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Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy

**Conducted by
Sophia Moreau and Liam Murphy**

Speaker: Michael Sandel, Harvard University

Paper: Renewal: How to Heal a Divided County

Introduction and Chapter 4: “Patriotism and Immigration”



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From Michael J. Sandel, *Renewal: How to Heal a Divided Country* (forthcoming, 2027)

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INTRODUCTION

From Resistance to Renewal

In January 2024, on a family vacation in Florida, I got into an elevator in the place where we were staying. A woman in her sixties asked where I was from. “Boston,” I said.

“I’m from Iowa,” she replied, then pointedly added, “You know, we can *read* in Iowa.” As she exited the elevator, she said, “We don’t much care for people from the coasts.”

I was puzzled by her animus. I hadn’t questioned her intellect or her ability to read. I wasn’t even wearing a Harvard sweatshirt. The mention of “Boston” was trigger enough.

A few weeks later, Donald Trump won the Iowa Republican presidential caucuses; later that year, he carried the state and was re-elected president.

My elevator encounter was hardly the worst instance of our polarized time. It pales in comparison to the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol, or the assassination of MAGA influencer Charlie Kirk, or the tense scenes in the streets of Minneapolis,

where ICE agents hunting undocumented immigrants shot and killed two American citizens. But it was a sign of the anger and resentment abroad in the land.

Our civic life is not going very well. Our public discourse is a foul brew of insult, outrage, and tired talking points. Politicians shout past each other, without really listening.

Fierce partisanship is nothing new. But today, political rancor seeps into social relations and everyday life. Parents now worry less about their children marrying outside the faith than marrying across party lines.

Democracy's peril

Polarization is only part of the problem. Democracy is in danger, for two reasons. One is the authoritarian ambition of Trump's presidency. The other is the failure of Trump's opponents to offer a compelling response to the grievances that propelled him to the presidency and sustain his support.

Of the two dangers, the authoritarian turn is the most obvious: sending masked ICE agents into American cities, where they enter homes without judicial warrants, attack protesters, and round up law-abiding residents and citizens; turning the Justice Department into a bureau of retribution against political opponents; using federal regulatory power to coerce media companies to silence critics, including late-night talk show hosts; extorting law firms, universities, and cultural institutions to bend to the government's ideological agenda; wielding tariffs and trade deals to exact tribute and

private enrichment from foreign powers and potentates; pardoning the perpetrators of the violent January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Many Americans who voted for Trump were not voting for these things. Some may celebrate these measures as a gratifying victory lap in the culture wars. But most thought they were voting against the high price of groceries, lax border policies, and the hardships and indignities the age of globalization inflicted on them.

This brings us to the second source of democracy's peril: the failure of Trump's opponents to offer a compelling response to the grievances that fuel his support. For decades, mainstream Democrats and Republicans embraced a version of market-driven globalization that brought widening inequalities, stagnant real wages for the average worker, hollowed-out industrial communities, a growing divide between winners and losers, and the sense among many working people that credentialed elites looked down on them.

Resistance and renewal

These two sources of peril call for different responses. The authoritarian threat calls for resistance—protesting the use of ICE to sow chaos and fear in American cities, appealing to Congress and the courts to uphold the separation of powers and the rule of law, calling out corruption, holding firm against government attempts to coerce law firms, universities, the news media, and other institutions of civil society.

But resistance is not enough. Dispelling the danger democracy confronts also requires a project of civic renewal. Democrats in particular, but also Republicans troubled by Trump, need to rethink their party's mission and purpose. Like Barack Obama in 2008, Trump was elected president in 2016 and again in 2024 because people wanted change. Many Americans had concluded that the system was broken, that unaccountable elites and concentrated economic power defied democratic control, that their voices did not matter. Mainstream Democrats had come to be seen as custodians of the status quo. By 2024, when they argued that re-electing Trump would put democracy at risk, the argument rang hollow—not because Americans didn't care about democracy but because they weren't so sure we had one anymore.

A politics of resistance without renewal not only fails to address the grievances Trump exploits; it spares elites of both parties the uncomfortable task of acknowledging their responsibility for the policies that gave rise to these grievances.

This book is about what civic renewal might look like. It seeks to articulate a politics that could deliver us from our dangerous political moment. Although it offers some concrete proposals, it is not primarily a set of policy prescriptions. It is an attempt to recast the terms of political debate, to point us toward a new politics of the common good. Such a politics would need to address three big questions that citizens care about, but that seldom find their way into public discourse:

1. How can we reason together, with less vitriol and more civility, across our differences?

2. How can ordinary citizens, especially those who are not rich and powerful, have a meaningful say in how we are governed?
3. How can we reweave the moral fabric of community and strengthen the bonds that hold us together, from family to neighborhood to nation?

A politics of the common good

A politics of the common good does not seek an end to political disagreement. Instead, it invites citizens across the political spectrum to a morally more robust public discourse than the one to which we have become accustomed.

We often assume that the best way to contend with the moral disagreements that abound in pluralist societies is to avoid them, to ask citizens to leave their moral and spiritual convictions behind when they enter the public square. But this is a mistake. It makes for a brittle toleration of avoidance, in which we live as strangers to one another, rather than a healthy, rambunctious pluralism.

Paradoxically, the way to heal a divided country is not to avoid our moral disagreements but to engage with them, to contend openly with them. A pluralism of engagement may not lead to agreement on any given issue. But it can cultivate habits of listening and learning, persuading and being persuaded, that lead to civic friendship and mutual respect.

Beyond elevating the terms of public discourse, what would a new politics of the common good consist in? How would it address the sense of disempowerment that

frustrates democratic citizens, the belief that their voices are not heard? And how would it respond to the crisis of belonging, the anxiety that the moral fabric of community is unraveling?

This book sets out various possible answers these questions. Broadly speaking, the politics of the common good I propose combines two seemingly disparate themes: a populist economic agenda that challenges unaccountable concentrations of power and addresses inequalities of wealth, voice, and dignity, and a project of spiritual renewal that speaks convincingly of patriotism, community, and belonging.

At first glance, these themes may seem strange ideological bedfellows. Worries about inequality and economic power typically find expression on the left, while talk of patriotism is more commonly heard on the right. But any project of civic renewal needs both.

Dismantling oligarchy and achieving a fuller equality of condition depends on seeing ourselves as engaged in a common project, indebted to one another as fellow citizens. But it is hard to see ourselves as sharing a common fate if market relations dominate social life and if inequalities are so pervasive that rich and poor live separate lives and rarely encounter one another in the course of the day.

A politics of the common good that would both challenge oligarchy and deepen community offers a corrective to the standard terms of political argument: Progressives seeking greater equality make a mistake to cede patriotism to the right and to ignore the moral significance of national borders; conservatives seeking to strengthen the bonds of

family, neighborhood, and community make a mistake to neglect inequality and the morally corrosive effects of unfettered markets.

