July 2024

2024 Immigrant Justice Platform

<u>Our Vision</u>



Purpose

The Center for Popular Democracy's Immigration Team prepared this document as a companion to *2024 CPD Immigration Platform: Our Work*.¹ Together, these two documents outline the overarching values and strategies that guide the CPD Network's immigration campaigns, reflect our affiliates and their members' vision and priorities, and provide consistent language for narrative and political education immigration work. Intended audiences for these documents include CPD staff, affiliates, our members, policymakers, journalists, and funders.

Who We Are

The Center for Popular Democracy (CPD) builds the power of communities to ensure the country embodies our vision of an inclusive, equitable society – where people of color, immigrants, working families, women, and LGBTQ+ communities thrive together, supported by a resilient economy and political institutions that reflect our priorities. To this end, CPD has designated campaign teams focused on specific issues affecting the communities we serve, including an Immigration campaign. Fifty-three affiliate organizations across 34 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C., comprise the CPD Network.

The Current Context

In the current political context of anti-immigrant narratives and misinformation, we must continue to build and showcase the power and diversity of immigrant communities in the U.S. Political parties exploit the issue of immigration for political gain every election year. But our communities know that beneath the posturing, immigration policies have life-or-death implications for real people.

Although it's crucial to continue fighting harmful proposals,² we must also be clear on our vision of what immigration means to this country and how intrinsically it ties to many issues that affect not only immigrants but all of us. **Below, we outline some guiding principles that CPD and our affiliates hope to center as we do immigration justice work.**



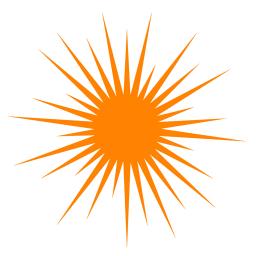
There are currently over 46 million immigrant and refugee community members living in the United States, including over 11 million undocumented Americans,³ many of whom have lived here for decades and are our family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. However, for all their contributions to our communities, many immigrants live in a state of limbo, unsure if someone will come overnight to take away the lives they have worked so hard to build. They face the constant threat of deportation and family separation as they struggle for basic labor protections, living wages, and access to health, education, and housing, all while raising their families and doing essential work that sustains our country. Millions face further uncertainties due to the current immigration case backlog crisis.⁴

Our immigrant communities have faced unprecedented, escalating attacks on and violations of their basic dignity and safety, including under Trump-era policies, some of which were continued and even expanded on by the current administration.⁵ (In June 2024, relenting to "decades of tireless organizing and advocacy," the current administration announced protections for "roughly half a million spouses of U.S. citizens, including eligible DACA recipients, from deportation [and] access to work authorization and a possible path to permanent residency and citizenship."⁶) It is terrifying to witness the rise of white supremacy, dehumanizing rhetoric, and open calls for fascism in the United States as we approach another pivotal election.⁷ But as frightening and disheartening as the current moment is, these anti-immigrant policies and scapegoating are nothing new.

Our Historical Perspective

U.S. immigration policy is inextricably linked to

racism. Up until 1965, it was the official policy of the U.S. Government to encourage immigration from select European countries and discourage or bar migrants of color from entering the country in service of a white supremacist idea of who should be considered "American."⁸ It has become an



ironic feature of our immigration debate that many of the descendants of past waves of immigration from Europe are some of the most fervent opponents to immigration today.

The bedrock of U.S. immigration policy has been to keep out the "other." In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act targeted Chinese immigrants for restriction–the first such group identified by race and class for severely limited legal entry and ineligibility for citizenship. The Immigration Act of 1917 established a "barred zone" extending from the



Middle East to Southeast Asia from which no one was allowed to enter the United States and also implemented English literacy tests intended to limit "undesirable" groups from Southern and Eastern Europe–Catholics and Jews.⁹ The Immigration Act of 1924 established discriminatory, country-based quotas; this remained the primary means of determining admission to the U.S. for immigrants until 1965.¹⁰

