

ONE PART OF THE

BODY

*The Potential Impact
of Deportations on
American Christian
Families*

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

The Apostle Paul describes the church of Jesus Christ as “one body” that is “not made up of one part but of many,” each of which is distinct from and yet interdependent upon the other parts (1 Cor. 12:13-14). Furthermore, we are called to both rejoice and to suffer together: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor. 12:26).

Just as the hand cannot go about its business unaffected if the foot is in debilitating pain, whenever one part of the church is suffering, the whole is called to suffer alongside. The Greek word for *compassion*, as the Catholic writer Henri Nouwen observed, literally means “to suffer with.” Writing from exile to the earliest believers, John introduces the book of Revelation describing himself as their “brother and companion in ... suffering” (Rev. 1:9).

In the United States, immigrants from various countries form integral parts of the Body of Christ. Most, of course, are lawfully present, whether as naturalized citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, resettled refugees or others with permanent legal status. But a significant share of the immigrants who are a part of our body are vulnerable to deportation, whether because they have no legal status or their legal protections could be withdrawn.

That has long been true, but it is of increased urgency given President Trump’s repeated pledge to carry out “the largest deportation in U.S. history.” President Trump and his administration have not consistently cited a specific goal for how many people they intend to remove from the United States, but the president cited his belief [during the campaign](#) that there could be as many as 20 million deportable immigrants present in the U.S. Post-election, when pressed on whether his deportation campaign would go beyond those convicted of criminal offenses, whom

he has indicated are the top priority, he said that such a policy, while difficult, was necessary. An [executive order](#) signed by the president on his first day after returning to the White House states, “It is the policy of the United States to take all appropriate action to secure the borders of our Nation through ... Removing promptly *all* aliens who enter or remain in violation of Federal law” (emphasis added).

The goal of this report is not to advocate for a specific position — though some of the report’s sponsor organizations may do so in other venues — nor is it to argue that all deportations are unjust. It’s also certainly not intended to feed into fear, because the reality is that there are significant logistical, legal, political and financial barriers to deporting *all* those who could be vulnerable to deportation.

Rather, our purpose with this report is to invite American Christians — within our congregations and within the halls of governmental power — to recognize that, if even a fraction of those vulnerable to deportation are actually deported, the ramifications are profound — for those individuals, of course, but also for their U.S.-citizen family members and, because when one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it, for *all* Christians.

We should also be clear that, as Christians, our concern is not exclusively for fellow Christians. We believe that all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, are made in the image of God with inherent dignity (Genesis 1:27, Genesis 9:6, James 3:9). Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbor was clarified by a story of a person who loved someone of a different religious tradition who was in need (Luke 10:25-37). Our call extends to those outside of the Body of Christ — but it certainly also includes those within, and many American Christians, we suspect, have not realized that among immigrants at risk of deportation, the vast majority — four out of five — are fellow Christians, as this report shows.

The Bible is clear that government is a gift from God which all people are called to obey (Romans 13:1-7). Respect for the rule of law is an important Christian principle. The administration of our laws should be done in ways that balance justice, compassion, redemption and proportionality. Deportation is only one of several ways in which this principle can be upheld. While this report does not discuss or evaluate alternatives to deportation, several thoughtful approaches have been proposed that would offer unauthorized immigrants opportunities to earn legal immigration status. These proposals should be part of the immigration policy debate.

This research relies upon the best estimates we can make of religious affiliation with any Christian tradition, relying on self-reported religious identification. We're not in a position to measure people's souls or verify their doctrine — and as Christians of distinct theological traditions, we would not be able to agree on every doctrinal question among ourselves. But we've relied upon the best data available to make reasonable estimates of how deportations could impact Christian families in the United States, and then highlighted those statistical estimates with profiles of individuals within Catholic and Protestant congregations throughout the country.

The findings are stark: Roughly one in 12 Christians in the United States are vulnerable to deportation or live with a family member who could be deported.

Our prayer with this report is that American Christians will recognize that these proposed deportations — to whatever extent they ultimately become a reality — are not just a policy issue, but a dynamic that will impact *us*, disciples of Jesus who are knit together in unity under Christ. Love for one another, Jesus said, is a sign to those outside of the Church that we indeed are Christ's disciples (John 13:35), but such love must go beyond vague expressions of

sympathy that do not actively care for the tangible needs of our brothers and sisters (James 2:14-16).

As you read this report, we hope that you will prayerfully ask the Lord what part you should play at a time when so many of your brothers and sisters are fearful of the impacts of deportation.

In Christ,



Walter Kim

President, National Association
of Evangelicals



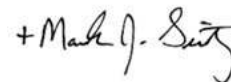
Todd M. Johnson

Co-Director, Center for the Study of
Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell
Theological Seminary



Myal Greene

President & CEO, World Relief



Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso

Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic
Bishops' Committee on Migration

THE PROMISE OF “THE LARGEST DEPORTATION IN U.S. HISTORY”

Deportation occurs when the federal government forcibly removes a non-citizen from the United States after concluding that the individual does not have a right to remain under U.S. law.

President Donald Trump promised repeatedly during the 2024 presidential campaign to carry out “the largest deportation in U.S. history.” Most Americans agree, of course, that individuals convicted of violent criminal offenses should be deported. However, President Trump has [suggested](#) deportations that extend well beyond this group, with actions that may be “hard” — particularly when it would require [separating mothers from children](#) — but which he deems necessary. An [executive order](#) signed on the first day of President Trump’s second term declares, “Removing promptly all aliens who enter or remain in violation of Federal law” to be the policy of his administration.