What went wrong

Any project of renewal must begin by acknowledging what went wrong. How did Americans become so disillusioned with the governing project pursued by the mainstream parties that they turned, twice, to Trump?

For decades, Democrats and Republicans embraced a version of globalization animated by the market faith—the idea that market mechanisms are the primary instruments for defining and achieving the public good. Inspired by this faith, they pursued free trade agreements, the unfettered flow of capital across national borders, the offshoring of jobs to low-wage countries, the deregulation of finance, reduced bargaining power for workers, and technological innovation aimed at automating work rather than enhancing workers' productivity and pay.

Although market-driven globalization brought economic growth, it flowed mostly to the top 20 per cent. For five decades, the real income of the median worker was virtually flat. Inequalities of income and wealth reached levels not seen since the 1920s. But that's not all. Those who landed on top during the age of globalization came to believe that their success was their own doing, that they therefore deserved the bounty the market bestowed upon them—and, by implication, that those who struggled had no one to blame but themselves.

This harsh way of thinking about success was inadvertently encouraged by the way mainstream politicians responded to the widening inequalities. In the face of job loss and wage stagnation, they offered workers some bracing advice: “If you want to compete and win in the global economy, go to college.” “What you earn will depend on what you learn.” “You can make it if you try.” Rather than contend directly with inequalities of income and wealth, the politicians offered a way out: individual upward mobility through higher education.

This rhetoric of rising, though inspiring on its face, had two defects: First, it was not easy to rise. By the 1990s and 2000’s, rates of upward mobility were less in the U.S. than in many other advanced economies. Second, the rhetoric of rising fed the idea that the winners and losers of globalization deserved their respective fates. The politicians who made it their mantra missed the implicit insult it conveyed: If you are struggling in the new economy, and if you didn’t go to college, your failure is your fault.

The rhetoric of rising also let the politicians and policymakers off the hook. “The problem is not the winner-take-all economy we brought into being,” they said, in effect. “It is your failure to improve yourself, as we encouraged you to do.” For those left behind in hollowed out industrial communities, the slogan “you can make it if you try” was less a promise than a taunt.

It is no wonder many working people turned against the mainstream parties and came to resent the credentialed elites who supported them.

The anger and resentment that gathered force in the aftermath of globalization, the financial crisis of 2008, and the taxpayer bailout of Wall Street was not only about economics; it was also about dignity and voice. Inequalities of income and wealth produced the gap between rich and poor. But inequalities of respect, influence, and social esteem produced the divide between winners and losers. And it was this divide, which closely tracked the divide between those with and those without a four-year college degree, that gave rise to the politics of humiliation that Donald Trump was able to exploit.

Moral and civic questions

This book draws lessons from this diagnosis for a better kind of politics. It is addressed to Democrats seeking to invigorate their party's mission and purpose, to Republicans uneasy with Trump's capture of their party, and to independents, now the plurality of Americans, who believe that both parties have lost their way.

Despite our polarized condition, most Americans yearn for something better. They want to move beyond the stale terms of political argument; contend with corrosive inequalities of wealth and social esteem; create class-mixing public places that bring people together from different walks of life; rein in the unaccountable power of big tech; give citizens a greater voice in shaping the forces that govern their lives; use technology and AI to enhance work rather than replace it; invigorate the dignity of work so that everyone who contributes to the common good wins honor and recognition, whether or

not they have a college degree; embrace a patriotism that celebrates our shared citizenship without vilifying immigrants; and help a generation of young people glued to their screens to lift their gaze from virtual to actual community and human connection.

This book seeks to answer these aspirations by pointing the way to a better kind of politics, one that engages with the most consequential moral and civic questions we face today.

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Chapter 4

Patriotism and Immigration

Many liberals and progressives view patriotism with suspicion. The reason is understandable: They associate it with the hyper-nationalist “America First” rhetoric and policies of Trump and similar anti-immigrant politicians in Europe and the UK. Parties of the populist right have captured the flag.

Is the left less patriotic than the right?

Patriotism has become a gaping fault line in our politics. It hasn't always been this way. In 2001, Gallup began asking “How proud are you to be an American?” Back then, the overwhelming majority of Democrats (87%) and Republicans (90%) declared themselves “extremely proud” or “very proud.” But since 2016, national pride has become a partisan affair. By 2026, 93 percent of Republicans said they were very proud to be American, while only 27 percent of Democrats did.¹

This may suggest that pride in one's country has come simply to reflect approval or disapproval of the president or governing party of the day. But it's more than that. A recent survey of national pride in several Western democracies shows that voters across the political

¹ Megan Brennan, American Pride Falls to 25-Year Record Low, Gallup News, June 29, 2026, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/711938/american-pride-falls-year-record-low.aspx>.

spectrum associate patriotic pride with right-wing, populist parties that appeal to national identity and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The international poll, conducted by Politico, asked a revealing question: If you heard someone say they were “proud to be British, or French, or German, or Spanish, or American, what party would you expect them to support?” In each country, the plurality of respondents associated patriotic pride with supporters of right-wing, anti-immigrant populist parties—Nigel Farage’s Reform party in the U.K., Marine Le Pen’s National Rally (Rassemblement National) in France, Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, Vox in Spain, and Trump’s Republican Party in the U.S.²

Even those who do not support these parties associate them with patriotic pride. Ask yourself a similar question: If you see an American flag flying every day at a neighbor’s home, what do you assume about their political allegiance? If you guess Republican, you are probably right. Republicans are more than three times as likely as Democrats (38-12 percent) to display the flag throughout the year. What about on the Fourth of July? Republicans again, by more than two to one (71-34 percent). Most Democrats (66 percent) never fly the flag.³

Here is another measure of the patriotism divide: Would the U.S. be better off if Americans were more patriotic? An overwhelming majority of Republicans (81%) think so, while only 36% of Democrats do.⁴

² Erin Doherty, The rise of the right has reshaped how we think about patriotism, POLITICO, July 5, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/07/05/poll-patriotism-political-right-trump-europe-00986654>.

³ AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. “AP-NORC America 250 Poll” (June 2026), <https://apnorc.org/projects/ap-norc-america-250-poll/>; for data from this survey on displaying the U.S. flag, see Corey Williams, Linley Sanders and Simran Parwani, Why most Black Americans say they never fly the American flag, according to a new AP-NORC poll, AP News, June 30, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/poll-american-flag-patriotism-black-b66ff2a116643523eab6c670cc94a95d>.