During the 1950s, so-called "Operation Wetback" was a militarized campaign that rounded up perceived Mexican nationals (and scores of U.S. citizens) in the Southwest

U.S. and pushed them over the border into Mexico.¹¹ Later, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 provided a path to permanent residency and "naturalization" for millions, but at the same time, contributed to more militarization and enforcement at the southern border and a more stringent system of proof of residency/citizenship required for workers to gain "legal" employment.¹²

One constant feature of anti-immigrant policy and rhetoric in the U.S. has been to treat the act of migration and the people migrating as a *problem*-of criminality and legality, often couched in terms of economic or safety concerns-rather than a *solution*: as a natural result of the human need and desire to move, or as the inevitable outcome, ironically, of U.S. economic and foreign policy such as NAFTA, support for death squads in Central America and dictatorships in South America, the invasion and destabilization of Iraq and the region, et cetera. **Casting immigration – especially from certain countries – as a problem or crime to be solved led to racist enforcement becoming the "solution." This bipartisan consensus¹³ gained traction over the past decades hand-in-hand with neoliberal austerity and mass incarceration; "the justifications used to target immigrants are based on the same**

long-standing beliefs that have criminalized other marginalized groups for decades."¹⁴



Criminalizing the very foreign-born workers demanded by big business is a key feature of disciplining the working class overall.¹⁵

An often overlooked feature of the oppression of immigrants in the U.S. is anti-Black racism. There are more than 600,000 Black undocumented people in the U.S. and about 4 million Black immigrants overall.¹⁶ They are

twice as likely to be deported as non-Black undocumented immigrants and account for 20% of the population facing deportation on "criminal" grounds despite representing under 9% of the undocumented population.¹⁷ "Our anti-Black and xenophobic immigration system is entangled with our racist criminal legal system," putting Black immigrants into a life of "double jeopardy" as they are targeted and profiled by both local law enforcement and immigration enforcement officials. This dynamic is only made worse by programs such as 287(G) that deputize local police as immigration agents and by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act ("IIRIRA") and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act ("AEDPA").¹⁸ Indeed, we can think of the white backlash to migration from Mexico, Central America, and other majority-people of color countries as mirroring and having roots in the backlash to another, earlier mass migration: the "*Great Migration*" of Black Americans escaping racial terror and discrimination in the South by moving to cities in the North, Midwest, and Western U.S.¹⁹

Our Values

We believe all people have inherent value and deserve to be treated as whole persons. The decision to migrate is not made lightly and is often driven by untenable conditions. Everyone deserves the freedom to stay – to remain rooted in the communities and countries where they were born and raised alongside family and friends. But if this becomes impossible due to economic, political, or other conditions,

everyone also deserves the right to move, migrate, and participate fully in the country where they live. We will only be free when immigrants are no longer exploited, scapegoated, or living in fear of a detention and deportation regime that rips apart families and communities. We will only be free when we recognize that our diversity is one of our country's oldest and greatest strengths.



Our Values

CPD's vision for immigrant liberation – and the liberation of all people – is grounded in the <u>"Five Freedoms"</u> imagined by the nearly 50 immigrant justice leaders who participated in the *Immigrant Movement Visioning Process* in 2018-19:

All people have inherent dignity and value. Everyone should be able to live in safe and healthy conditions, protected equally under the law. Every human being deserves to embrace their complex histories and backgrounds, to dream, love, imagine, and achieve peace and liberation. We believe that migration policies must be grounded in racial, economic, and gender equity and justice.

- **Freedom to Thrive.** All people should have equal agency to make decisions about their lives, relationships, community, and future.
- **Freedom to Stay.** All people have the right to stay and belong in the place they call home.
- **Freedom to Move.** All people should have the freedom to move equitably and be welcomed.
- **Freedom to Work.** All people deserve the right to safe, fulfilling, and dignified work.
- **Freedom to Transform.** All people have inherent value and deserve to be treated as whole persons.