From a technical perspective, the legal action most commonly thought of as a deportation is referred to as a “removal.” The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is responsible for carrying out removals, often in coordination with the U.S. Department of Justice, whose Immigration Judges must determine that an individual is indeed removable under the law. In certain cases, the law allows for officials other than an Immigration Judge to make the determination that an individual should be removed and then to carry out an “expedited removal.” In either case, an individual who is removed is physically returned to their country of nationality or citizenship either by airplane or, for Mexicans or Canadians, by being forced across a land barrier.

In some cases, individuals who are not formally ordered to be removed are physically brought outside of the United States, particularly when someone has recently crossed a border without

authorization but is not formally charged with a Notice to Appear before an Immigration Judge or issued a Notice of Expedited Removal by a lower-level immigration official. In other circumstances, an individual facing the likelihood of formal removal may be given the option to repatriate “voluntarily” at their own expense. And in other cases, individuals who fear deportation or for whom life has become increasingly difficult may choose to repatriate themselves, which is sometimes referred to as “self-deportation.”

Because there is not a single technical meaning to the term “deportation,” there are different ways to calculate how many individuals being deported would account for “the largest deportation in U.S. history.” But what is clear is that the population of individuals who could be vulnerable to deportation under existing law is significant — and most of them are Christians.

WHO COULD BE AT RISK OF DEPORTATION?

Anyone who does not have a legal right to be physically present within the United States could be issued a Notice to Appear before an Immigration Judge and ultimately be ordered deported. That of course includes non-citizens who entered the United States unlawfully, crossing the border without inspection, regardless of how long they have been present within the United States. It also includes anyone who entered on a temporary non-immigrant visa — such as a tourist, student or temporary worker visa — but whose authorized stay has expired or who has violated the terms of their visa. These two broad categories of non-citizens — unlawful entrants and visa overstayers — are unlawfully present within the United States and are sometimes referred to as “undocumented” or “unauthorized.”

Not all immigrants are at risk of deportation, of course — naturalized U.S. citizens cannot be deported, nor can

CARLOS SANCHEZ

When Carlos Sanchez saw his dad arrive home bleeding and unable to speak, he knew his life in Venezuela would never be the same.

Carlos' father had been kidnapped (by whom, the family still doesn't know, but the kidnappers were very professional). He is still alive today, but the gangs took a lot of money from the family and threatened more violence against them. "That's when he started to make radical decisions for our lives," said Carlos, "and one of them was encouraging us to move out of Venezuela... At a really young age I realized how fragile life is and how meaningless life is in a place like Venezuela" (The U.S. State Department strongly urges U.S. citizens not to travel to Venezuela as a result of the dangerous conditions, and recommends that U.S. citizens currently stuck there should draft a will).

Carlos traveled lawfully to the U.S. on a student visa and earned a degree, making the dean's list and paying more than \$100,000 in tuition without taking out any loans. Before he graduated, the opportunity to apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) spared him from needing to return to danger in Venezuela.

Originally from a Catholic family, Carlos references many divine appointments with God and miracles that allowed him to find a church and later attend school in the U.S.

Carlos feels the 2024 election was over dramatized — that many Americans don't fully grasp the privilege of democracy, free elections, and the justice of checks and balances. He also says he has nothing against Donald Trump. After all, it was President Trump who initially used executive action to allow Venezuelans to stay lawfully in the U.S. and be authorized to work during his first administration, in light of the repressive and dangerous conditions in Venezuela.



"I think this nation has done great for immigrants. I don't think that's going to be completely removed. But Americans should not take for granted what they have. This is a beautiful nation."

Carlos has no criminal background and has paid taxes for years. "I'm a strong believer that Trump's administration is split into two [goals]: Remove anything that is hurting the nation, but help anything that is helping the nation," he says. "I believe that someone like me and thousands of other people that are here and have great backgrounds, I believe Trump is going to do something about that in a positive way."

"I think this nation has done great for immigrants. I don't think that's going to be completely removed. But Americans should not take for granted what they have. This is a beautiful nation."

native-born citizens who were citizens at birth under the authority of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, regardless of the legal status of their parents.

Similarly, Lawful Permanent Residents — immigrants sometimes described as having their “green cards” — cannot be deported unless they violate the terms of their residence, such as by being convicted of particular criminal offenses. Similarly, individuals present on a non-immigrant visa could only face the risk of deportation after their authorized stay expires or if they violate the terms of their visa, such as by accepting employment on a visa that does not include employment authorization or by not being enrolled in school while on a student visa.

However, beyond these categories, there are also various categories of non-citizens who are lawfully present in the United States — at least for the moment — who nevertheless could be at risk of deportation. That includes individuals with temporary statuses or protections that could be withdrawn by the executive branch, without the need for congressional approval.

Temporary Protected Status

Under the authority of a law passed by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush in 1990, the Secretary of Homeland Security has the authority to grant Temporary Protected Status to individuals who are physically present in the U.S. as of a particular date when the conditions in their country of origin make it unsafe for them to return for reasons such as war, conflict, a natural disaster or a public health epidemic.

Qualifying individuals — whether present on a temporary lawful basis or without any valid legal status — must pay a fee to apply for TPS and, if approved, are lawfully present and eligible for employment authorization for up to 18 months. The Secretary of Homeland Security may extend these

protections in up-to-18-month intervals if they determine the country continues to meet the legal conditions for TPS.

As of [September 2024](#), roughly 1.1 million individuals were lawfully present in the United States under Temporary Protected Status. More than 95 percent of these individuals come from five countries: Venezuela, Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras and Ukraine, though there are also individuals with TPS from South Sudan, Ethiopia, Nepal and several other countries.