⁴ YouGov Survey: Patriotism, June 4 - 7, 2026, Question 9, p. 14, https://ygo-assets-websites-editorial-emea.yougov.net/documents/Patriotism_poll_results_XyvqTk5.pdf

These results can be interpreted in at least two ways: Either Democrats actually are less patriotic than Republicans, or they conceive patriotism differently. Democrats (and those who identify with center-left parties generally) resist the first interpretation. They insist that they love their country no less than MAGA Republicans do, but favor a more inclusive, less weaponized patriotism. Recently, Democrats in the U.S., and center-left parties in Europe, have sought to bolster their patriotic credentials by festooning their rallies and party gatherings with flag-draped décor.

Public opinion surveys offer some support for the second interpretation, about differing conceptions of patriotism. While most Democrats and Republicans agree on the importance of certain civic acts--treating fellow citizens with respect, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, voting in elections, and paying taxes—more Republicans than Democrats place “great importance” on speaking English (85-55%), embracing American culture (78-46%), and flying the American flag (62-24%). Democrats are more likely to place importance on serving on a jury, volunteering for community service, or participating in a political protest.⁵

Underlying these differences is a disagreement about what patriotism means. Most Democrats believe patriotism is about “acknowledging problems in your country and seeking solutions” (79%), rather than giving it unconditional support (11%), while a plurality of Republicans (48%) believe patriotism means “supporting your country unconditionally.”⁶

Although it is understandable why liberals and progressives have ceded the rhetoric of patriotism to the populist right, doing so is a mistake, for two reasons. First, patriotism is too

⁵ The American Public and Patriotism, SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus Poll, July 11, 2024, <https://ssrs.com/insights/the-american-public-and-patriotism/>

⁶ Jamie Ballard, Half of Republicans and 11% of Democrats define patriotism as supporting their country unconditionally, YouGov, June 25, 2026, <https://yougov.com/en-us/articles/55054-half-of-republicans-and-11-of-democrats-define-patriotism-as-supporting-their-country-unconditionally>.

potent a political sentiment for a political party or movement to neglect. People want to take pride in their country, to see themselves as participants in a common life of shared traditions. If mainstream politics does not answer this aspiration, it opens the way to those who would fill this void with nativist hyper-nationalism.

Second, liberals and progressives have long recognized the need to cultivate solidarity as the moral basis of the decent safety net or welfare state they favor. If citizens lack a sense of shared identity and mutual obligation, it is hard to generate support for policies that provide fair access to education, health care, housing, retirement security, and other social services. In a world where the public provision of these goods is ensured mainly by national governments, patriotism reminds us of what we owe one another as citizens.

The political philosopher Jean-Jacque Rousseau sees patriotism as a condition for public provision, which in turn deepens civic virtue and shared identity. “Do we want people to be virtuous?” he asks. “Let us begin by making them love their country. But how can they love it, if their country means nothing more to them that it does to foreigners, allotting to them only what it cannot refuse to anyone.”⁷

Reclaiming patriotism

Those dismayed by the rise of right-wing, anti-immigrant populist parties should not allow those parties a monopoly on patriotism; they should reclaim it and give it new meaning.

But what might an inspiring, non-xenophobic patriotism look like? One alternative to strident hyper-nationalism is a patriotism that expresses allegiance by protesting or redressing injustices

⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Political Economy,” (1755), translated by Donald A. Cress (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing), p. 173.

one's country has committed. The patriotism of dissent has a noble tradition. Unlike uncritical, "my country right or wrong" patriotism, self-critical patriotism asserts that loving our country means taking responsibility to right the wrongs, past or present, committed in our name.

For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., frequently pointed out that the civil rights movement he led was not only for the sake of winning "certain rights for black people," but to "save the soul of America" by helping the country cast off the stain of racial segregation and injustice.⁸ In a similar spirit, many Americans who protested the Vietnam War felt a special responsibility, as Americans, to oppose an unjust war carried out in their name. For them, protest was an act of patriotic allegiance not betrayal. King made this point when he too spoke out against the war. "I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America... I speak out against this war because I am disappointed with America. There can be no great disappointment where there is no great love."⁹

This tradition of patriotic protest found recent expression when thousands of residents of Minneapolis, in the winter of 2026, came to the aid of their neighbors (some immigrants, some citizens) victimized by ICE agents. A quote attributed to Clarence Darrow, the renowned civil liberties attorney, captures this form of patriotism well: "True patriotism hates injustice in its own land more than anywhere else."

In polarized times, however, the patriotism of dissent, admirable and necessary though it is, may not call forth the common ground civic renewal requires. In fact, the political divide between college-educated liberals and blue-collar workers found early, emblematic expression in the angry backlash of construction workers against the flag-burning anti-war protesters of the

⁸ Rev. Martin Luther King, *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence*, Riverside Church, New York City, April 4, 1967, <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/mlk-viet.htm>.

⁹ Address by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam*, New York City, April 15, 1967, <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/mlkviet2.htm>.

late 1960s and early 1970s, protests that fueled the rise of George Wallace and the election (and re-election) of Richard Nixon.

Notwithstanding its multiple and contested meanings, patriotism is an ethic of belonging. A patriotism of civic renewal should therefore begin by engaging directly with the issue of belonging at the center of the populist backlash: the question of immigration. On what terms, and in what numbers, should a country admit outsiders who wish to become citizens?

The question of immigration

The rise of right-wing populist parties in the U.S., Britain, and Europe has coincided with a time of nearly unprecedented immigration. During the decades following the Second World War, immigration levels were low. In 1970, fewer than five percent of U.S. residents were foreign-born, and most major European countries had less. But recent decades saw dramatic increases. In 2025, as Trump assumed office for the second time, nearly 16 percent of U.S. residents were foreign-born, the highest percentage in American history. (The previous high was 14.8 percent, in 1890.)¹⁰

The major countries of Western Europe also had record numbers of immigrant residents: 20 percent in Germany, 21 percent in Sweden, 22 percent in Austria, 19 percent in Spain, 17 percent in the Netherlands, 17 percent in the U.K., 14 percent in France, 12 percent in Italy.¹¹

¹⁰ U.S. immigrant population peaked at nearly 16% in January 2025, Pew Research Center, August 19, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/21/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/sr_25-08-21_immigrants-in-the-us_1/.

¹¹ EU population diversity by citizenship and country of birth, eurostat, 2 February 2026, Table 1, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_population_diversity_by_citizenship_and_country_of_birth.

Most of these countries experienced a surge of support for right-wing populist, anti-immigrants parties.¹²

Beyond the overall numbers, the rapid pace of immigration likely heightened public concern. During the first years of the Biden administration, net migration averaged 2.4 million per year, a faster influx than ever before, including the mythic time when waves of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe arrived to the sight of the Statue of Liberty and streamed into the country through Ellis Island.¹³

The increased pace of migration was due in part to the Biden's easing the harsh immigration policies of the first Trump administration. But when the public reacted with alarm to the influx of immigrants at the southern border, Biden tightened enforcement, sharply reducing the number of entrants.

