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Immigration Law: The Prohibition of Our Day

by [Alex DiBranco](#) May 06, 2010 01:30 PM (PT) Topics: [Border Policy](#), [Immigration Reform](#)

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It's the day after Cinco de Mayo, so it seems appropriate to use alcohol to illustrate what's wrong with the framing of the immigration debate today. So pop a couple aspirin for that hangover, and listen to why the "enforcement first" approach to immigration law makes no sense, according to Daniel Griswold, a director at the Cato Institute.

"Illegal immigration," [Griswold writes](#), "is the Prohibition debate of our day." To insist on enforcing immigration law *first* is like saying "we can't repeal the nationwide prohibition on alcohol consumption until we've drastically reduced the number of moonshine stills and bootleggers." If you legalize alcohol, bootleggers will disappear of their own accord; if you provide legal routes to immigration, undocumented workers will fade away. Or, to think of it another way: why would you enforce laws that you are planning to change?

Bootleggers arose in response to demand for alcohol; undocumented immigrants exist to fill an unmet demand for low-skilled labor. The way our current immigration system is set up, it's nigh-impossible for low-skilled workers to immigrate legally. Yet they are lured here anyway by the existence of labor demand. Of course, now with a recession going on, immigrants are scapegoated more than ever; however, the rate of illegal immigration slows with the economy, in accordance with laws of supply and demand. And we'll really need tax-paying immigrant workers to keep Social Security from crumbling as the baby boomers retire.

Griswold concludes, "If we want to 'get control' of our border with Mexico, the smartest thing we could do would be to allow more workers to enter the United States legally under the umbrella of comprehensive immigration reform." This approach frees up law enforcement to focus on criminal elements who still try to sneak across the border: drug smugglers, human traffickers, organized crime, fugitives. With a real way for low-skilled workers to enter legally, law enforcement could justifiably be suspicious of those who keep to the illegal route as planning something more nefarious than making a better life for their families.

Photo credit: [Kent Wang](#)



[Alex DiBranco](#) is a Change.org Editor who has worked for the Nation, Political Research Associates, and the Center for American Progress. She is now based in New York City.

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And we'll really need tax-paying immigrant workers to keep Social Security from crumbling as the baby boomers retire.

And how many more immigrants will we need later to cover those that are covering for those now? Why not just get rid of the welfare benefit (SS) all together? Why not privatize it? that would end the need for continuous immigration to keep it afloat. The entire bases of this argument seems to be only to continue with the Gov't handout of SS: *we'll really need tax-paying immigrant workers to keep Social Security from crumbling.*

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