We believe that immigration enriches our country in every sense of the word. Contrary to the cynical scarcity ideology that pits marginalized communities against each other, immigration increases and sustains the country's economic growth. In 2024, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that immigration will boost US GDP by \$7 trillion over the next decade.²⁰ In addition to contributing millions of dollars annually through taxes, immigrants labor in various industries and businesses, including many that deem them essential workers. **But beyond their economic contributions**, **immigrants are whole persons who are invaluable to our families, institutions, communities, and movements**. Their language, traditions, and cultural practices enrich us all.

Our Strategy

We must not give in to hopelessness and apathy. **We must maintain our long-term** vision and values and trust that they will outlive the short-term expediency of the current political moment. This long-term vision must be nurtured through *narrative change*, *electoral work*, *litigation*, and *advocacy and direct action*, as well as by continuing to build our movement's power and visibility.

Narrative change

It is essential to maintain a continued focus on narrative change to counteract the barrage of dehumanizing anti-immigration rhetoric flooding the public square and political arena. This means sharing immigrants' stories in their own words and highlighting their challenges navigating a country and a system that aims to isolate and punish them while also uplifting the joy they experience with their families and communities across the U.S. **This also includes striking a balance between noting immigrants' essential economic contributions and emphasizing that their worth as**



individuals is not limited to the value of their labor. Our advocacy must also reflect the diversity of the immigrant experience, recognizing that immigration policy is not just simply a Latine issue but also profoundly impacts Black, Muslim, Arab, African, Asian, LGBTQ+, and other communities, and the

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countless people for whom two or more of

these identities overlap. We recognize that just as the immigrant community is not racially, ethnically, or religiously homogeneous, there's also significant variation in how and when individuals arrive in the U.S.

We must advocate for the entirety of the immigrant community and not buy into a scarcity mindset or divisive "good/deserving vs. bad/criminal immigrant" framing within our movement. **No immigrant is more or less worthy than another**. This type of thinking is a distraction from the work that needs to be done to defeat the oppressive systems that threaten us all.

Intersectionality

Immigrants are not just affected by immigration policy. Immigrant communities often bear the brunt of a myriad of other issues, including housing unaffordability, lack of access to healthcare, violations of labor rights, substandard wages, discrimination in the education system, and increased policing, surveillance and criminal enforcement.²¹ The constant attacks on civil rights and liberties and racist rhetoric that characterizes the anti-immigrant movement are part of a broader, deep-seated threat to our society. This is why our immigrant justice campaign supports state and local work on a range of issues, including access to housing, healthcare, education, and labor rights. **The issue of immigration and immigrant communities themselves cannot be siloed. The liberation of immigrants connects to the liberation of everyone.**

Electoralizing Immigration

As we recognize the intersectionality of immigration, we also cannot shy away from explicitly naming immigration as a priority issue for our communities. In an election year such as 2024, this includes electoralizing immigration. Candidates and elected officials at every level, whether federal, state, or local, must face accountability for how their rhetoric and actions (or lack thereof) directly impact immigrant communities. As we continue to grow the power of our affiliates and members, immigration policy must continue to be front and center, whether seeking support for pro-immigrant proposals or responding to anti-immigrant attacks.

Litigation

At the federal level, litigation has been an invaluable tool to fight back against anti-immigrant attacks, particularly during the Trump administration, helping to preserve programs like TPS and DACA. At the state level, the use of litigation has been crucial in pushing back against, or at least pausing the implementation of, anti-immigrant laws in places like Florida and Texas.²² Unfortunately, the ultimate fate of some of these key cases might not hinge on the validity of substantive legal arguments but on the personal views of anti-immigrant judges. This is particularly concerning in the case of the Supreme Court of the U.S., which has been shown to have severe conflicts of interest.²³ This is part of the reason why CPD has an ongoing campaign focused on Supreme Court reform, which is broader than the immigration cases.

