

IN OUR OWN IMAGE

Beto O'Rourke's Plan for Rebuilding Our Immigration and Naturalization System To Make It Work Better for Our Families, Our Communities, and Our Economy

Above all else, immigration is about people – not just those who have recently arrived or those yet to come, but the kind of people we choose to be. Since the Founding, the compact we made as a nation was to welcome the oppressed, the persecuted, and the hopeful from all over the world because we recognize that immigrants enrich every aspect of our society with their determination and genius. Each successive generation of Americans has included immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, strengthening this nation that we share.

The current administration has chosen to defy this American aspiration, drafted into our *Declaration of Independence*, welded into the welcome of our Statue of Liberty, and secured by the sacrifices of countless generations. Instead, the current administration is pursuing cruel and cynical policies that aim to sow needless chaos and confusion at our borders. It is manufacturing crises in our communities. And it is seeking to turn us against each other. When this is done in our name, with our tax dollars, and to our neighbors, we not only undermine our laws, hold back our economy, and damage our security – we risk losing ourselves.

But at this moment of peril, we have a chance not only to reverse course but to advance a new vision of immigration that more fully reflects our values. As a fourth-generation El Pasoan, Beto uniquely recognizes the urgency of fixing our broken immigration and naturalization system. Rooted in his experience serving the largest binational community in the Western Hemisphere – one that draws its strength and prosperity from its rich heritage of welcoming immigrants – Beto is proposing a new path forward to ensure we honor our laws, live up to our values, and once again harness the power of a new generation of immigration toward our shared prosperity.

Beto's plan, which would represent the most sweeping rewrite of our nation's immigration and naturalization laws in a generation, is built on three key pillars:

1. On day one of his presidency, Beto will use executive authority to stop the inhumane treatment of children, reunite families that have been separated, reform our asylum system, rescind the travel bans, and remove the fear of deportation for Dreamers and beneficiaries of programs like TPS.
2. Beto will also immediately engage with Congress to enact legislation – focused on the key role families and communities play – that will allow America to fully harness the power of economic growth and opportunity that both immigration and naturalization will bring to our country's future.
3. Finally, Beto's plan would strengthen our partnership with our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. We need to refocus on supporting democracy and human rights and invest in reducing violence because the only path to regional security runs through a more democratic and prosperous Latin America.

I. ENDING THE CRUEL AND CYNICAL POLICIES THAT CREATE CHAOS AT OUR BORDERS AND IN OUR COMMUNITIES ON DAY ONE

The current administration's cruel and cynical policies are sowing needless chaos and confusion at our borders and in our communities. On day one of his presidency, Beto will take immediate executive action to end these practices and replace them with policies that conform to our laws and values, restore order and process to our asylum and immigration systems, and refocus our tax dollars on smart security. Those executive actions will:

- Reform the asylum system and reunite families. The current asylum system is ineffective, inefficient, illegal, and immoral. Those traveling vast distances to escape extreme violence and crushing poverty are being met by a militarized cruelty and manufactured chaos that separates families, detains children, and deliberately extends the backlog of those who require processing. We must change both the culture and processes for handling asylum claims.

An O'Rourke administration will ensure lawful and humane conditions at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities, including access to medical treatment, mental health care, social workers, and translators, and restore orderly and prompt processing of people seeking refuge under our nation's asylum laws. As president, Beto will:

- Rescind the current administration's executive orders that seek to maximize detention and deportation, including former Attorney General Sessions' radical re-interpretation of asylum law that seeks to deny protection to women and children fleeing domestic violence and escaping from deadly gangs.
- Mandate an end to family separations at the border and illegal policies like "metering" and "Remain in Mexico."
- Issue an executive order to require detention only for those with criminal backgrounds representing a danger to our communities and eliminate all funding for private, for-profit prison operators whose incentive is profit, not security.
- Ensure that people have the tools to navigate our immigration court system by scaling up community-based programs and family case management, which is nearly one-tenth the cost of detention and ensures that people attend their courts hearing and that they know what is expected of them.
- Reinstatement of the Central American Minors program – allowing children with parents in the U.S. to apply for refugee status from their home countries – and other regional refugee resettlement efforts, working with the international community to process cases in the region and commit to resettling in partner countries.
- Take immediate steps to upgrade and increase staffing in the asylum system, streamline how cases move through the process, and provide timely and fair asylum decisions, while laying the foundation for a more fundamental reform to the immigration court system that restores due process and ensures equal access to justice, including by:

