



The Costs of Mass Deportation

Impractical, Expensive, and Ineffective

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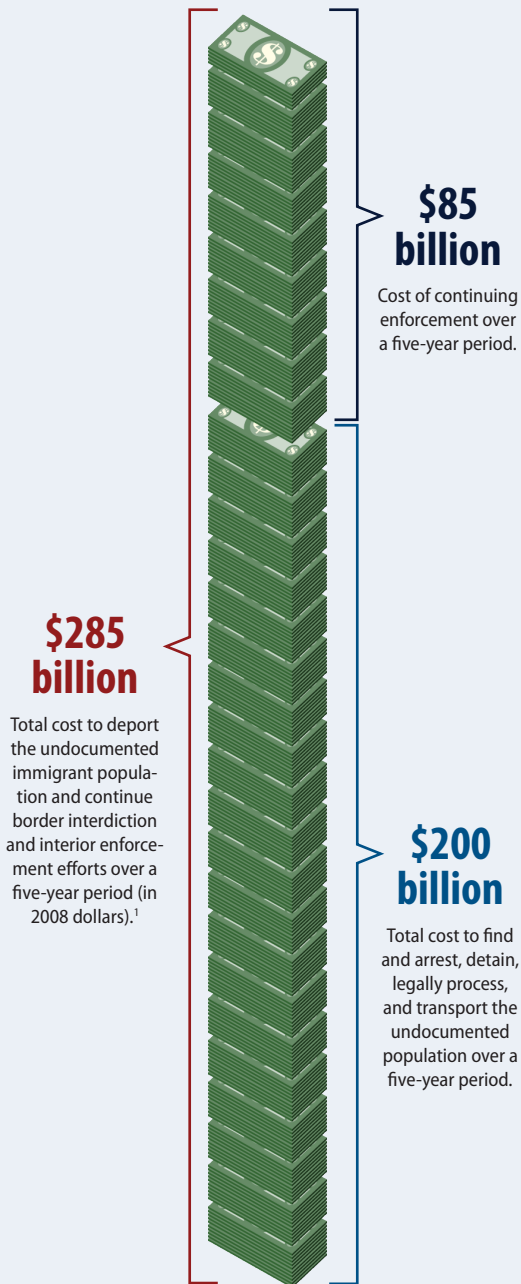
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Fast facts

What the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants would cost the American taxpayer

The price tag



What this means

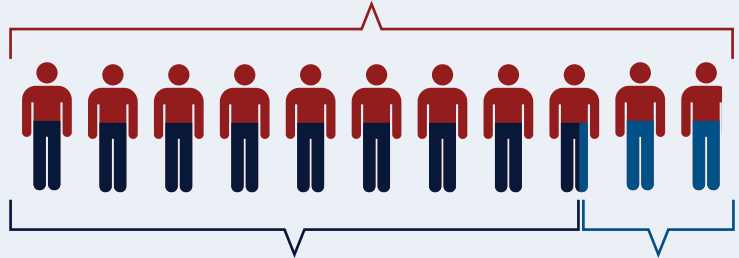
Total cost over five years: \$285 billion, would mean new taxes of \$922 for every man, woman, and child in our country.

\$5,100 fewer dollars for the education of every public and private school student from prekindergarten to the 12th grade.

The people

Undocumented immigrants in the United States, according to the latest estimates by DHS

10.8 million



8.64 million

Number subject to forcible deportation

2.16 million

Estimated number of undocumented immigrants that would leave the United States before any contact with authorities

The cost of deportation

U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement budgets increased by 80 percent to \$17.1 billion in fiscal year 2010 from \$9.5 billion in FY 2005, yet the net increase in undocumented immigrants increased by 300,000 to 10.8 million.²

The numbers



\$158 billion Apprehension cost

with the cost per apprehension in FY 2008 of \$18,310.



\$29 billion Detention cost

with the cost to detain one person for an average of 30 days in detention of \$3,355.

Most of the detention space for those arrested and awaiting deportation is leased from local governments, but construction costs to meet new demand would be about \$34 billion because a deportation strategy would more than double the number of people in American jails.



\$7 billion Legal processing cost

with the cost per one proceeding of \$817.



\$6 billion Transportation cost

for 6.22 million people, with the cost per person of \$1,000. (In FY 2008, about 28 percent of deportations were through voluntary departure orders that did not require government transportation. The same percentage drop was applied to 8.64 million undocumented immigrants who would be apprehended, reaching a total transportation number of 6.22 million people.)

Total cost of deportation campaign: \$200 billion, with the cost per deportation of \$23,482 for each person to be apprehended, detained, legally processed, and transported out of the country.

Introduction and summary

Almost three years ago, Congress tried to reform the nation's broken immigration system but fell short of the mark. The core questions of what to do about undocumented immigrants already living in the United States and about those who are sure to seek our shores in the future thwarted political agreement and shut down congressional negotiations in 2007. Under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, deployment of new enforcement strategies and the allocation of enforcement resources have multiplied. Nonetheless, the inherent systemic dysfunction has deepened, and the public call for solutions has amplified.

