
OPINION > IMMIGRATION

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Americans want humane immigration policies, not cruel political stunts

BY TOMÁS JIMÉNEZ, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 09/29/22 3:30 PM ET

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vineyard, Mass., with two planeloads of Venezuelan migrants. On Friday, the migrants were being moved voluntarily to a military base on nearby Cape Cod, Mass.

In justifying their morally bankrupt and legally dubious busing of immigrants to liberal strongholds around the country, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey (R) got one thing right: There are big differences in how states treat immigrants.

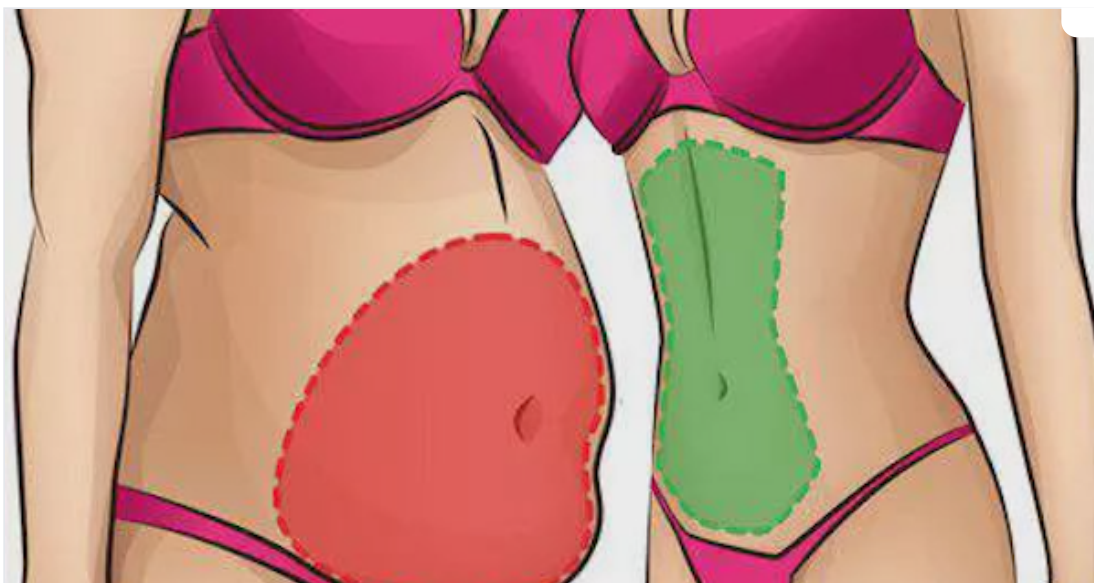
In the last two decades, some states and cities have followed an enforcement forward approach championed by governors like DeSantis, Abbott and Ducey in the name of economic and cultural preservation. Others have taken a different tactic, enacting measures to include immigrants. If you look closely at the effect of these efforts, it's clear that DeSantis, Abbot and Ducey have got it wrong. Including immigrants is not eroding our economy and culture. Instead, policies that help immigrants belong can make Americans feel like they belong too.

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While Capitol Hill has slept on immigration policy for two decades, states, counties and cities stepped into the void. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, states have enacted an average of 161 immigration laws per year since 2005. The most notorious of these measures emerged from roughly 2005 to 2012, when states like Arizona, Alabama and Georgia took extreme measures to exclude immigrants from accessing public institutions, like colleges and universities and empowered law enforcement to pick up people they suspected of being undocumented.

unwelcoming sort, with states becoming far more likely to extend than to restrict rights, resources, and access to institutions for immigrants regardless of their legal status.

Sixteen states and the District of Columbia now offer driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, 19 states allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition, and seven states offer them financial aid at state colleges and universities. When federal immigration policy was arguably tougher on immigrants than ever during the Trump administration, the Immigrant Climate Index shows that state and local immigration policies became even more welcoming.



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With so much political polarization, you might think more welcoming policies are as controversial as the unwelcoming sort. But that's not the case. In our book, "States of Belonging: Policies, Attitudes, and Inclusion," we used a range of social science research methods to understand how people respond to living under different kinds of state immigration policy regimes. Our research took us to Arizona — unequivocally the least welcoming policy state in the country — and New Mexico, a far more welcoming state and an early adopter of efforts to include immigrants regardless of legal status.