- Increasing court staff, clerks, interpreters, and judges;
 - Making the courts independent under Article I, rather than administered by the U.S. Department of Justice;
 - Ending policies that prevent judges from managing their dockets in the most effective way;
 - Expanding the Legal Orientation Program (LOP) to ensure that everyone knows how to navigate our immigration system;
 - Deploying up to 2,000 lawyers to the border and funding a robust right to counsel; and
 - Developing approaches to resolve asylum cases outside of the court system, such as by allowing USCIS Asylum Officers to fully adjudicate cases when conducting Credible Fear Interviews to prevent referring more cases into the backlogged courts.
- Personally lead a public-private initiative to bring humanitarian resources to the border.
- Rescind the discriminatory travel bans, which defy our nation's Constitution and values.
- Immediately remove the fear of deportation for Dreamers and their parents and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) beneficiaries, and begin work towards a permanent legislative solution.
- Refocus on smart security. The current administration is distracting CBP and other law enforcement personnel from focusing on actual threats and undermining their efficacy by pulling resources away from them – all in pursuit of a wall that we do not need, does not work, and will not make us safer. As President, Beto will:
 - Immediately halt work on the border wall – and his first budget, and every budget, will include zero dollars for this unnecessary wall;
 - Immediately boost staffing to expand inspections, reduce wait times, and increase our capacity to detect illicit drugs – for instance by pursuing a targeted two-prong strategy that focuses on fentanyl shipments coming through our ports and our mail system – and other contraband, as well as modernizing our ports; and
 - Immediately prioritize cracking down on smugglers and traffickers who exploit children and families by working with our regional partners.

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The following are first-hand testimonials from immigrants in El Paso and across America

Daisy, Dreamer

El Paso, TX

"I came to this country when I was under two years old and have been here for 21 years. I have two younger brothers - one is a United States citizen and one is DACA, like me. I've been here longer than I can remember, but because of my status I couldn't qualify for federal loans to help pay for community college. So I worked two jobs - one full-time job and one part-time job at the same time as taking classes year-round to get my associate's degree, and now I'm enrolled in the University of Texas, El Paso, where I'm studying computer science and want to go into cybersecurity. After I graduate, I'm thinking about maybe trying to support the US military in cybersecurity or networking - but I can't work on a base if I don't have legal immigration status.

"All my friends and memories are here in America. Everything I've worked for and contributed to is here and I want to continue building my life and career in the only place I've known to be home."

David, Dreamer

El Paso, TX

"I arrived in the United States when I was 13 years old with my mother after we lost our home during Hurricane Wilma. Since I've come here, I've always pushed myself to be the best I can be. I've worked hard in school, pursued my passion in math and science, and now I'm studying computer science at UTEP while also working at a solar company. When I graduate, I want to use my degree to better this country and society.

Some of modern society's most important inventions are the result of immigrants - such as Google and Tesla. This innovation only happened because people came to this country and were given a chance. America should embrace the investments, benefits and diversity that immigrants bring, because we can help this country reach its greatest potential."

II. STRENGTHENING OUR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND ECONOMY BY REWRITING OUR IMMIGRATION LAWS IN OUR OWN IMAGE

As President, Betó will push to rewrite our nation's immigration and naturalization laws in our own image. These laws have not been meaningfully modernized in decades, despite the efforts of multiple administrations. But we have the chance to chart a new course that more fully vindicates the promise of this nation of immigrants. Betó will work with Congress to achieve that vision. He will reunite families and ensure they have a chance to contribute more to our economy and our communities – and pursue the American Dream. He will put workers and employers on a level playing field to, together, tap into the opportunity immigration presents for our economic growth and shared prosperity. And he will do that while boosting the security and functionality of our borders.

This is not just right but also essential to our shared prosperity. Immigrants from every corner of the world – those who came here on student visas and those seeking refuge from persecution – have been a key driver of our economic growth. They have been responsible for nearly one-third of all new small business, one-fifth of all Fortune 500 companies. And achieving immigration reform will be critical to unlocking our future success – creating at least 3 million jobs over the next decade, adding \$2 billion to state and local tax revenues each year, and cutting the deficit by at least \$1 trillion over the next 20 years.

Naturalization, too, promises economic gains. A recent study of 21 U.S. cities found that if all eligible immigrant residents were to naturalize, incomes would increase by \$5.7 billion,

homeownership would rise by over 45,000, and tax revenues would grow \$2 billion. The same study showed GDP would grow by \$37 to 52 billion per year if half of those eligible nationwide naturalized.