In the United States, the case for generous immigration policies begins on the highest moral ground: compassion for the downtrodden, the promise of freedom, the chance to rise from humble origins to realize the American dream. Its iconic expression is the stirring poem of Emma Lazarus, engraved in bronze in the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

¹² Tom Fairless, "Immigration Backlashes Spread Around the World," *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/immigration-backlashes-spread-around-the-world-142124bc>.

¹³ David Leonhardt, "Recent Immigration Surge Has Been Largest in U.S. History," *New York Times*, December 12, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/11/briefing/us-immigration-surge.html>.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"¹⁴

The great immigration wave at the turn of the 20th century brought 18 million new arrivals between 1890 and 1919, increasing the foreign-born share of the U.S. population to 14.8 percent. The immigration surge, and especially the prevalence among the newcomers of Italians, Poles, Jews, and others from Southern and Eastern Europe, gave rise to anti-immigrant backlash, and the enactment, in 1924, of the nation's first comprehensive immigration law.¹⁵

The Immigration Restriction Act sharply reduced the number who could enter and set quotas by national origin to give priority to those from Northern and Western Europe. The rationale for the quotas was explicitly eugenic. Supported by the Ku Klux Klan, who opposed the arrival of Catholics and Jews, the law drew on "expert" testimony from eugenicists who urged Congress to restrict immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe so as not to "adulterate our national germ plasm with socially unfit traits."¹⁶ Republican Congressman Albert Johnson, a leading architect of the law, described it as a "bulwark" against "alien blood."¹⁷

The eugenic rationale of the 1924 law echoed a century later, when Trump vilified immigrants from Haiti and what he called "s---hole" countries in Africa.¹⁸ "They're poisoning

¹⁴ Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," November 2, 1883, <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/colossus.htm>.

¹⁵ Muzaffar Chrishti and Julie Gelatt, A Century Later, Restrictive 1924 U.S. Immigration Law Has Reverberations in Immigration Debate, Migration Policy Institute, May 15, 2024, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/journal/policy-beat/century-later-restrictive-1924-us-immigration-law-has-reverberations#>;

¹⁶ Ibid. See also Paul Lombardo, Eugenics Laws Restricting Immigration, Archive on the American Eugenics Movement, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, <https://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay9text.html#>.

¹⁷ Devin E. Naar, "The Regional Origins of American's First Comprehensive Federal Immigration Law," *TIME*, January 19, 2026, <https://time.com/6990567/1924-act-washington-state/>.

¹⁸ Alan Fram and Jonathan Lemire, "Trump: Why allow immigrants from 'shithole countries'?", Associated Press, January 12, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-north-america-donald-trump-ap-top-news-international-news-fdda2ff0b877416c8ae1c1a77a3cc425>; Julie Hirschfeld Davis, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, and Thomas Kaplan,

the blood of our country,” he said. “They’re coming into our country from Africa, from Asia, all over the world.”¹⁹ Like the eugenicists of the 1920s, he preferred immigrants from Northern and Western Europe. “Why can’t we allow people to come in from nice countries,” he asked, “you know like Denmark, Switzerland? Do we have any people coming in from Denmark? How about Switzerland? How about Norway?”²⁰

The 1924 restrictions drove the foreign-born share of the population down to 4.7 percent by 1970, a record low. The law slashed quotas for immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and virtually barred admission from Asia by carrying over provisions of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. In the 1930s and 40s, the restrictive quotas resulted in the U.S. turning away Jews fleeing the Holocaust.²¹

The dark history of U.S. immigration restrictions and their odious rationale are a stark counterpoint to the idealism of the “golden door.” It was not until 1965 that the law was changed. The 1964 Civil Rights Act had prohibited discrimination in employment and public accommodations on the basis of “race, color, religion, or national origin.” In a similar spirit, Congress, the following year, eliminated the national origin quotas of the immigration system, basing admission instead on considerations of family reunification and specialized job skills the country needed. Senator Edward Kennedy, the younger brother of slain President John F. Kennedy, led passage of the bill, and President Lyndon Johnson signed it into law at the Statue of

“Trump Alarms Lawmakers With Disparaging Words for Haiti and Africa,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/us/politics/trump-shithole-countries.html?>

¹⁹ Ginger Gibson, NBC News, Dec. 17, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/trump-says-immigrants-are-poisoning-blood-country-biden-campaign-rcna130141>.

²⁰ Maggie Haberman and Michael Gold, “Trump, at Fund-Raiser, Says He Wants Immigrants From ‘Nice’ Countries,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/07/us/politics/trump-immigrants-nice-countries.html>.

²¹ Chrishti and Gelatt, op. cit.

Liberty. “From this day forth,” he declared, “those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here.”²²

The 1965 Immigration Act was a triumph over the bigotry embedded in the country quotas, but it had two unintended effects that transformed the politics of immigration: It led to an explosion in the numbers of immigrants, and it brought an unexpectedly high number of low-skilled immigrants who competed for jobs with working class Americans. Although the law set a cap on the total number of immigrants granted admission each year, the cap did not apply to relatives of existing citizens who wished to come. The number who chose to join their families in America far exceeded the predictions of those who enacted the law. Moreover, many of those who arrived under the family reunification provision were low-skilled workers, not the highly skilled scientists and specialists the law sought to attract.²³

The aftermath of the new law brought the biggest wave of immigration to the United States in its history. From 1965 to 2025, more than 76 million immigrants arrived—18 million from Mexico (24 percent of the total), and millions from China, India, the Philippines, Cuba, the former USSR, Korea, El Salvador, Vietnam, and the Dominican Republic.²⁴ The foreign-born share of the population more than tripled, from a low of 4.7 percent in 1970 to an all-time high of 15.8 percent in 2025.²⁵

²² The history of the 1965 bill is well recounted in David Leonhardt, *Ours Was the Shining Future: The Story of the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 2023), pp. 290-302. Lyndon Johnson quoted at p. 302.

²³ Ibid., pp. 302-306.

²⁴ 3 great waves of immigration to the United States, Pew Research Center, August 19, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/21/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/sr_25-08-21_immigrants-in-the-us_3/.

²⁵ U.S. immigrant population peaked at nearly 16% in January 2025, Pew Research Center, August 19, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/21/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/sr_25-08-21_immigrants-in-the-us_1/.

Like previous generations of immigrants, the new arrivals invigorated and enriched American society, economically and culturally. Contrary to familiar assertions by anti-immigrant politicians, the rate of crime among immigrants is lower, not higher, than that of native-born Americans.²⁶ The children of immigrants achieve upward mobility at a higher rate than the children of native-born citizens, a pattern that has persisted for two centuries.²⁷ Beyond stories of individual success, immigrants from around the world have built businesses, advanced science and technology, and broadened Americans' cultural, artistic, educational, and culinary horizons.