While some TPS holders have arrived in the U.S. relatively recently, more than 200,000 individuals from El Salvador or Honduras have been in the U.S. since at least 2001, as their “temporary” protected status has been renewed repeatedly. Not surprisingly, given that they have been lawfully present in the United States for roughly a quarter century or longer, many of these individuals have built lives in the United States and have U.S.-citizen children and even grandchildren.

Early in the new administration, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem reversed extensions of TPS for [Venezuelans](#) and [Haitians](#) made in the final days of the Biden administration and [terminated](#) the 2023 designation of TPS for Venezuelans. Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans and Haitians are now poised to become vulnerable to deportation in the coming months, though these actions could face legal challenges.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under the Obama administration announced a new policy inviting particular individuals — who had arrived as children (before their 16th birthday) on or before June 15, 2007, who did not have serious criminal convictions and who were either currently enrolled in school or had graduated from school, among other requirements — to request “Deferred Action.”

VILÈS DORSAINVIL

As executive director for the Haitian Community Help & Support Center in Springfield, Ohio — as well as a community liaison for Clark County Commissioner's Office — Vilès Dorsainvil fielded more media calls in late 2024 than he ever would have wished.

But as a native Haitian and minister, when he looks back on that time, he looks with a pastor's heart, concerned primarily for Haitian people living in that city.

The Springfield community was deeply disturbed with bomb threats and other panic after social media rumors about Haitian migrants there were repeated in presidential debates. "It was disturbing," he says. "It was panicking, because mentally speaking, the Haitians here — they were not ready for that... It was a traumatizing time for them."

As a high schooler, Vilès watched his father, to whom he was very close, suffer a stroke and eventually die. Vilès found solace in Christ after his death: "I came to realize that giving him my life and my heart was the best thing I could do." He decided to go into ministry and enrolled in a Moravian seminary located in Jamaica, the United Theological College of the West Indies.

Haitian gangsters had started taking over the streets and targeting people, especially professionals who were assumed to have more money. "Many of us coming — it's not because we were looking for jobs," says Vilès. "We were being pushed away by the situations. You had to choose between your life and the job you had." He left Haiti with a tourist visa on New Year's Eve, 2020, and eventually the Biden administration approved TPS for Vilès and other Haitians.



"Many of us coming — it's not because we were looking for jobs. We were being pushed away by the situations. You had to choose between your life and the job you had."

"I am a community-oriented person. I am a Christian and I love Jesus. I like to serve people. I think serving people is my calling," says Vilès. Still, he has no intention of starting over in Haiti. If he had to leave the country, he would head the opposite direction for Canada, where he has some family.

Vilès attends Central Christian Church in Springfield, Ohio, and occasionally preaches there.

Essentially, this policy allowed a subset of these immigrants often known as “Dreamers” to receive a temporary, renewable reprieve from the risk of deportation and be authorized to work lawfully. Various administrations have exercised deferred action prior to the Obama administration, but the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy has been notable because of the significant number of individuals who have benefited from it — more than [800,000](#) at one time or another.

Because DACA was created by administrative action, not as a result in a change of law, it could presumably also be cancelled by the executive branch. Indeed, the Trump administration sought to do so in [September 2017](#). That action faced legal challenges, and in 2020 the U.S. Supreme Court [sustained](#) the DACA policy because it said the Trump administration had not followed the proper procedure to terminate it — though the court also effectively made clear that the executive branch would indeed have the right to terminate this administrative program if they followed the proper procedure.

Shortly after that 2020 court decision, however, a separate lawsuit — not challenging the Trump administration’s efforts to terminate DACA, but the Obama administration’s legal authority to create it in the first place — proceeded, and Judge Andrew Hanen ruled in 2021 that DACA had been created unlawfully. While Judge Hanen stayed part of the impacts of that decision, such that individuals who already benefit from DACA still were allowed to renew, the decision barred the Department of Homeland Security from adjudicating new applications for DACA. That included [roughly 100,000](#) DACA applications submitted between the re-opening of DACA applications after the 2020 U.S. Supreme Court decision, most of which presumably came from individuals who were too young when the Trump administration closed off new

DACA applications the first time, in 2017 (an individual generally had to be at least 15 years old to request DACA).

At present, roughly [530,000](#) individuals continue to benefit from DACA, awaiting a final decision on the legal challenge to the program. In January 2025, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals largely [affirmed](#) the lower court’s finding, but kept in play the stay such that existing DACA beneficiaries can continue to renew their status — until the U.S. Supreme Court makes a final decision.

Notably, though these hundreds of thousands of young people entered the United States as children, since to be eligible for DACA they would have to have resided here continuously since June 15, 2007, at this point they are almost all adults, largely in their 20s, 30s or even 40s. Many have had children of their own: An [estimated 300,000 U.S.-citizen children](#) live with at least one parent who is a DACA recipient.

Individuals with DACA could be at risk of deportation either if the Trump administration (or any subsequent presidential administration) would follow the appropriate processes to terminate DACA or if the U.S. Supreme Court would agree with the lower courts that the program was created illegally and, as a result, invalidate the policy. That would not mean that individuals would immediately face deportation, but they would be vulnerable to deportation under the law — and they presumably would lose the legal authority to accept employment and thus to provide for themselves and their families.