In his first hundred days, Beto will put the full weight of the presidency behind passing legislation that:

- Creates an earned pathway to citizenship for 11 million undocumented people that is more efficient than previous proposals and includes an immediate path for Dreamers and beneficiaries of programs like the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) programs.
- Strengthens our families, communities, and economy by prioritizing family unity – a hallmark of our best traditions – through provisions that:
 - Reunite immigrant families separated by lengthy visa backlogs;
 - Revise preference categories and caps to prioritize family unity; and
 - Remove bars to re-entry and status adjustment to support families.
- Establishes a new, first-of-its-kind community-based visa category. Beto's proposal will create a brand new category whereby communities and congregations can welcome refugees through community sponsorship of visas. This program will supplement the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which will be rebuilt and restored to align with America's tradition of welcoming vulnerable refugees from around the world.
- Increase the visa caps so that we match our economic opportunities and needs – for work, education, investment, and innovation – to the number of people we allow into this country. This also means legislation that will:
 - Ensure that industries that depend on immigrant labor have access to a program that allows workers to legally come here and legally return to their home country with appropriate labor and mobility protections;
 - Address the green-card backlog and provide opportunities for those awaiting resolution to work and contribute, while immediately recapturing the over 300,000 green cards that have gone unused due to bureaucratic delays to support our high-growth industries of the future;
 - Promote STEM education by granting foreign-born students more flexibility to stay in the U.S. and gain employment after graduating; and
 - Allow foreign-born entrepreneurs and U.S. patent holders the chance to stay in the United States to grow their business, create jobs and raise families that will go on to enrich our country.

- Make naturalization easier for the nearly 9 million immigrants who are currently eligible for citizenship. If we are to reestablish our reputation as a nation that welcomes immigrants, we must make it easier for those already here to become full-fledged citizens. This means pursuing legislation that:
 - Makes naturalization free for all who meet the legal requirements for citizenship;
 - Eliminates application backlogs;
 - Reforms the application process so that individuals are mailed a pre-filled application form as soon as they meet the legal requirements for citizenship;
 - Increases legal services funding for those who need it; and
 - Establishes equal treatment of all citizens – naturalized and native-born – rejecting the current administration’s effort to create new barriers to naturalization and stoke fears around de-naturalization.

- Bolster security and functionality of the border where trade and travel occur. Beto will draw on his lived experience at the border to push for legislation that actually supports our law enforcement and our border communities in advancing the nation’s security and protection from all threats. This includes three steps:
 - **Increasing Personnel:** Immediately stop the smuggling of drugs and prevent human trafficking across the border by hiring, training, and assigning additional CBP personnel at land border crossings;
 - **Strengthening Infrastructure:** Investing in smart, long-term border security by improving existing ports of entry and constructing new ones, investing in evidence-based, cost-effective technology, and supporting federal grant programs that provide resources to both state and local law enforcement and our border communities; and
 - **Addressing Failures:** Ensuring that we remain a nation of laws by addressing visa overstays through better tracking of and notification to visa holders and fully harmonizing our entry-exit systems with Mexico and Canada.

- Ensure transparency and accountability in law enforcement, including ICE and CBP. Beto will also continue to champion and build upon his previous proposals to:
 - Create an independent Border Oversight Commission, an Ombudsman, and Border Community Liaison office;
 - Create a uniform process for tracking and preventing migrant deaths along the border; and

- Increase accountability from ICE and CBP personnel through improved training and continued education courses.

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Jose Ochoa, business owner

Santa Teresa, NM

“I was born and raised in Mexico and studied engineering. In 2003, I moved to Juarez and worked for multiple global companies in their engineering and packaging operations, but after three years, I knew I wanted to start my own company. One of my colleagues and I teamed up and we opened our own businesses - one in Juarez and one in El Paso - embracing the binational relationship and trade partnership between the United States and Mexico. Today, that company employs nine people in El Paso, and I recently started my third business in America: a consumer electronics corporation established in New Mexico with an e-commerce presence and a physical store in Texas.

“In 2017, our El Paso business, Global Containers & Custom Packaging, was named Exporter of the Year by the El Paso Small Business Administration. Small businesses are the top generators of our economy - we want to generate value, impact our communities and keep employing more people. And if I can help other entrepreneurs and immigrants to be successful here in America - that’s what makes me happy.”

Jose David Burgos, MD, doctor and business owner

El Paso, TX

“I was born in Venezuela as the son of Colombian immigrants. I studied medicine in Venezuela, but because of the political climate there, I came to the United States in 2005, enrolled in school and started preparing for my medical boards while doing research at the University of South Florida. I then had the chance to do my residency at Texas Tech, where I also worked as a professor of internal medicine and after that I started working at the University Medical Center in El Paso. Now, I serve as Medical Director at UMC and have opened two medical clinics in the area, including an urgent care facility. My family also recently opened a restaurant in El Paso.