And yet, despite these achievements, immigration has become a flashpoint of political controversy. In the United States, as in other democracies, the populist backlash against immigration has polarized politics, empowered demagogues, and put democracy in peril. Any attempt to articulate a non-xenophobic vision of patriotism must acknowledge and take seriously three sources of the hostility to immigration that roils our politics.

Working class wages

Many working people believe, not implausibly, that a large influx of low-skilled immigrants puts pressure on wages by expanding the labor supply, enabling employers to resist workers' demands for higher pay and better working conditions. Historically, labor unions have opposed high rates of immigration and business groups have favored them. In 1924, the National Association of

²⁶ Robert Adelman, *et al.* (2017) 'Urban crime rates and the changing face of immigration: Evidence across four decades', *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, vol. 15(1), 2017, pp. 52–77. doi: 10.1080/15377938.2016.1261057; Ran Abramitzky, Leah Platt Boustan, Elisa Jácome, Santiago Pérez, and Juan David Torres, "Law-Abiding Immigrants: The Incarceration Gap Between Immigrants and the US-born, 1870–2020," National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper 31440 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w31440>.

²⁷ Ran Abramitzky, Leah Boustan, Elisa Jacome and Santiago Perez, "Intergenerational Mobility of Immigrants in the United States over Two Centuries." *American Economic Review*, Feb. 2021, vol. 111 (2): pp. 580–608, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257%2Faer.20191586>.

Manufacturers opposed the Immigration Restriction Act, fearing it would lead to higher wages for workers. Although the business lobby did not prevail, it won a concession: the restrictions would not apply to Latin America, enabling the agriculture industry to continue to rely on Mexican workers to pick crops at low pay. In 1965, the AFL-CIO endorsed the immigration act only after receiving assurances from the bill's proponents that it would not substantially increase immigration.²⁸

Economists who study the effect of immigration on the wages of domestic workers have come to conflicting conclusions. But historical experience lends weight to the concern that high levels of immigration suppress wages. Periods of high immigration, such as the Gilded Age in the 1890s and the age of globalization in the late 20th and early 21st century, have been periods of high inequality. From the end of the Second World War to the 1970s, immigration was low and inequality eased. This is not the whole story; other factors contributed to rising inequality during the age of globalization. But it is not hard to fathom how an influx of low-skilled workers can make life harder for Americans who work in hotels and restaurants, construction, landscaping, and childcare, and make life easier for the well-paid professionals who pay less for these services, without facing similar pressure on their own earnings.²⁹

Writing in 2024, Nobel Prize economist Angus Deaton, himself an immigrant to the U.S., described how his thinking on the impact of immigration on working class wages had changed. “I used to subscribe to the near consensus among economists that immigration to the U.S. was a good thing, with...little or no cost to domestic low-skilled workers. I no longer think so... Longer-term analysis over the past century and a half tells a different story. Inequality was high when American was open, was much lower when the borders were closed, and rose against post

²⁸ Leonhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-299.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-318.

[the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965], as the fraction of foreign-born people rose back to its levels in the Gilded Age.”³⁰

Elites defying public opinion

Whatever the merits of a permissive immigration policy, it is at odds with what most voters want. In 1965, when the Immigration and Nationality Act was passed, only seven percent of Americans favored an increase in immigration.³¹ This is why the proponents of the law stressed time and again that it would not substantially increase the number of entrants. In a nuanced, sympathetic critique of U.S. immigration policy, *New York Times* journalist David Leonhardt celebrated the 1965 law as “a monumental civil rights achievement,” and yet saw it as a betrayal of democracy.

“It ended decades of discrimination against Asians, Africans, eastern Europeans, southern Europeans, and disabled people. In other respects, though the law represents a failure of democracy. It was sold to the American public with repeated promises that it would not do what, in fact, it did. In particular, it was sold with the false claim that there would be no increase in the number of immigrants who would be seeking blue-collar and low-wage jobs.”³²

Over the next three decades, support for increased immigration remained at a meager seven percent, while nearly two-thirds of the public wanted it decreased. Throughout the six decades of Gallup polling following the 1965 act, more Americans wanted to decrease immigration than to

³⁰ Angus Deaton, “Rethinking My Economics,” F&D Magazine, International Monetary Fund, March 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/fandd/issues/2024/03/symposium-rethinking-economics-angus-deaton>.

³¹ Gallup Historical Trends, Immigration, July 9, 2026, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>.

³² Leonhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

increase it, with the interesting exception of two moments: 2020-21, as Trump ended his first term and Biden took office, and June 2026, in the aftermath of violent attempts by ICE to deport unauthorized immigrants.³³

But here is a paradox: Despite long-standing public opposition to increased immigration, and even in the face of the fierce backlash the issue has provoked, Americans overwhelmingly believe (73-21 percent) that immigration is a good thing for the country. Over the past 25 years, Gallup has asked whether, on the whole, immigration is a good thing or a bad thing for the country. Throughout this time, even amidst charged debates about the border wall, deportations, and lurid, baseless claims by Trump that immigrants were eating their neighbors' cats and dogs, substantial majorities of the public (including a plurality of Republicans) have said immigration is a good thing for the country.³⁴

Despite the seemingly insuperable political impasse on immigration, this paradox contains a glimmer of hope: Americans remain open to immigration, even if they don't want too much of a good thing. To build on this hope, those who would repair our broken immigration system need to do better than the last generation of reformers at listening sympathetically to those who worry about the effects of immigration on the wages of America's most vulnerable working people, on the dignity of their work, and on the meaning of citizenship.

Boundaries and belonging

The backlash against immigration is not only about the number of immigrants; it is compounded by anger at illegal immigration. Trump understood this. From his first campaign for the

³³ Gallup Historical Trends, Immigration, op. cit.

³⁴ Megan Brenan, Americans' Support for Immigration Down, Still Strong, Gallup News, July 9, 2026, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/712289/americans-support-immigration-down-strong.aspx>.

presidency, he made Illegal border crossings his central issue. His promise to build a wall along the southern border made it vivid.

Although Trump bore a general animus toward immigrants, especially from non-Anglo Saxon or Nordic countries, what resonated most viscerally with his supporters were his attacks on *illegal* immigration. It is worth asking why. Why did Trump's call for strict border enforcement evoke such a potent response?

One possible answer is that people feared that a surge of unauthorized migrants would disrupt their lives and destabilize their communities—committing crimes, taking jobs from locals, imposing burdens on housing, schools, and social services. Trump worked hard to fan these fears, offering lurid tales of heinous crimes by unauthorized immigrants.

But many of those angered by lax border policies do not live near the border. Some live in places with few immigrants. What motivated their fury? Why were they outraged at the idea of people transgressing the border?

Perhaps it offended their respect for the rule of law. Maybe they felt that crossing the border without permission was like cutting in line, jumping the queue, failing to abide by the rules--a kind of cheating.

