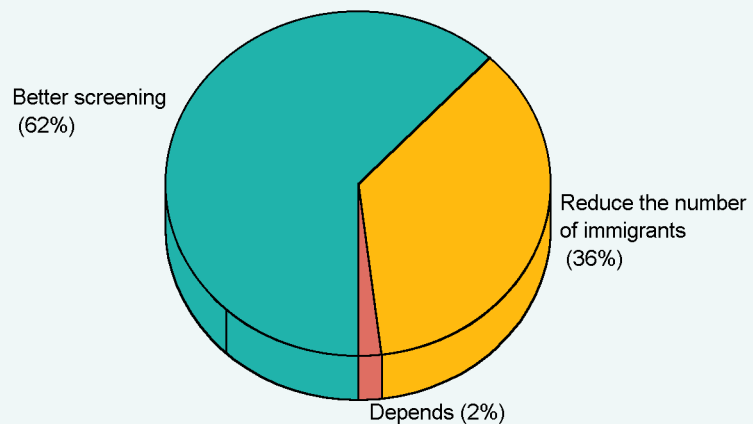
Uninvited but welcome guests?

The Bush administration has acknowledged that the problem of illegal immigration isn’t going away by proposing a “temporary worker” program. Under this plan, as many as eight million illegal immigrants who have jobs would be able to apply for temporary worker status, allowing them to stay in the U.S. legally and travel home.

President Bush argues that the program both acknowledges that Americans don’t want many of the jobs immigrants are willing to take, and contends giving these workers legal status will allow the government to track (and tax) them more effectively. Critics say, however, that the program is an amnesty that rewards those who broke the law to come here in the first place.

Most people say the U.S. should do a better job of screening immigrants rather than reduce the number of immigrants admitted to the country

Which of the following statements comes closer to your view? Since the Sept. 11 attacks and with the threat of terrorism, we should reduce the number of immigrants let into the country. Or since the Sept. 11 attacks and with the threat of terrorism, we should do a better job of screening immigrants let into the country but not reduce the overall number.



Source: NBC News / Wall Street Journal 9/02

Face the Facts

- ▶ **About 40 percent of legal immigrants admitted to the U.S. during fiscal year 2001 had no occupation, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Of the 40 percent with no occupation, 61 percent were students or children, 29 percent homemakers, 9 percent were unemployed and 1 percent retired.**
- ▶ **At the beginning of the 2000 fiscal year there were 25,042 refugee applications pending, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. During that year, 91,854 were filed, 66,546 were approved, 21,010 were denied, 10,482 were otherwise closed, and 18,858 remained pending at the end of the year.**

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Additional Resources

- ▶ Visit our partner, **The New York Times Learning Network** for the latest campaign news, stories, and information on what the candidates are saying about these issues. For more information specifically on immigration, visit their **Issues in Depth** section.
- ▶ Even more information about the candidates and the campaign is available from our partner, **MTV's Choose or Lose**.
- ▶ **Youth Vote** is the nation's largest nonpartisan coalition working to increase the political involvement of 50 million Americans between 18-30 years old. The Youth Vote coalition consists of over one hundred diverse national organizations representing hundreds of organizations and millions of young people.
- ▶ **Kids Voting USA** fosters an informed electorate by educating and engaging students and their families in voting and other elements of effective civic engagement.
- ▶ To find out more about specific candidates running for office in your area, we suggest the nonpartisan Web sites **Project Vote Smart** or **DemocracyNet**.
- ▶ For more information on immigration, visit **Public Agenda Online's issue guide**.
- ▶ Think you know this topic? Try our **Test Your Knowledge** feature.
- ▶ Think these choices don't go far enough? Do you want to mix and match options? Visit Public Agenda Online and try our **Create Your Own Choicework** feature.
- ▶ Want to find organizations on all sides of this issue? Visit **Sources and Resources**.
- ▶ Funding for First Choice 2004 was provided by the **Carnegie Corporation of New York**.

Set Your Own Priorities

Making public policy decisions isn't just about choosing the best way of attacking a problem – you also have to consider which problem should be tackled first. There are lots of things the government *could* do, and many it *should* do, but not even the federal government can do everything at once. So priorities have to be set. With our **First Things First** feature on Public Agenda Online, you can work through what you think the next administration should do – and what it should do first. Find out more at:

www.publicagenda.org/firstchoice2004/first-things-first.cfm

Find Out More About the Issues

If you like this edition of *First Choice 2004*, read some of our companion guides on:

- ▶ Terrorism and Foreign Policy
- ▶ Health Care
- ▶ Race and Affirmative Action
- ▶ Gay Rights
- ▶ Paying for College
- ▶ The Environment
- ▶ Jobs and the Economy
- ▶ Taxes and the Deficit
- ▶ Immigration

For even more detail, visit **Public Agenda Online**, which offers nonpartisan issue guides on 21 issues ranging from abortion to welfare reform.