[Most](#) “Dreamers” at this point do not have DACA, since they arrived after June 15, 2007 and thus do not qualify for the program, even if they came as small children and have spent most of their lives in the United States. Others technically meet the qualifications for DACA, but as a result of current legal challenges, United States Citizenship & Immigration Services can receive their applications and fees, but

OKSANA SAVKA

Americans still ask Oksana Savka whether the war in Ukraine is still going on.

Yes — every day there are bombings, she tells them. But it's not in the news anymore.

Oksana's husband pastored a church in Ukraine for 13 years, and their ministry was a model for any couple in church leadership. They hosted Bible studies and counseled married couples; she taught Sunday school and served in the worship band; they had two children (including one adopted), founded an orphan ministry through Eastern European Ministry International, and placed 500 children in their forever families over the course of 20 years. For the first seven months of the war, Oksana and Peter often hid in the basement of their apartment during bombings. But they also helped refugees through their local church, providing meals and clothing to over 1,000 people.

To their great relief, the couple escaped to the U.S. to join their daughter and grandkids in 2022. Now Oksana works at World Relief helping other Ukrainians resettle, which provides a powerful bond for newcomers; Oksana entered through the Uniting for Ukraine parole sponsorship program, and subsequently was granted Temporary Protected Status.

"I feel like Joseph from the Bible story. God sent me first. I still have this feeling that God prepared the whole way for me just to be able to help other Ukrainians."

Oksana had mixed feelings watching the 2024 campaign. She recalls former President Trump's promise to stop the war, but wonders: If he can accomplish that, but then kicks her out of the U.S., what then?



"If there would be some kind of pathway [to residence] for those who want, people would really, really appreciate this. They can be very good workers and good citizens for United States."

Oksana sees many families who wish they could go back; coming to the U.S. was not the dream of their life. But, she says, "If there would be some kind of pathway [to residence] for those who want, people would really, really appreciate this. They can be very good workers and good citizens for United States. I don't know how to prove to Trump and his administration; we are good people."

is barred from adjudicating their cases, pending a final disposition of the legal challenge.

Encouragingly, President Trump has [stated](#), post-election, that he hopes to find a bipartisan legislative solution for Dreamers — but given that bipartisan proposals such as the Dream Act have been introduced time after time since 2001 but have not been passed into law, that will be a challenging task.

Deferred Enforced Departure

Similar to Deferred Action — but granted by the president, rather than the Department of Homeland Security — Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) is an administrative tool used by various administrations to defer immigration enforcement actions for particular groups of people. Like DACA and TPS, it also allows individuals to apply for employment authorization.

Citing the human rights abuses of the government of Nicolas Maduro, President Trump [issued](#) DED for most Venezuelans who were present in the United States as of January 20, 2021, in one of his final actions of his first term as president. President Biden subsequently extended TPS to many of these same individuals. Both President Trump and President Biden also extended DED for certain Liberians, and President Biden extended DED to individuals from Hong Kong, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

Like DACA or TPS, though, DED is granted by the executive branch and could thus likely be terminated (or simply not renewed) by the executive branch as well, if the appropriate procedure is followed. Notably, individuals who apply for employment authorization based upon any of these programs must pay application fees and subject themselves to regular criminal background checks, so by definition they have already been found not to have been convicted of serious crimes or to be a national security threat.

Humanitarian Parole

[U.S. law](#) allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to “parole” an immigrant into the country who otherwise does not qualify for admission, but “only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit” — a phrase not further defined in the law and thus widely debated, particularly as the Biden administration granted parole to a large number of individuals, including:

- Afghans who were evacuated upon the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in 2021, including many at risk because of their service to the U.S. military
- Individuals from specific countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Ukraine and others who were sponsored by an individual or group of individuals (including some church groups) in the United States who pledged to be financially responsible for them
- Certain individuals who arrived at the U.S-Mexico border, including many who made appointments via the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s CBP One app, allowing them to enter the United States and apply for asylum.

Those who entered the country with parole are typically eligible to apply for employment authorization, allowing them to work and provide for themselves. However, just as parole can be granted at the discretion of the Secretary of Homeland Security, it can also be withdrawn, and within the first several days of the second Trump administration, they announced the review of parole sponsorship programs with the intent to terminate those not in alignment with the administration’s priorities. They also cancelled pending CBP One appointments for those seeking to enter lawfully at a port of entry and seek asylum and issued [instructions](#) for Immigration & Customs Enforcement to terminate parole for at least some of these individuals, such that they could be issued a Notice to Appear for a removal

ANA & BERNARDO

Contrary to the stereotypes of many migrants, Ana and Bernardo feel at times they might have been better off, professionally, had they been able to stay in El Salvador.

At the end of the civil war there, Bernardo says, gangs would kidnap very wealthy people and ask for a million dollars ransom. But those millionaires all left the country, leaving the white-collar professionals to be targeted. And Ana and Bernardo are both dentists.

As Ana was leaving a shift at their dental clinic one day in 1994, a man demanded her car. He pushed her to the passenger seat with a gun at her stomach and drove her around for four hours. Miraculously, after pleading with him, he let her go.

After that, Ana didn't want to drive or go anywhere or be alone. Sleep was hard to come by.

At the time they had a beautiful house, the clinic, and Bernardo was a director for the dental school, working in the clinic all day doing oral surgeries. He had also been elected twice as a member of the Salvadoran Dental Society (similar to the American Dental Association in the U.S.). They were active in their Catholic church.

But the kidnapping was too much. They both agreed to leave it all and come to the U.S., where during their first few years Ana worked overnight doing graveyard shifts at Taco Bell and Target so that one of them could always be with the kids. Earthquakes prompted the U.S. to offer TPS to individuals from El Salvador in 2001, which applied to Ana & Bernardo. They have been able to live and work lawfully for more than two decades now, as healthcare workers, but they realize that could change.