We found that it was not just immigrant and U.S.-born Latino residents who responded more positively to welcoming immigration policies. So did white residents. Like immigrant and U.S.-born Latinos, whites displayed a more positive emotional response and felt like they belonged in their state more when immigration policies are more welcoming. We also

Democrats and independents, together, constitute a majority, as is the case nationwide.

We also spent hundreds of hours talking to everyday Arizona and New Mexico residents. They were hardly caricatures of the immigration debate, which seems to portray “deport-everyone” Republicans on one side and “open-borders” Democrats on the other.

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Both Latino and white Democrats and Independents supported government action that was more welcoming to immigrants. But they also saw a need for border security and told us that immigrants who come to the United States need to demonstrate their commitment to their new communities. Republicans were more interested in muscular border security. But they thought undocumented immigrants who have been acting like good citizens by following the laws, paying taxes and working hard deserved the opportunity to become citizens.

What we heard reflects what Americans from across the political spectrum have been saying for more than a decade: They want a pathway to citizenship for most undocumented immigrants. Even though differences between Republicans and Democrats around immigration have captured the most attention, there may be enough agreement on border security and legalization to build a bridge strong enough to cross the political divide on immigration. States across the nation have been experimenting with a range of immigration policies.



States across the nation have been experimenting with a range of immigration policies. Asylum seekers have a legal right to be in the United States until their claims are heard. Shuttling them to other states is a cynical political ploy that ignores the facts: Policies that are more welcoming to immigrants who are already here — including those that offer a pathway to citizenship — are good for immigrants, good for Americans, and therefore, good for the United States.

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Tomás Jiménez is a professor of Sociology and Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University and co-author of the recent book, [“States of Belonging: Policies, Attitudes, and Inclusion.”](#)

Editor’s note: This story was updated on Sept. 30 at 8:53 a.m.

