



# 5 Reasons Why Amnesty is a Bad Idea

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**What is Amnesty:** In the context of immigration, amnesty is the granting of legal status to any individual who is in the country illegally. There have been variations of amnesty in terms of size and scope, but all confer upon illegal aliens some manner of legal status. Some amnesty proposals also include “pathways to citizenship” for former illegal aliens.

**Why Activists Are Calling For Amnesty:** The proponents of amnesty typically [invoke](#) a combination of compassion and pragmatism in making their case. Illegal aliens, particularly those who’ve worked without committing other crimes for decades, should be given a break, they argue, because they hold jobs and it would be too difficult to detain and deport as many as the more than [14.5 million illegal aliens](#) living in the U.S. in 2020. What the supporters usually ignore or downplay are the problems associated with amnesty.

Here are five key reasons why granting amnesty is a bad idea:

**1. Amnesty encourages more illegal migration.** The granting of mass amnesty impedes efforts to deter illegal immigration by making others think they can enter illegally and get an amnesty later. This is what happened after an amnesty was approved by Congress and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1986. It stands as a case study in how [good intentions can result in bad law](#).

In 1985, Senator Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.) introduced the [Immigration Reform and Control Act](#) (or IRCA) that included penalties for knowingly hiring illegal aliens while also giving a path to citizenship to illegal aliens who entered the U.S. or overstayed their visas before January 1, 1982. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), who was elected in 1980, [emphasized](#) during a debate on immigration reform in February 2013, that “what Congress, the public, and the President did not envision, or did not want, was another amnesty debate. The American people were told that this would be a one-time shot. The incentive to buy-in to the argument was a promise of enforcement.”

Following the signing of the bill into law in 1986, 2.7 million illegal aliens were granted amnesty while approximately another 3 million unauthorized migrants remained. Today, there are at least 14.5 million, according to FAIR’s latest estimates. That means the number of illegal aliens has increased almost fivefold since 1986.

**2. Amnesty undermines unemployed and struggling Americans, especially during the pandemic.** Granting amnesty places illegal aliens on the same playing field with Americans in a pandemic-weakened economy with high unemployment. In addition, giving unauthorized migrants status would add a crushing weight to burdened unemployment systems or social services. The negative impact of an influx of foreign workers in higher-skilled vocations would be replicated among lower-skilled jobs as well. It is also likely that a sudden increase in the supply of legal labor generated by amnesty would further contribute to wage stagnation since employers would have even less incentive to raise wages.

**3. Amnesty is costly, now and in the future.** While the proponents of amnesty often tout its alleged economic [benefits](#), amnesty is an expensive gamble. Supporters argue that allowing illegal aliens to work lawfully would increase tax revenue and spur economic growth, yet do not consider whether short-term benefits of increased taxes would be outweighed by long-term costs of mass amnesty. Even over a period of years, the legalization of more than 14 million individuals would overwhelm state and federal resources. That means more pressure on public schools, hospitals, social services, and housing, all of which are struggling in the pandemic.

Then there is the negative impact on an entitlement system on the brink. In 2007, a Heritage Foundation study estimated that amnesty would [cost American taxpayers at least \\$2.6 trillion](#), and in 2016 Heritage estimated that amnesty would require an [immediate tax increase of \\$1.29 trillion](#). Higher national debt results in higher costs from education and healthcare to groceries and transportation. More than 60 percent of Americans are [living paycheck to paycheck](#) since the pandemic started. Amnesty would likely exacerbate that while simultaneously saddling future generations with more stifling debt.

**4. Amnesty is unfair to legal immigrants.** It is understandable that people from all over the world wish to settle in the United States, but that makes it all the more necessary that they do so legally. Each year, [over one million people](#) are granted Legal Permanent Residency (“green cards”). They endure a costly, complicated, and long process that is necessary to maintain order and proper vetting. Thus, granting amnesty (regardless of the conditions) to people who violated our laws and effectively cut in line to get here is deeply unfair to those who followed the rules, respected our laws, and waited in line.

**5. Amnesty undermines the rule of law.** America was founded on the principle that every person and institution would be held accountable to and judged equally under the law. The granting of mass or large-scale amnesty contradicts that principle. Amnesty undermines the rule of law by tacitly approving the breaking of our immigration laws by some (illegal aliens) while requiring others – both American citizens and legal immigrants – to obey all laws or face the consequences. Affording one group preferential treatment, while simultaneously penalizing others for minor infractions of the law, such as mistakenly underpaying taxes, is an unjust double standard. We have witnessed how even a perceived imbalance in the application of the law undermines trust in the legal system, and this would only increase public cynicism about it. That, in turn, might encourage more law-breaking, which would undoubtedly harm us as a society.