But they, the MAGA enthusiasts, were not the ones waiting in line; they were already here. No one was cutting in front of them. So why the outrage? It is possible the line-cutting offended their sense of fairness. But something more potent than fairness seems to be at stake. Trump's rhetoric on illegal immigration offers a clue. It was not about fairness or the rule of law. It was about borders. Time and again, as a candidate and as president, he returned to this theme: "I've been saying from the first day I started campaigning...that if you have open borders, you

don't have a country. You don't have a country, with open borders."³⁵ "Without a border, you don't have a country. You don't have a country."³⁶

Trump's emphasis on borders reflected a keen political intuition. It spoke to an anxiety that had been deepening for decades. Although he did not articulate this explicitly, people care about borders because borders are about belonging. They are markers of national identity. They situate us in the world, not only on a map but in relation to each other. They signify the bonds among citizens, the traditions and ideals we share.

Immigration and globalization

The age of globalization put these bonds in doubt. The neoliberal faith had little use for borders, or for particularities of place. The globalization project eroded the economic significance of national borders. More than that, it gestured toward a vision of freedom beyond boundaries and belonging. The fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), a symbol of communist oppression, offered an irresistible metaphor for the new global capitalism: "a world without walls."

The credentialed elites who flourished in the new economy discovered they had more in common with their fellow entrepreneurs, innovators, and professional around the world than with their fellow citizens.³⁷ As companies could find workers, and for that matter, consumers, half a world away, they became less dependent on those closer to home.

³⁵ Remarks by President Trump in Press Briefing, The White House, August 13, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-briefing-august-13-2020/>

³⁶ Donald J. Trump, Remarks at the National Federation of Independent Businesses 75th Anniversary Celebration, June 19, 2018, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/332604>.

³⁷ In this and the following paragraphs, I draw upon Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: A New Edition for Our Perilous Times* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2022, pp. 4-5.

Workers whose livelihoods were tied to neighborhood and place took note. The new way of organizing economic activity heightened inequality, eroded the dignity of work, and devalued national identity and allegiance.

For the winners, the political divide that mattered was no longer left versus right but open versus closed. Those who questioned free trade agreements, the offshoring of jobs to low-wage countries, and the unfettered flow of capital across national borders were cast as close-minded, as if opposition to neoliberal globalization were on a par with bigotry. By this logic, patriotism seemed atavistic, a flight from the open, frictionless world that beckoned, a consolation for the left-behind.³⁸

As the unfettered flow of goods and capital eroded the significance of national borders, ordinary citizens had little say in the matter. These were abstract developments, enacted with little public debate, not easy for citizens to fathom much less influence. Elites encouraged this sense of inevitability. The global economy was less a choice than a fact of nature, they claimed, like wind and rain, as unalterable as the seasons.

But the flow of trade and capital across borders was one thing. The flow of people coming across the border from Mexico into the United States was another. It was tangible, concrete, and we were not powerfulness in the face of it. This was Trump's message. We could do something about it. We could build a wall along the border.

Trump's supporters found this promise thrilling, not because they believed his exaggerated claims about murderers and rapists and patients from mental hospitals pouring in, but because the wall stood for something bigger: the reassertion of national identity, sovereignty, and pride. At a time when multicultural, cosmopolitan identities complicated traditional notions of patriotism and belonging, the border wall would "make America great again." It would

³⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

reassert the certitudes that the porous boundaries and fluid identities of the global age had put in doubt.³⁹

Here, then, is why the immigration surge of recent decades stirred anger, anxiety, and grievance: Like other aspects of the globalization project, but in a more tangible, visible way, it threatened the wages and bargaining power of local workers and was carried out by elites against the wishes of the public. More than this, it reenforced citizens' sense of powerlessness, of a world spinning out of control, of the unravelling fabric of community.

A patriotism of civic renewal should begin by taking national borders seriously, not only by enforcing them but also by strengthening the civic solidarity for which they stand. Such patriotism poses different challenges for parties of the left and of the right.

A patriotism of civic renewal

For the left, it means overcoming their reticence about patriotism. No longer should parties of the left cede patriotism to the right. The best antidote to xenophobic nationalism is not a cosmopolitan ethic that would transcend national identities; it is an affirmative national project that cultivates solidarity, community, and pride. In recent times, few liberals and progressives have articulated such a project, even though most of their policy ambitions depend on it. The Democratic Party has sought to contend with inequalities of income and wealth; to provide access to health care, education, housing, childcare, and retirement security for all; to ensure that the wealthy pay their fair share for the support of government; to rein in unaccountable economic power; to hold big tech to democratic account.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

These are worthy ambitions. But they are in some tension with the market faith and individualistic assumptions that animate American liberalism. As a result, the United States, more than some European countries, has struggled to summon the solidarity social democratic policies requires. A progressive, or left populist economic agenda would be politically more inspiring and morally more convincing if it took up the challenge of cultivating solidarity and civic virtue--invigorating civic education; rebuilding class-mixing institutions and practices; questioning consumerist conceptions of the good life; opposing the soul-killing, doomscrolling hold of social media on the minds of young people; honoring lives bound up with family, work, place, and faith that do not aspire to be everywhere, all at once; repairing the moral fabric of neighborhoods and communities hollowed out by globalization; chastening the hubris of the winners and recalling them to the obligations of shared citizenship.

An agenda such as this would connect economic populism with a project of civic and spiritual renewal. It might prompt unease among liberals who believe government should be neutral toward competing conceptions of virtue and the good life. But the liberalism of neutrality has not served progressive politics well. It has abetted its allergy to patriotism and ill-equipped it to address the big civic questions people care about—the lack of voice, the loss of trust, the erosion of community. Asking citizens to leave their moral and spiritual convictions outside when they enter the public square hollows out public discourse and opens the way for patriotism’s dark twin, xenophobic nationalism.

For the right, a patriotism of civic renewal poses a parallel challenge. It requires choosing between the free market, deregulation, libertarian-leaning strand of conservatism and the family values, virtue-oriented, communitarian strand. The conservative think tank American Compass chooses the second. It proposes an economic agenda that rejects free-market orthodoxy and

offers instead a political economy of citizenship. It therefore holds promise as a counterpart to a progressive populist agenda of moral and civic renewal.