Advocacy and Direct Action

Our advocacy work and direct action tactics are driven by those most impacted by immigration policies. Although litigation and other tools can provide a powerful last resort when Congress fails to act or the executive branch overreaches, we cannot stay



on the defensive or settle for minimum protections; we must put forward and fight for our affirmative vision for the future. We train, organize, and mobilize organizations and members across the country to take powerful, decisive action on decision-makers.

Nurturing the power and sustainability of the movement

The immigrant justice movement needs to be rooted in affected communities and strive to care for each other as much as for any specific advocacy goals. We must continue to share tools and recognize the diversity of skills and experiences within our organizations.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

If you would like to receive more information about our vision and strategy for 2024, please contact *National Immigration Organizer* **Tony Alarcon at** <u>talarcon@populardemocracy.org</u> or *Senior Policy Strategist* **Iris Figueroa at** <u>ifigueroa@populardemocracy.org</u>

Endnotes

1. See <link to report page on CPD site>

2. Some of the current policies, narratives and proposals we are fighting against include the bipartisan <u>scapegoating of</u> <u>immigrants and asylum seekers to score political points</u>; <u>H.R. 7343</u>, <u>a redundant</u>, <u>fearmongering bill</u> that would subject immigrants to mandatory detention for being accused of, arrested for, charged with or convicted of assaulting a law enforcement officer; new attempts to include a <u>citizenship status question in the 2030 Census</u>; and a <u>major expansion of the FISA warrantless spying program</u> that would target immigrants.

3.

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https://americasvoice.org/press_releases/following-decades-of-tireless-organizing-and-advocacy-immigrant-and-civil-righ ts-groups-win-historic-relief-for-immigrant-families/

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- 15. See Denvir, All-American Nativism, pp 7-9.
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- 19. See Denvir, *All-American Nativism*, pp 3-7; <u>https://thebaffler.com/latest/impossible-contradictions-oconnor</u> 20.

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23. https://fixthecourt.com/2024/05/recent-times-justice-failed-recuse-despite-clear-conflict-interest/



The Center for Popular Democracy works to create equity, opportunity and a dynamic democracy in partnership with high-impact base-building organizations, organizing alliances, and progressive unions. CPD strengthens our collective capacity to envision and win an innovative pro-worker, pro-immigrant, racial and economic justice agenda.

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2024 Immigrant Justice Platform

<u>Our Work</u>



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CPD Immigration Network

At CPD, we deeply value collaboration. **We work hand in hand with our affiliates and partners to help immigrant communities directly impacted by anti-immigration policies at the state and national levels**. We provide members and leaders with context, frameworks, and information to assist them in responding to the fast-changing political landscape and in understanding different threats and opportunities in immigration policy. As part of this work, we train member leaders on organizing skills and offer practical tools that support base-building. This collaborative effort creates a common language, expands our analytical reach, and increases our ability to build solidarity and act with a common purpose.



CPD coordinates and mobilizes to ensure members and leaders maintain an active presence in local and state legislatures and Washington, D.C. We organize rapid-response actions responding to federal immigration threats from proposed legislation, the federal appropriations process, and Supreme Court cases. At the local and state levels, we support and uplift our affiliates' campaigns on various issues impacting immigrant communities, including housing access, access to healthcare, education, labor rights, and economic justice. CPD also facilitates a vital role in coordinating rapid response amongst affiliates and partners on many policy issues, including those discussed below.

Doñas Academy

In September 2022, CPD launched the <u>Las Doñas Academy</u> in response to the needs expressed by our Immigrant Justice cohort (which includes multiple affiliates such as <u>Make the Road New York, Make the Road Connecticut, Make the Road New Jersey,</u> <u>Make the Road Nevada, COPAL</u> (Communities Organizing Latine Power and Action), and <u>PCUN</u> (Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste). **This initiative, developed in collaboration with CPD's Base-building team, is designed to strengthen the organizing capacity of the CPD Network's affiliate members and leaders**. The program, specifically for monolingual Spanish-speaking women, is making significant contributions by mobilizing more than 350 *Doñas* throughout the country, including states like Arizona, Connecticut, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, , and Texas. Since its inception, the program has grown CPD and our affiliates' base and inspired hope for a more inclusive and equitable society by giving people the tools and information they need to represent themselves in any room.