"Hearing a presidential candidate say that people on TPS are delinquents, that they belong in an asylum... it made me sad and

*"... there's so much uncertainty.
If we keep on looking at that,
we're going to sink in the water
just like Peter started to do when
he took his eyes off of Jesus. So
we try to keep running the race
with our eyes on the prize."*

frustrated," says Bernardo. "I just think, how can a person that is going to be president of a great, great nation not research what people on a certain immigration status are really like?" Those on TPS are thoroughly fingerprinted and vetted every 12 or 18 months when their status is renewed. They also pay a hefty fee every time to be able to live and work here.

Their eldest daughter was a pastor for almost a decade before feeling compelled to work in helping immigrants and refugees full time after experiencing the attempted cancellation of TPS during the first Trump administration. Their son is now a youth pastor of a church in Texas, along with his wife. Bernardo plays drums and bass guitar in the worship ministry at their current church, and Ana helps with the kids, in the greeting ministry, and elsewhere, along with their youngest daughter who is a U.S. citizen.

"Even though TPS has been extended for a year and a half, [for] which we're so thankful and blessed, that decision can be reversed or stopped. So there's so much uncertainty," Bernardo says. "If we keep on looking at that, we're going to sink in the water just like Peter started to do when he took his eyes off of Jesus. So we try to keep running the race with our eyes on the prize. And that's all we have."

hearing or, for certain individuals, subject to expedited removal. In late March 2025, Secretary Noem [announced](#) that parole for an estimated 532,000 individuals from four particular countries would be terminated in the coming month, at which point these individuals will be subject to removal, barring legal challenges.

Asylum Seekers Awaiting Final Disposition of an Immigration Court Proceeding

Lastly, there are a significant number of individuals present in the United States who could be at risk of deportation after the final disposition of their immigration court proceedings, if they are not granted asylum or other relief by an immigration judge.

U.S. law allows any individual in the United States, whether on a temporary visa or by reaching the border, to seek asylum, presenting evidence that they face a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin on account of their race, religion, political opinion, national origin or membership in a particular social group. The burden of proof is on the applicant to present documentary evidence that they qualify.

Asylum can either be granted “affirmatively,” when an asylum officer within U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services assesses the case of an individual who was lawfully admitted to the United States in a temporary capacity or has not been placed in removal proceedings, or it can be granted by an immigration judge once an individual is already in removal proceedings. Many individuals who have arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border in recent years have sought asylum, including many who made an appointment at a lawful port of entry using the CBP One app and were allowed to enter the country with a Notice to Appear for immigration court.

While both the [Biden administration](#) and the new [Trump administration](#) have dramatically curtailed due process for asylum seekers who arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border in the past year, many

individuals remain present in the United States awaiting asylum hearings. From entering the United States to a final disposition of an asylum claim, the full process can take several years. While these individuals with pending asylum claims have a right to due process under the law and are not unlawfully present for the moment, they could face deportation if they either fail to attend a court hearing and are ordered deported “in absentia,” or if a judge determines that they do not qualify for asylum.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON U.S. CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLDS AND CHURCHES

Among these categories of individuals who are at risk of deportation — should any administration seek to deport as many individuals as legally within their authority without any change to U.S. law — are many Christians, given that Christianity is, by far, the religion of the large majority of those in these categories. We estimate that, **as of the end of 2024, there were more than 10 million Christian immigrants present in the United States who are vulnerable to deportation**, including those with no legal status, as well as those with a temporary status or protections that could be withdrawn.

Furthermore, because many of these individuals live in households with U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, or others who are generally not subject to deportation, the impact on American Christian households goes well beyond those directly at risk of deportation. We find that **nearly 7 million U.S.-citizen Christians live within the same households of those at risk of deportation**. Most of these U.S. citizens are spouses or minor children of the immigrant at risk of deportation.

While the immigrant may be at risk of deportation, a U.S.-citizen spouse or child cannot be deported under U.S. law.

FATHER KRISTOPHER COWLES

Father Kristopher Cowles' South Dakota Catholic parish, he estimates, is 60-70 percent foreign born, with the majority of those being first generation in the United States. Deportation, he says, would be a major loss for the body.

While in seminary, Kristopher was asked if he was open to learning a new language. It was surprising, he says, because "I'm as gringo-ish as gringo can be."

He lived in Guadalajara, Mexico, for two months doing 6-8 hours of intensive classes each day. Then he did another six months with very little ministry, and then was made the pastor of the only dominantly Hispanic parish in the diocese.

He's now "somewhat fluent," but still struggles sometimes to articulate in the moment — not unlike his parishioners learning English.

Kristopher wants to do whatever he can to prevent family separation. Often he is asked to write letters of reference for families making their way through immigration court. When they're seeking to legalize their situation, it helps to prove to the court that they've been present and active in the community. The government can't look into his files, but Kristopher will sign a letter verifying the length of time that they've been a member of the parish, giving financially, taking Communion, etc.

"Whether we recognize it or not, so many of our laws make it nearly impossible to have a course forward even if they want to do so legally," he points out.

Immigrants in Kristopher's parish have been paying into Social Security for up to 20 or 30 years. They have not, and will not, receive a single benefit from that program.



"I wish lawmakers would understand the sacrifices that so many people have gone through, and what so many of them are running from."

"I wish lawmakers would understand the sacrifices that so many people have gone through, and what so many of them are running from," he says. "Some are just looking for a better life and some are looking to just survive."