Its founder, economist Oren Cass, seeks an alternative to the “blind faith in markets [that] had come to dominate right-of-center economic thinking, at great cost to conservatism’s political prospects and the common good... Tax cuts, deregulation, and free trade were the only items on the menu.”⁴⁰ The new conservatism he proposes is “skeptical of corporate power and financial engineering and optimistic about a renewed labor movement; actively hostile to globalization and enthusiastic about industrial policy; averse to entitlement cuts and eager to expand support for working families.”⁴¹

Cass challenges the assumption, central to the market faith, that economic policy should aim above all at maximizing consumption. “People are workers as well as consumers,” he writes. The flourishing of families and communities depends as much on what people “contribute through their production as on what they enjoy in consumption.”⁴² He offers a scathing critique of the neoliberal economic policy embraced by the center-right in recent decades:

“Globalization crushed domestic industry and employment, leaving collapsed communities in its wake. Financialization shifted the economy’s center of gravity from Main Street to Wall Street, fueling an explosion in corporate profits alongside stagnating wages and declining investment. The decline of unions cost workers power in the market, voice in the workplace, and access to a vital source of communal support. These trends,

⁴⁰ Oren Cass, ed., *The New Conservatives: Restoring America’s Commitment to Family, Community, and Industry* (New York: Radius, 2025), p. vii.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. xi.

actively cheered on the Right, contributed to rising inequality, slowing innovation, narrowing of opportunity, and loss of middle-class security.”⁴³

Not all of Cass’s views would gladden the hearts of progressives. He opposes the Green New Deal, and large-scale climate change policies generally, on the grounds that a costly transition to a green economy would displace an “existing energy sector that provides productive blue-collar jobs and a source of inexpensive power” for what he considers dubious gains.⁴⁴ And he favors strong immigration enforcement and a restrictive immigration policy that would keep out low-skilled workers who would compete for low-wage American jobs.

Restricting entry by low-skilled foreign workers puts Cass at odds not only with some Democrats but also with free market, pro-business Republicans who would enable American companies and agribusiness to continue to hire immigrant laborers at low wages, rather than increase pay and working conditions to attract American workers.

For progressives who are critical of offshoring American jobs to low-wage countries, Cass’s view offer a challenge: What, really, is the difference between allowing companies to cut wages by hiring foreign laborers abroad and allowing companies to cut wages by hiring foreign laborers admitted to the United States? Don’t both policies undermine American labor by enabling American capital to “choose workers in those markets over the workers in its own”?⁴⁵

Beyond the question of worker pay, the analogy between globalization and immigration has a broader significance. Recall the connection between boundaries and belonging. Cass points out that capitalism does not bring about prosperity and the common good simply by

⁴³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. xxvii; Oren Cass, *Who is Climate Policy For?*, June 9, 2025, Commonplace.org, <https://www.commonplace.org/p/who-is-climate-policy-for>.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Cass, *The New Conservatives*, p. 52.

telling people with capital to go forth and maximize their profits. It works by creating well-governed markets that bind capital and labor in a relation of mutual dependence. “Capitalists need increasingly productive workers to achieve increasing profits, and workers need access to capital to achieve increasing wages.” But globalization destroys this mutual dependence by “urging the owners of mobile capital to forsake the interests off their fellow citizens and search for higher profits through labor arbitrage abroad.”⁴⁶

“A model focused on ensuring that wealthy people can earn the greatest possible return on their capital is not capitalism; it’s oligarchy, and its track record is quite poor. Capitalism works for capital, labor, and consumers when all are indispensable to each other’s goals... Interdependence is what translates the pursuit of profit into public benefit.”⁴⁷

“An indispensable element for maintaining this interdependence,” Cass claims, “is the bounding of the market,” so that capital and labor will have to deal with one another, and work things out to their mutual benefit. “A bounded market,” he explains, “is not an isolated one; goods and services, capital and people can enter and exit. But their flows are controlled” for the sake of preserving the bonds of mutual dependence.⁴⁸

Such mutual dependence not only brings shared prosperity; it also promotes the common good. “Economic interdependence invariably strengthens the social fabric, as elites who might otherwise look outward for both peers and employees much instead look inward.” Entrepreneurs will care more for the quality of public education, community colleges, and job training

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

programs if the success of their enterprises depends on the quality of the domestic work force. “Corporate executives in coastal cities might understand their fellow citizens in the domestic hinterland better if their supply chains traveled through it and thus so did they.”⁴⁹

Cass’s argument that bounded labor markets promote mutual dependence brings out the connection between borders and belonging. More broadly, it illustrates the link between a political economy of citizenship and the project of civic renewal.

It is possible, of course, to accept the idea that economic arrangements bear on the prospects for solidarity and community without necessarily accepting Cass’s views on trade policy or immigration. But acknowledging the connection between economy and community offers a promising starting point for constructive debate between progressives and conservatives seeking to repair our civic life in the aftermath of globalization.

Immigration reform

What might this suggest for the fraught issue of immigration reform? Progressives who object to the offshoring of American jobs to low-wage countries should take seriously the notion that admitting large numbers of immigrants willing to work for low wages may have similar effects on the jobs and wages of American workers. They should consider a “high-wage immigration policy” that increases the supply of highly skilled workers and limits the supply of low-skilled, low-wage workers, so that employers will have to bid up the pay and working conditions of the most vulnerable American workers.

As for the enforcement of immigration law, Democrats and Republicans should resist pressure from corporate lobbyists and agree to strict enforcement, not only at the border but also

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

by holding companies responsible for hiring only legally authorized immigrants. Penalties for violations of immigration law should fall more heavily on companies seeking to exploit low-wage workers than on unauthorized immigrants seeking a better life.⁵⁰

In exchange for reasonable limits on immigration and a credible system of enforcement, Republicans should embrace a path to citizenship for otherwise law-abiding unauthorized immigrants who have lived in this country for some time—raising families, paying taxes, and contributing to their communities. Conservatives who prize virtues associated with being embedded in family, neighborhood, workplace, congregation, and community know that bonds of belonging can arise not only from birth but also from sharing in a common life.

They should also agree to abandon the cruel and violent deportation policies of the Trump administration. Sending masked ICE officers into cities and towns across the country to hunt down unauthorized immigrants has done more to project fear than to protect American workers or to apprehend dangerous criminals, much less build the community and solidarity that justify national borders in the first place. The only fellow-feeling such invasions inspire arises when members of the community rise up in support of those victimized, and in some cases killed, by ICE agents.

To ensure that the use of ICE as a lethal, unruly federal police force does not continue after the Trump administration, Democrats and Republicans should slash the exorbitant funding allocated in 2025-2026 for border enforcement, an amount that rivals the combined annual budgets of all state and local police departments in the country.⁵¹ Rather than heed calls by some

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

⁵¹ Margy O'Herron, Big Budget Act Creates a "Deportation-Industrial Complex," Brennan Center for Justice, August 13, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/big-budget-act-creates-deportation-industrial-complex>; ICE, CBP Now Sitting on \$152 Billion After Republican Funding Bills, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Budget Committee, July 23, 2026, <https://www.budget.senate.gov/ranking-member/newsroom/press/ice-cbp-now-sitting-on-152-billion-after-republican-funding-bills>.

to “abolish ICE,” Congress should restrict ICE and border control agents to the border and U.S. points of entry, leaving the arrest of immigrants who commit crimes to state and local police. Permitting ICE agents to intimidate and detain non-citizens and citizens in hospitals, schools, courthouses, sports arenas, and polling places does little to make the country safer and a great deal to violate individual liberty and imperil the public places essential to a healthy civic life.