The *Doñas Academy* focuses on the skills used to build a base, deepen our organizing work, and take collective action. We encourage participants to participate actively in the virtual training and utilize diverse, interactive digital tools and facilitated discussions to ensure a healthy and accessible learning environment. During each session, we share immigration language to provide consistent comprehension of



different terms and phrases and assign follow-up actions for the subsequent training to practice the skills and framework covered. Through these base-building activities, we empower our members as leaders and cultivate their capacity to build organizational power, increase access and accessibility of organizing resources and materials, and facilitate alignment among immigrant justice organizations — advancing toward our vision of building a world where we all can thrive, despite citizenship status. The *Doñas* represent an empowered collective that mobilizes and takes action around the issues that affect immigrants, working at the forefront of dozens of lobby visits, rallies, and town halls to uplift healthcare, housing, worker justice, and, of course, immigrant justice.

Our Advocacy And Organizing

Immigrant communities themselves must lead in determining what policies can best ensure their safety and well-being. That is why CPD works closely with our affiliates to amplify immigrants' stories and policy demands.

Immigration Detention: Putting People Over Profits

While failing to address the need for immigration reform, there is one area where the U.S. government has spent substantial money and attention in recent decades: the increased criminalization of immigrants and the militarization of our immigration system. **The U.S. spends billions of dollars every year to maintain the world's most extensive immigration detention system**, with almost 200 detention centers filled with people deprived of their liberties, denied access to legal representation, separated from their families, and subjected to severe medical neglect.² Corporations profit handsomely by contracting with the government to run these centers – and by

coercing detained immigrants into working for as little as one dollar per day.³ In the broader economy, corporations also pad their profits by exploiting the labor of a racialized, precarious segment of the working class under constant threat of deportation.

Although the contributions of immigrants to their communities go well beyond economics, it is



worth noting that immigrants added \$2 trillion to the U.S. GDP in 2016⁴ and nearly \$580 billion in taxes in 2022;⁵ indeed, immigrants are "powering the U.S. economy."⁶ Instead of continuing to fund an ineffective, punitive system, alternative measures that government spending should focus on include investing in community-based resettlement services, rehabilitation-and-reentry support, funding for just economic transitions, ensuring access to counsel, removing barriers to navigating the immigration system, and investments in border communities, rather than continuing to increase ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and CBP (Customs and Border Protection) funding. CPD has worked consistently with partner organizations that highlight the pervasive impacts of this enforcement funding and advocates on these issues as part of our work on the federal appropriations process.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, created in 2012, allowed over 800,000 individuals to remain in the U.S., attend school, work, and live without fear of deportation. There are currently over 500,000 people actively enrolled in DACA (and nearly 100,000 pending applications as of the end of 2023, stalled by anti-immigrant litigation).²

DACA did not happen overnight. A sustained movement that began in the early 2000s and led by young undocumented immigrants, or "Dreamers," achieved it.⁸ After early efforts to pass the *DREAM Act* (which would have provided a path to permanent residency for many of these youths) repeatedly failed in Congress,⁹ undocumented and other immigrant youth grew increasingly frustrated by inaction on the federal level, the limits of large but distant national immigrant advocacy organizations, and the severity of Obama-era deportation and immigrant detention policies.¹⁰ In 2010, young people held direct actions and civil disobedience and marched and rallied to force officials to take action.¹¹ In June 2012, President Obama finally relented to their pressure with the announcement of DACA.