“Both my wife and I are immigrants and we both had the opportunity to become American citizens. It was a lengthy and painful process, but I am grateful that we have been able to make a positive impact in our community and bring positive change to the area. I am living proof the American Dream is alive, and now I am able to support and encourage other hardworking physicians who are looking for the same chance.”

III. RESTORING OUR STANDING AND ENSURING REGIONAL SECURITY BY BEING A PARTNER FOR PROSPERITY AND SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Consistent with this broad vision, Betó’s plan strengthens our partnership with our neighbors throughout the Western Hemisphere and will be implemented alongside partners in the Northern Triangle and across the region. His foreign policy will increase our engagement within the hemisphere, elevate the importance of Latin America, refocus on supporting democracy and human rights, end our failed war on drugs, and invest in reducing violence and combating climate change, because the only path to regional security runs through a more democratic and prosperous Latin America.

- Join with the people of the Northern Triangle to fight violence and poverty and bolster our shared security and prosperity. Betó will bring a whole of government approach to our investment in the Northern Triangle, recognizing that what we have done in the past is not enough. We must convene our regional partners to do more, faster, if we are serious about reversing the instability that drives forced migration. This means:

- Convening a new and improved Partnership for Prosperity and Security by calling upon our allies and friends across the Americas to form a regional alliance dedicated to creating stability and economic prosperity across the continent, beginning in the most precarious countries;
- Investing \$5 billion in the region primarily through non-governmental organizations, community groups (such as Municipal Crime Prevention Committees) and congregations, and public-private partnerships, while galvanizing new financial support from Canada, Mexico, and other international partners, and transforming the development approach that these resources advance, by
 - Supporting community-based violence prevention strategies and encouraging an end to militarized public security and the global war on drugs – which has become a war on people and fails to recognize the real threat of addiction;
 - Promoting democratic infrastructure, labor rights, civil rights, and human rights;
 - Supporting the growth of small-scale farming and access to markets;
 - Providing agricultural technical support to increase adaptation to climate change and improve the use of natural resources;
 - Elevating job, training, and educational opportunities for youth;
 - Strengthening strategies to address the specific needs of women and girls;
 - Improving access to health care, clean air, and clean water; and
 - Supporting adoption of crop insurance and catastrophic insurance, especially as a powerful tool in the face of a changing climate.
- Address systematic impunity, corruption, and weak institutions. Beto will also be firm with the economic and governing elites of the Northern Triangle, who must do their part. For too long these elites have benefited from the status quo. Real change will require their full engagement and, as President, Beto will demand it. That means if they want access to the United States – to do business, to vacation, to send their kids to college – they must commit to ending corruption and self-dealing. They must pay their taxes and invest in their broader communities. They must hold their elected officials accountable.
- Strengthen Mexico and Latin America’s capacity to contribute to regional security, by supporting the United Nations’ Refugee Agency’s (UNHCR) work and the development of strong asylum and refugee protection systems in Mexico and across the region, to manage migration flows from the Northern Triangle, specifically by:

- Working with UNHCR to expand the capacity of Mexico’s refugee system and to collaborate with Mexico on asylum seekers who are both traveling to and through Mexico; and
- Launching a regional resettlement initiative, including building a safe and comprehensive repatriation and reintegration program.

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Evelyn, survivor of human trafficking

Silver Spring, MD

“I came to this country when I was 9 years old. I had no idea that I didn’t come here legally, and I was forced into modern-day slavery for the next seven years. With the help a local church and law enforcement, I was able to escape the system I was forced into, get a visa, and I eventually became a naturalized citizen. I got my GED, went to community college, saved money, and in 2016 received my Bachelor’s Degree. Becoming a naturalized citizen enabled me to do more work helping survivors of human trafficking find jobs and start new lives for themselves. It also enabled me to travel across the United States and abroad to educate people about human trafficking and how many people who come to this country and don’t have legal status are victims of violence or horrible situations often without anywhere to turn.”

Carlos G. Maldonado, J.D., immigration lawyer

El Paso, TX

“I came to the United States from Quito, Ecuador when I was 16 without knowing a word of English. I had always wanted to become either a doctor or a lawyer, but after navigating the difficult and complicated immigration system myself, I knew I wanted to go into law to help others have the chance to start and build their lives in America too.

“It took me almost 18 years to finally be able to become a United States citizen. For the first 13 years I was here - even though I had finished law school and was here legally - I never once left the country because I feared I wouldn’t be able to return or that it would slow down my immigration process. I finally became a U.S. citizen in 2018 - and that day was the best day of my life. It was honestly a dream come true. I was relieved, happy and thankful all at the same time. I am so honored today to be able to say that I am an American, and I’m honored that through my work every day I am able to help others navigate the immigration process and have a chance at the American Dream too.”