A broader patriotism

We can now see why many in the U.S., Britain, and Europe associate patriotic pride with right-wing, anti-immigrant parties. Borders signify belonging, an aspect of patriotism. For working people whose sense of belonging is in doubt, who feel that elites look down on them and may soon send robots to replace them, porous borders are especially threatening. Not only do they represent increased competition for jobs and wages. They imply that their country cares more for strangers than it does for them. This draws them to populist-nationalist parties that would shore up borders and harden the distinction between insiders and outsiders.

Progressives and conservatives alarmed by the rise of right-wing nationalism should take seriously the hunger for patriotism and belonging these parties exploit. One way of doing so is to reform immigration and rethink globalization. Another is to offer a broader patriotism of civic renewal.

This could include highlighting, for example, the neglect of borders when it serves the interests of powerful corporations. If national borders stand for the mutual obligations of citizens, why allow U.S. corporations to dodge taxes by shifting billions in profits earned at home to tax havens abroad? Since 2025, when Trump withdrew the U.S. from a global

agreement to curb tax evasion by multinational corporations, American companies such as Walmart, Uber, Mastercard, Pepsi, Crocs, and Merck, have avoided at least \$40 billion in taxes by claiming their U.S. profits were earned in low- or no-tax places like Malta and the Cayman Islands.⁵²

Why isn't the transgression of borders to avoid paying American taxes on American earnings unpatriotic? That this form of tax evasion is legally permitted makes it more scandalous, not less, a graver offense against patriotism than a smuggling scheme.

Or what about the prevalence of corruption at the highest levels of government, including in countries led by right-wing, anti-immigrant nationalists? Exploiting public office for private gain violates the patriotic duty to care above all for the good of one's country. In 2026, this argument, casting anti-corruption as a patriotic cause, contributed to the "stunning electoral upset" of Europe's leading figure of right-wing, populist nationalism, Hungary's Victor Orban. During 16 years of autocratic rule, Orban dismantled liberal institutions, opposed support for Ukraine, was sanctioned by the European Union for rampant corruption, and won the support of both Vladimir Putin and Trump. Vice President J.D. Vance traveled to Budapest to campaign on his behalf.⁵³

Orban's decisive defeat by Peter Magyar, a disillusioned former member of his party, was hailed as a "political earthquake" that offered hope, in Europe and beyond, that the rising tide of autocracy and democratic backsliding could be reversed.⁵⁴ Magyar was not a candidate of the

⁵² Jesse Drucker and Dylan Freedman, "Trump Clears Way for Corporate Tax Dodge Hidden in the Fine Print," *New York Times*, May 29, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/29/business/economy/offshore-tax-havens-trump.html>.

⁵³ Sándor Ésik, How Péter Magyar Defeated Viktor Orbán, *Journal of Democracy*, April 2026, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-peter-magyar-defeated-viktor-orban/>; Andrew Higgins and Lili Rutai, "Orban, Beacon to the Right, Concedes Defeat in Hungary's Election," *New York Times*, April 12, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/12/world/europe/hungary-election-orban-magyar.html>.

⁵⁴ Sándor Ésik, *ibid.*

left. He “constructed his campaign around broad, non-ideological themes of inclusive nationalism and patriotism, telling Hungarians over and over again that they should believe in the possibility of creating a ‘humane’ Hungary. Rooting out corruption and restoring the rule of law were central planks of his message.”⁵⁵

Magyar’s campaign, replete with Hungarian flags and folks songs, linked patriotism and anti-corruption. Orban had “stolen from the common good of the Hungarian nation, from the pockets of the Hungarian people,” he declared in his inaugural speech. For years, Orban’s reign of fear had prevented the public from engaging in public affairs. Magyar’s campaign, which reached beyond Budapest into the conservative rural countryside, energized a “patriotic enthusiasm” that mobilized an unprecedented electoral turnout. Many Hungarians felt, a political analyst observed, “that they got their symbols and their homeland back.”⁵⁶

In the aftermath of Orban’s defeat, commentators wondered whether Magyar’s victory offered lessons for turning back the autocratic assault on democracy and the rule of law in other countries. A few months after Magyar took office in Hungary, a Gallup poll showed that nine out of ten Americans believed corruption was widespread throughout the U.S. government, a record high. Notwithstanding a deep partisan divide on most issues, public concern about widespread government corruption reaches across party lines.⁵⁷ Another survey found similar results, and revealed that large majorities of Americans believe the corruption extends not only to President

⁵⁵ Saskia Brechenmacher, What Hungary’s Anti-Corruption Election Can Teach U.S. Democracy Advocates, Just Security, July 24, 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/148927/hungary-election-anticorruption-lessons/>.

⁵⁶ Zoltan Szalay, Hungary’s new leader, Péter Magyar walks a fine line between patriotism and populism, euobserver, 8 May 2026, <https://euobserver.com/215229/hungarys-new-leader-peter-magyar-walks-a-fine-line-between-patriotism-and-populism/>. Magyar inaugural speech quoted in M. Gessen, “This Is the Formula That Defeated Orban. It Would Defeat Trump, Too,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/29/opinion/hungary-win-election-viktor-orban.html>.

⁵⁷ Benedict Vigers, Record-High 89% in U.S. Say Government Corruption Widespread, Gallup, September 2, 2026, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/713933/record-high-say-government-corruption-widespread.aspx?>.

Trump, who made \$1.4 billion in cryptocurrency deals in 2025,⁵⁸ but to high-ranking cabinet officials, Congress, many of whose members engage in stock trading,⁵⁹ and more broadly to the way political campaigns are financed.⁶⁰

Given the level of concern, it is possible that corruption could be a “sleeper” issue in American politics that could catch fire, propel anti-corruption candidates, and galvanize a movement for reform. Whether this comes to pass will depend on two factors: (1) establishing a visceral connection between corruption by public officials and the economic struggles and political disempowerment of ordinary citizens and (2) showing how the use of public office for private gain constitutes a betrayal of patriotism and the common good.

⁵⁸ Ben Protess, et al., “Trump Pulled In at Least \$2 Billion After Returning to the White House,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2026,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/30/us/politics/trump-financial-disclosure-crypto-windfall.html>.

⁵⁹ Annie Karni, “Stock Trading by Lawmakers Becomes a Campaign Attack Line,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/14/us/politics/stock-trading-congress.html>.

⁶⁰ Alex Brunet and Marina Pino, “Poll: Voters Want Solutions for Government Corruption,” Brennan Center for Justice, June 2, 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/poll-voters-want-solutions-government-corruption>.