In the meantime, in the weeks to come, he will continue to practice authentic presence, making sure his parishioners know he's willing to walk with them, suffer with them, and struggle with them.

When one member of a family is ordered deported, the family faces a dilemma: In some cases, a U.S.-citizen husband will decide to expatriate himself with his wife, but that may mean leaving behind his job and means of supporting the family, being required to adjust to a new culture and language and potentially living within the same threats to his public safety or health that inspired his wife to migrate in the first case. When U.S.-citizen children are involved, the decisions can be even more difficult: Some families repatriate as a family, avoiding separation, but others make the difficult decision to have a parent not facing deportation stay behind with U.S.-citizen children, or to find a relative or even a foster family to care for their children so that they can benefit from the relative safety, educational opportunities and economic well-being available in the United States but not in their parent's country of origin.

In some cases, a U.S.-citizen husband, wife or child repatriating to their deportable loved one's country of origin could also mean abandoning the religious freedom that is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution but is not respected by all countries. Some parents would rather their son or daughter stay with loved ones — relatives or members of their church community — in the United States, where they can worship Jesus freely, rather than have them travel to a context where Christians face persecution.

For Christians who believe that God has established the family unit in Creation as the central building block of society and who believe that “what God has joined together” in marriage should not be separated (Matthew 19:4-6), the possibility of governmental action contributing to marriages being divided or children being raised apart from one or both parents due to deportations is a sobering public policy concern.

Overall, we find that 8 percent of all Christians in the United States are either personally at risk of deportation or are household members of those at risk of deportation. That's one out of every 12 Christians in the U.S. — including one out of 18 evangelical Christians and nearly one out of five Catholics — that are vulnerable to deportation or could lose at least one family member if the United States government were to deport all of those vulnerable to deportation without any change in law.

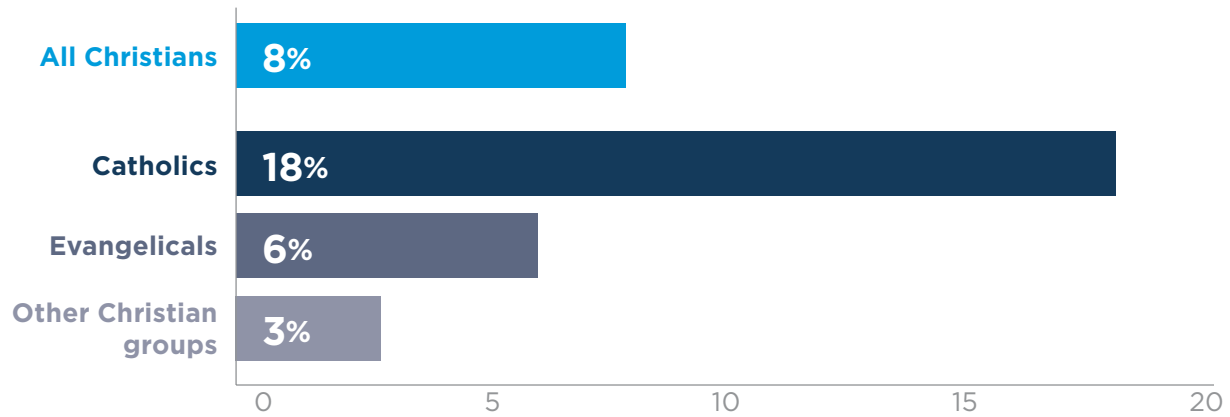
That's because the vast majority of individuals at risk of deportation are Christians: 80 percent of all of those at risk of deportation are Christians. Sixty-one percent of those at risk of deportation are Catholic, 13 percent are evangelical and 7 percent are adherents to other Christian traditions.

Among DACA recipients, the share who are Christian is even higher: 87 percent of all DACA recipients are Christians. More than three-quarters of TPS holders are Christian: More than half are Catholic and about one in seven are evangelical. Among asylum seekers, which includes those who have professed a fear of persecution specifically on account of their religious beliefs, 58 percent are Catholic, 14 percent are evangelical and 5 percent are other Christians.

While beyond the scope of this report, we also note that deportations may have devastating consequences for particular congregations. In some cases, if the pastor is deported, the congregation may be unable to find a new leader. Similarly, if a substantial portion of the congregation is deported, the church may close. In these cases, even church members who are citizens or legal permanent residents will be deeply impacted. In other cases, fear of deportation may deter some church members from attending services at all, again affecting the entire congregation.

SIGNIFICANT PORTIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA WOULD BE IMPACTED BY DEPORTATIONS OF ALL THOSE AT RISK

% of U.S. Christian groups who are vulnerable to deportation or live with someone who could be deported

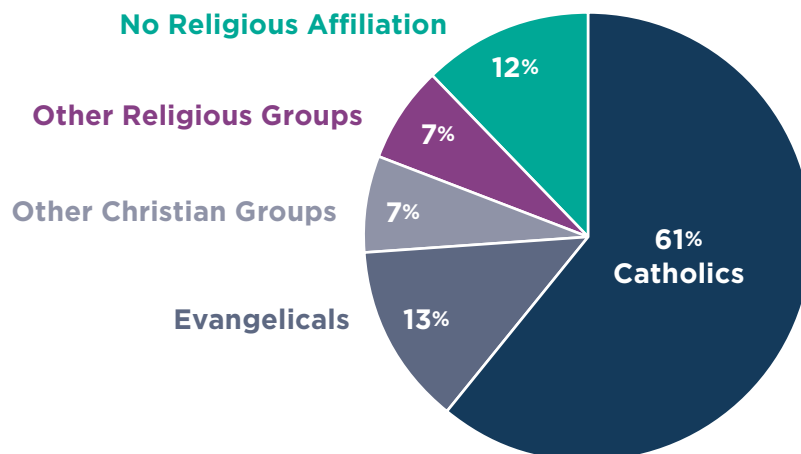


Note: Estimates are as of the end of 2024 and include non-citizens without permanent residency or a temporary nonimmigrant visa as well as household members living with them regardless of their place of birth or immigration status. Religious affiliation is largely based on self-reporting in global census and survey data. See methodology for more information.