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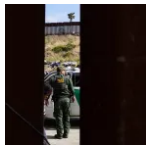
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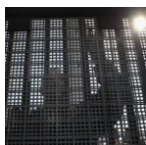
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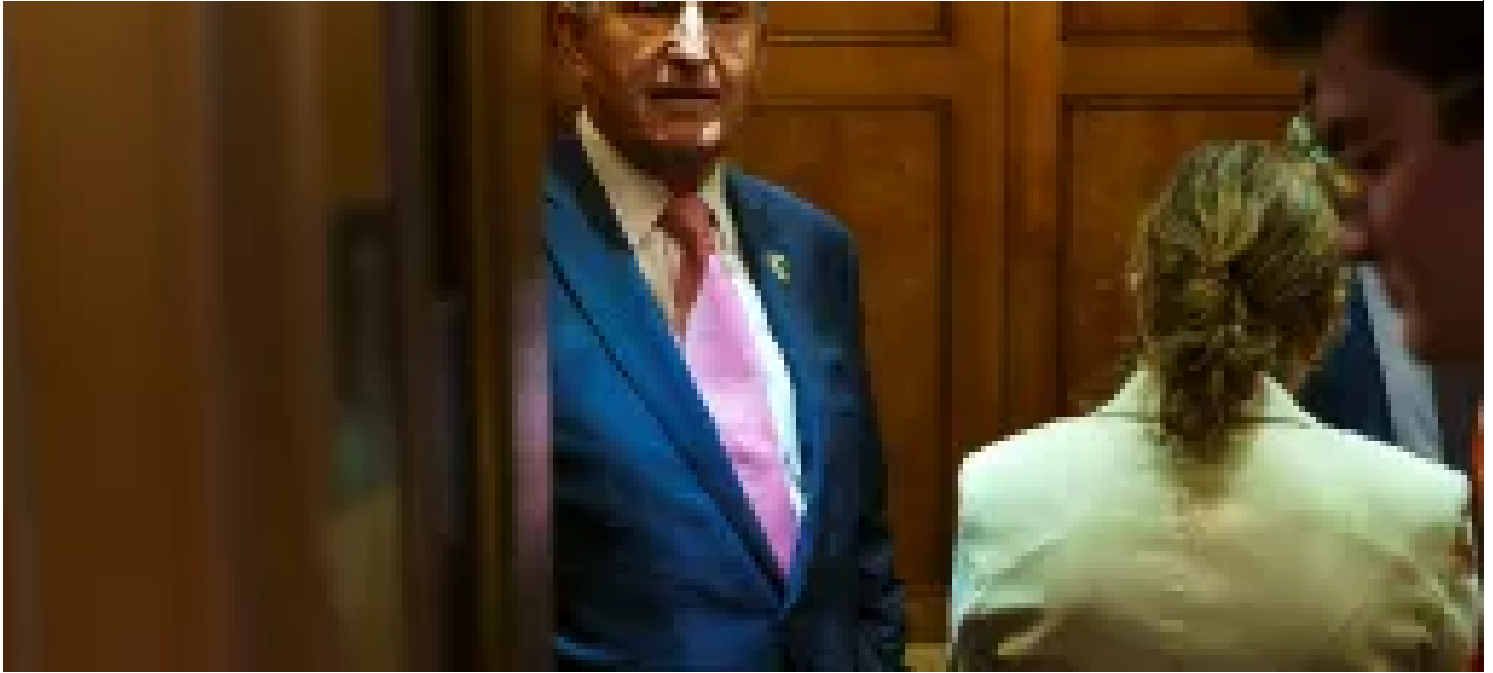
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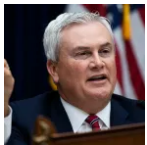
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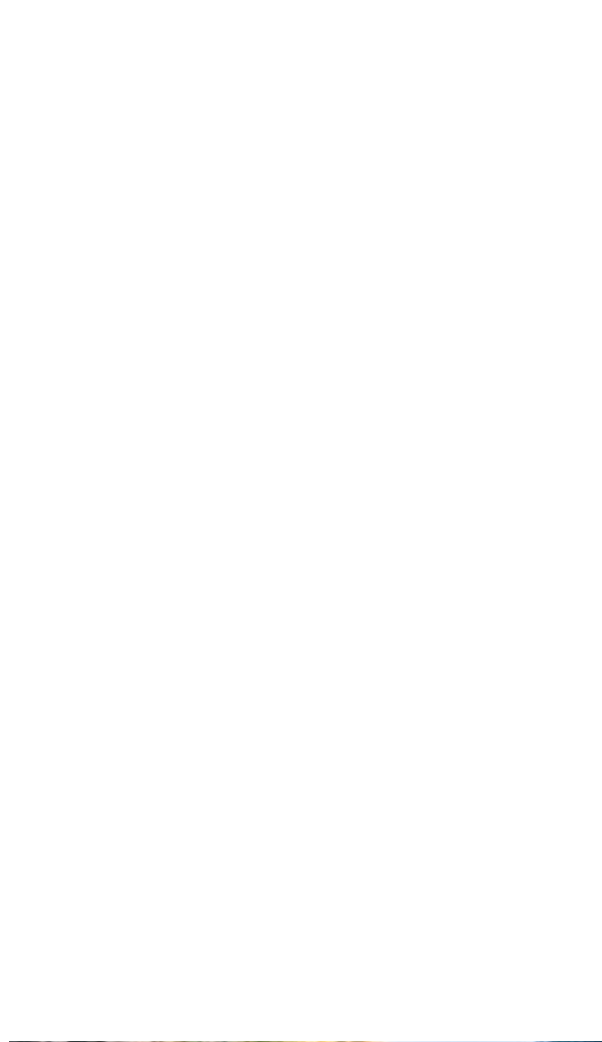
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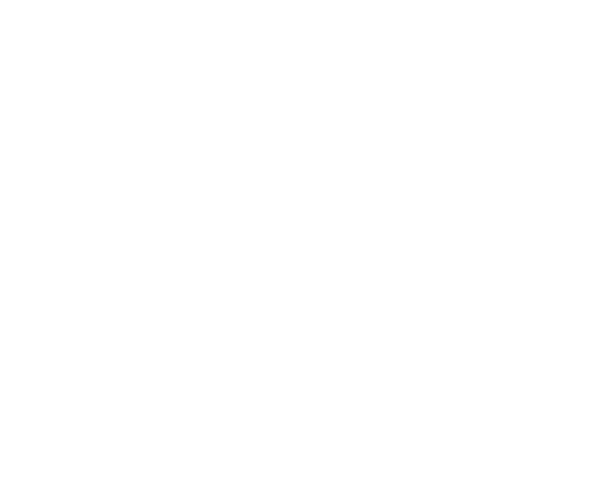
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