DACA was a resounding victory for the immigrant youth movement. It allowed hundreds of thousands of people to achieve their full potential in the only home they've ever known. However, from the beginning, DACA was a temporary measure that did not offer a path to citizenship. The future of DACA is in limbo, as is the future of those who have benefitted from the program and their families. In 2017, the Trump administration announced it would be ending DACA, a decision subsequently enjoined by courts that left protections in place for those who already had DACA but halted new applications.¹² DACA will likely get struck down by the Supreme Court of the United States sometime in the next two years.¹³

CPD, along with affiliate and partner groups, is part of the *Home is Here coalition*, which seeks to raise awareness of the DACA program's importance and offer resources to help DACA recipients navigate the program's current uncertainty.

TPS (Temporary Protected Status)

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) helps people find stability by granting individuals from specifically-designated countries temporary status, work authorization, and protection from deportation. Overall, TPS-eligible individuals contribute nearly \$31 billion annually to the U.S. economy.¹⁴ Congress created TPS in 1990; TPS was granted to nationals of El Salvador that same year.¹⁵ TPS is granted based on the conditions of the origin country, such as natural disasters, political instability, or armed conflict.⁶ TPS designations often follow destabilizing or destructive interventions by the U.S. and other major powers abroad, as in the case of Central America.¹² Throughout its almost 35-year history, both Democratic and Republican administrations have granted TPS to multiple countries in regions including Latin America, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

As an administrative tool, Presidents have the discretion to award TPS based on country conditions, allowing the government to respond in real time to crises. But this makes TPS protections temporary, unstable, and subject to shifting political whims. TPS has suffered multiple



threats in recent years, and calls to designate or renew TPS protections have too often been ignored.¹⁸ Unfortunately, even individuals who have had TPS for decades must continuously renew their status.¹⁹

The countries with a current TPS designation include Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Cameroon, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.²⁰ There are ongoing campaigns to ensure the TPS redesignation of these countries once their statuses expire and, in some cases, expand the country designation so that more people can be protected. There are also campaigns calling for the designation of TPS protections for additional countries, including Ecuador,²¹ the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Mali, and Mauritania.²²

CPD and its affiliates and partners have been particularly involved in efforts to protect and extend TPS designations for Central American countries, including Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Similarly, CPD affiliates, and individual *Doñas*, have been involved in advocacy efforts to designate TPS for Ecuador, including actions in Washington, D.C., and popular education at the local level.

The Registry Act

No temporary measures will fulfill the need for a permanent solution to providing citizenship for

all. Our family members, neighbors, colleagues, and friends deserve the opportunity to come out of the shadows. This is long overdue and will significantly impact not only undocumented individuals but also the broader communities that they belong to and help to sustain daily.

One proposal for providing this crucial protection is the Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929, often referred to as the "Registry" Act. If the Registry Act passes, it would



update the registry date, which **could provide approximately 8 million immigrants with permanent legal status**. This is based on the discretion granted to the Department of Homeland Security Secretary by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to grant lawful admission for permanent residence (a "green card") to certain immigrants based on a specific "registry" date. This registry date has been updated several times – the most recent was during the passage of the 1986 Immigrants hoping to apply for permanent residence must have entered the country) to January 1, 1972. The registry date will remain obsolete without a new update (as proposed in the Registry Act). With an updated registry date, millions of individuals who have lived and worked in their communities for years and even decades could finally be eligible for a green card.²³

Rather than creating a patchwork of provisions and adding further complexity to existing immigration law, **a single registry date update would offer universal relief to Dreamers, TPS holders, and other long-time community members.** CPD will continue to work to support this legislation and make it clear to members of Congress that a straightforward and comprehensive solution exists, provided the political will to implement it.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

If you would like to receive more information about our work or the specific policy objectives detailed above, please contact *National Immigration Organizer* **Tony Alarcon at <u>talarcon@populardemocracy.org</u> or Senior Policy Strategist Iris Figueroa at <u>ifigueroa@populardemocracy.org</u>**

Endnotes

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The Center for Popular Democracy works to create equity, opportunity and a dynamic democracy in partnership with high-impact base-building organizations, organizing alliances, and progressive unions. CPD strengthens our collective capacity to envision and win an innovative pro-worker, pro-immigrant, racial and economic justice agenda.