Source: World Christian Database estimates, based on demographic data from FWD.us as derived from the 2023 American Community Survey, and other global census, religious communities, and survey data.

THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF IMMIGRANTS AT RISK OF DEPORTATION ARE CHRISTIANS

Religious affiliation of the non-citizen population without legal status or with temporary legal protections in the U.S.

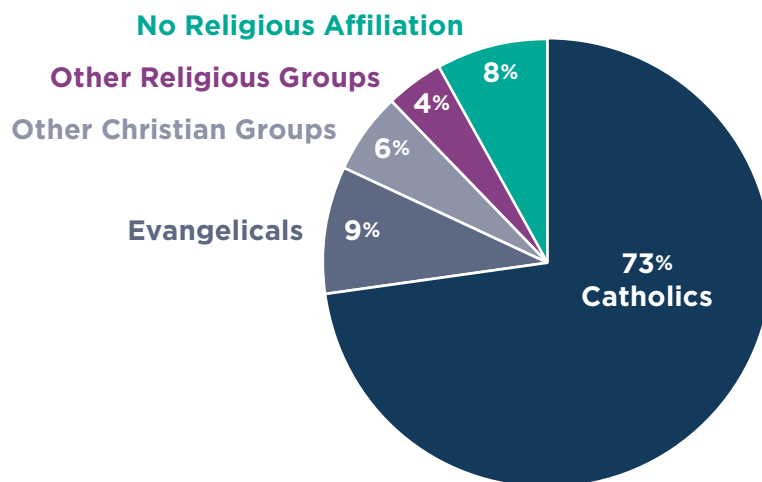


Note: Estimates are as of the end of 2024 and include non-citizens without permanent residency or a temporary nonimmigrant visa. Religious affiliation is largely based on self-reporting in global census and survey data. See methodology for more information.

Source: World Christian Database estimates, based on demographic data from FWD.us as derived from the 2023 American Community Survey, and other global census, religious communities, and survey data.

DACA RECIPIENTS

Religious affiliation of DACA recipients in the U.S.

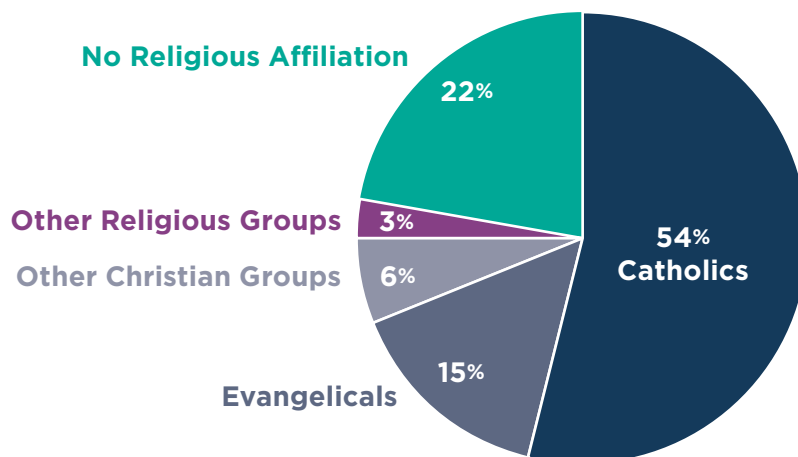


Note: Estimates are as of the end of 2024. Religious affiliation is largely based on self-reporting in global census and survey data. See methodology for more information.

Source: World Christian Database estimates, based on demographic data from FWD.us as derived from the 2023 American Community Survey, and other global census, religious communities, and survey data.

TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS HOLDERS

Religious affiliation of TPS recipients in the U.S.

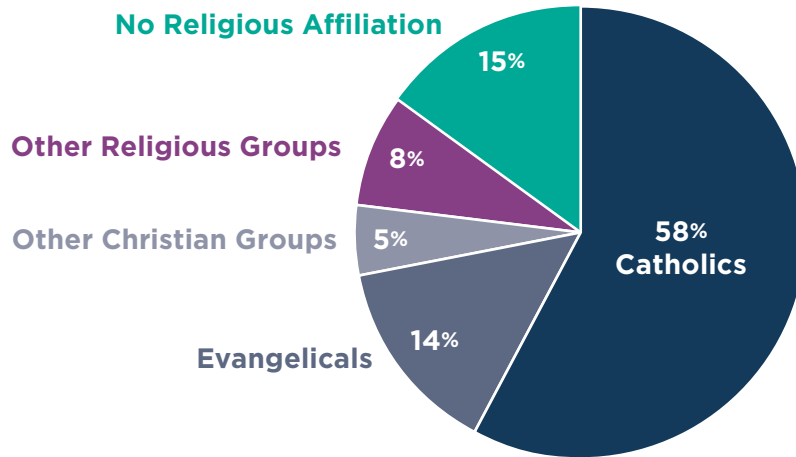


Note: Estimates are as of the end of 2024. Religious affiliation is largely based on self-reporting in global census and survey data. See methodology for more information.