That legislative battle for immigration reform now looms again on the horizon. There are three options for restoring order to our immigration system:

- Live with the dysfunctional status quo, pouring billions of dollars into immigration enforcement programs at the worksite, in communities, and on the border without reducing the numbers of undocumented immigrants in the country
- Double down on this failed enforcement strategy in an attempt to apprehend and remove all current undocumented immigrants
- Combine a strict enforcement strategy with a program that would require undocumented workers to register, pass background checks, pay their full share of taxes, and earn the privilege of citizenship while creating legal channels for future migration flows

The first alternative would leave in place policies that have allowed 5 percent of our nation's workforce—approximately 8.3 million workers in March 2008—to remain undocumented in our country.³ This is clearly an unsustainable position in a democratic society—permitting a class of workers to operate in a shadow economy subject to exploitation and undermining all workers' rights and opportunities.

The second option, mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, is essentially the enforcement-only status quo on steroids. As this paper demonstrates, this option would be prohibitively expensive and trigger profound collateral consequences.⁴ Our analysis is comprised of a detailed review of all federal spending to prevent unauthorized immigration and deport undocumented immigrants in FY 2008, the last fiscal year (ending in October 2008) for which there is complete data (see box on page 5). It shows that the

total cost of mass deportation and continuing border interdiction and interior enforcement efforts would be \$285 billion (in 2008 dollars) over five years.⁵

Specifically, this report calculates a price tag of \$200 billion to enforce a federal dragnet that would snare the estimated 10.8 million undocumented immigrants in the United States over five years.⁶ That amount, however, does not include the annual recurring border and interior enforcement spending that will necessarily have to occur. It would cost taxpayers at least another \$17 billion annually (in 2008 dollars) to maintain the status quo at the border and in the interior, or a total of nearly \$85 billion over five years. That means the total five-year immigration enforcement cost under a mass deportation strategy would be approximately \$285 billion.

When viewed through this most narrow but most telling fiscal lens, it should be clear that a deportation-only strategy is highly irresponsible. In these challenging economic times, spending a king's ransom to tackle a symptom of our immigration crisis without addressing root causes would be a massive waste of taxpayer dollars. Spending \$285 billion would require \$922 in new taxes for every man, woman, and child in this country.⁷ If this kind of money were raised, it could provide every public and private school student from prekindergarten to the 12th grade an extra \$5,100 for their education.⁸ Or more frivolously, that \$285 billion would pay for about 26,146 trips in the private space travel rocket, Falcon 1e.⁹

The worst economic downturn since the Great Depression has clearly diminished the number of people attempting to enter the country illegally—the absence of jobs eliminates the predominant incentive to migrate.¹⁰ And yet, even with diminished pressure at the border, the dramatic increases in spending on immigration enforcement have not significantly altered the net number of undocumented immigrants in the country. In fact, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, reports that the undocumented immigrant population as of January 2009 stood at 10.8 million,¹¹ or 300,000 more than it was in 2005.¹² In other words, the massive outlays in enforcement resources are barely making a dent in the current population.

That leaves the third course, comprehensive immigration reform, as the only rational alternative. The solution to our broken immigration system must combine tough border and workplace enforcement with practical reforms that promote economic growth, protect all workers, and reunite immediate family members. Among other things, that means we must establish a realistic program to require undocumented immigrants to register with the government while creating legal immigration channels that are flexible, serve the national interest, and curtail future illegal immigration.¹³

Some proponents of the second option—a deportation-only strategy—contend that the Great Recession and heightened unemployment justify mass deportation.¹⁴ As if deportation were a panacea for the nation's economic woes, the ranking member on the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), claims: “The single most effective thing

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that DHS could do to create jobs for American workers would be to conduct vigorous worksite enforcement and to actually deport the illegal immigrant workers so they don't remain here to compete with citizen and legal immigrant job-seekers."¹⁵ The patently erroneous analysis behind this contention—that unemployed Americans are a perfect substitute for undocumented workers in the workforce—ignores the devastating impact such an approach would have on economic growth.

In fact, a recent study by the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Center demonstrates how legalization of undocumented immigrants and more flexible immigration channels would significantly expand the economy—by a cumulative \$1.5 trillion in gross domestic product over 10 years—through increased consumer spending, higher tax receipts, and other related factors.¹⁶ A deportation approach, by contrast, would have the cumulative effect of draining \$2.5 trillion over 10 years from the U.S. economy.¹⁷ That is a \$4 trillion swing in GDP depending on which policy approach we adopt.

Once policymakers in Congress and their constituents across the country weigh the unrealistic five-year immigration enforcement costs of pursuing a deportation-only strategy—\$285 billion—against the progressive alternative they will recognize once and for all that mass deportation is fiscally untenable.

This paper will demonstrate in detail the severe consequences of a deportation-only policy on the nation's economy and how the execution of such a policy would require massive direct expenditures. We analyze publicly available data to assess the costs and the steps required to carry out such a policy—from point of arrest through transportation out of the country. Our report adopts conservative assumptions for key variables to ensure that the estimated program and spending requirements are realistic and not overstated. Our findings are not just sobering; they conclusively prove a deportation-only immigration strategy would be the height of folly.

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