Source: World Christian Database estimates, based on demographic data from FWD.us as derived from the 2023 American Community Survey, and other global census and survey data, and data from religious communities.

PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM

Religious affiliation of asylum seekers in the U.S.



Note: Estimates are as of the end of 2024. Religious affiliation is largely based on self-reporting in global census and survey data. See methodology for more information.

Source: World Christian Database estimates, based on demographic data from FWD.us as derived from the 2023 American Community Survey, and other global census and survey data, and data from religious communities.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this report should be sobering to Christians of every background: Roughly 1 in 12 Christians stands to be deported or have at least one family member deported, should the current administration or a future administration attempt to deport as many individuals as possible under existing law.

According to a [December 2024 survey](#) by the Bulfinch Group and the National Immigration Forum, a large majority of all Americans — including 62 percent of Catholics and 70 percent of evangelical Protestants — want violent criminals and those with final orders of deportation to be the priority for immigration enforcement, not all who are undocumented. Congress could limit the scope of deportations to these individuals by appropriating resources sufficient for such deportations, but not dramatically more.

If the administration would follow through on its stated goal to remove all non-citizens who enter or remain in violation of immigration law — and continue to remove temporary protections such that a broader share of immigrants would fall into the latter category — the impacts would be profound on congregations throughout the United States and on families that would be likely to experience separation.

Our prayer is that the president and his administration as well as the Congress will take these stark realities into consideration as they pursue immigration policies.

Just as importantly, we pray that the whole of the American church, including the 11 out of 12 Christian households not at risk of losing a family member to deportation, will recognize that this suffering that is likely to affect many parts of the body of Christ actually impacts them as well.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the immigrant population vulnerable to deportation and their household members, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, was obtained from FWD.us based on their immigrant status assignment process in the 2023 American Community Survey. FWD's methodology also projects this population forward to September 30, 2024. For more information on these data, consult FWD.us' [methodology](#).

Religious affiliation breakdowns for the overall immigrant population by country of birth was obtained from the Pew Research Center's recent report, "[The Religious Composition of the World's Migrants](#)." These broad religious group breakdowns were applied to FWD.us' population estimates for the population of individuals vulnerable to deportation and other immigrants living in their household. Consequently, it is assumed that the religious breakdown of immigrants vulnerable to deportation or any other immigration status by their country of birth do not differ from the overall immigrant population in the U.S.

The Christian breakdowns were obtained from the [World Christian Database](#) using data from the immigrant group's country of birth. This assumes that immigrants who are Christian in the U.S. have migrated at the same rate across all sub-Christian groups within each country of origin. For example, this method assumes that the Christian breakdown of Mexican immigrants at risk of deportation from the U.S., regardless of when they migrated, is the same as the Christian breakdown of Christians currently living in Mexico. It is possible that some Christian groups that are more represented in the U.S. compared with origin countries of undocumented immigrants, such as evangelicals, may have been more likely to migrate than other Christian groups or change their Christian religious affiliation after migrating. Due to a

lack of data, this possible religious selection and religious conversion effects across Christian groups is not taken into account in these estimates.

The religious affiliation of U.S. citizens living with immigrants at risk of deportation is based on World Christian Database estimates of religion by ethnicity while the Christian breakdowns were derived by applying the detailed religious distribution for the U.S.-born population from the Pew Research Center's [2014 Religious Landscape Survey](#) by race and ethnicity.

Religious affiliation is the self-reported religious affiliation of individuals, often in surveys of adults, and may not always reflect actual religious practice. Although some minor children may not currently or end up practicing the faith of their parents, the religious distribution of immigrants and U.S.-citizen children reflects the same breakdown as adults from the same countries of birth or U.S.-born adults.

Some immigrant groups that have spent most of their lives in the U.S., such as those who came as children, often referred to as Dreamers and of which some are DACA recipients, may have changed their religious affiliation as adults to reflect more the U.S. general population, and consequently likely may be more religiously unaffiliated than shown in this report. Other individuals that have lived in the U.S. for many years may also have changed their religious affiliation, and are less reflected in the estimates provided in this report.

Total religious group populations used as the denominator in calculating the share of each Christian group that are vulnerable to deportation or live with an individual vulnerable to deportation is based on 2024 estimates for the U.S. from the [World Christian Database](#).

Christians are a broad religious group that encompasses many different denominations. Catholics largely represent members of the Roman Catholic Church.

Evangelicals largely consist of those stating they've had a born-again experience and can include Protestants like Baptists and Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and non-denominational groups and movements. Those categorized as Other Christians include those such as Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, and Mainline Protestants, among others, who are individuals that self-identify as Christian and do not affiliate with Catholic or Evangelical groups.

Religion figures were estimated by Gina Zurlo, Editor of the World Christian Database, with assistance from Phillip Connor, Senior Demographer and Immigration Fellows Director at FWD.us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FINAL NOTES

The authoring organizations wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of FWD.US and the National Immigration Forum for their assistance on this report. We also thank the individuals who agreed to allow us to share their personal testimonies — some of whom, at their request, are included with pseudonyms to protect their privacy or that of their family members — and journalist Laura Finch, who interviewed these individuals.

Please also note that nothing in this document is intended as legal advice. We encourage any individuals in need of legal counsel or assistance to consult with an experienced immigration attorney or a non-profit organization, including those supported by the [Catholic Legal Immigration Network](#) or by [World Relief](#), which are recognized by the [U.S. Department of Justice](#) to provide legal guidance on immigration matters.



NAE | National Association of
Evangelicals



world relief 