



DORDT COLLEGE

Digital Collections @ Dordt

---

Faculty Work: Comprehensive List

---

8-26-2015

# Who Must Take the Lead in Immigration Reform?

Abby M. Foreman

Dordt College, [abby.foreman@dordt.edu](mailto:abby.foreman@dordt.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty\\_work](http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work)

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Foreman, Abby M., "Who Must Take the Lead in Immigration Reform?" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 311.  
[http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty\\_work/311](http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/311)

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Work: Comprehensive List by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

---

# Who Must Take the Lead in Immigration Reform?

## **Abstract**

"What gets us closer to a world where people are living in right relationship with one another, with creation, and with God?"

Posting about a responsive immigration system from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/who-must-take-the-lead-in-immigration-reform/>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, emigration and immigration, government policy, social justice

## **Disciplines**

Christianity | Sociology

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# Who must take the lead in immigration reform?

---

 [all in allthings.org/who-must-take-the-lead-in-immigration-reform/](http://allthings.org/who-must-take-the-lead-in-immigration-reform/)

Abby Foreman

## Policymaking Probs

In class last spring, my students and I watched a Frontline documentary exploring the impact that decreased funding for mental health hospitals has on prisons. We watched as a prison social worker asked an inmate, in preparation for his release, if he knew his medication schedule and when to take which med and how often. The man did not have the ability to speak in coherent sentences about his medication plan and it was not clear that he even understood the question. The man was released, his term in prison was up, and off he went back into society with little or no support.

After the film ended, I turned up the lights and we began to discuss the film in class. We continued the discussion through online responses later that week. This one man, more than the others portrayed in the film, had students worried and more than a little curious: *How can he be expected to stay on his medications without any support? Shouldn't the prison do more to help his transition? Well, maybe that's not the prison's responsibility or purpose, but who should help him? Isn't there a program out there?* The students' questions did a lot to reveal the expectations that we all have about quality of life, our responsibility to others, and also a general uncertainty about who, or what, should be responsible for the vulnerable in our society. Who is responsible? The government? The church? Nonprofit community organizations? Or is each man, woman, or child on their own? These questions are foundational to our study of social policy and the development of social welfare response in developed countries. In reviewing our social welfare policies and systems in the US, we see that our collective response is often one that includes a mixture of state, community nonprofit and faith-based organizations, and individual involvement.

Our political leanings typically reflect our preferences to either have social problems handled primarily by government or by more local, community-based organizations. In the context of immigration reform, it is widely recognized that the government *must* take the lead in determining the structural parameters for lawful immigration. In addition, it must also make a decision about how to resolve the legal and social complications that arise for those who live in the United States – sometimes for decades – without the proper documentation. Community organizations, churches, and individuals can each do their part to help care for their neighbors, and many already do, but the government needs to set the policy that defines immigration, creates expedient avenues for legal immigration that meets US labor needs and humanitarian goals, and solves the broken parts of the current system.

I do not hear anyone argue that our current system is so good that it should remain unchanged — most agree that it needs to be reformed. However, we haven't come to an agreement on how to proceed. We can point to increased partisanship gridlock in Congress, or point to failed presidential leadership. Congress and the President are easy targets for blame, but in the context of studying this from a policy standpoint, I believe there may be more at play.

Mary Anne Poe, in her chapter “Good news for the poor: Christian influences on social welfare,” <sup>1</sup> argues that *all policies and programs are reflections of our values about people and also our responsibility to them*. Ingram, Schneider, and de Leon<sup>2</sup> argue a similar point using a social construction framework: if a social group is viewed favorably, policies that are created are more generous, whereas if the group is viewed negatively, the policies tools tend to be more punitive and stingy. There can be valid reasons for

different types of policy solutions, but it is rather clear that it matters a great deal what is thought about, or valued, about the group around which the policy is created. As Soerens makes clear in his [article](#), there is significant difference in how immigrants, both legal or illegal, are viewed and valued in our society generally and also among Christians. We may need to back up a bit to examine how our values are influencing our views of people; we may need to engage with one another in civil dialogue about these things.

In traditional policy analysis, the criteria for evaluation are assumed to be neutral and objective — things like adequacy, efficiency, and effectiveness. These are all good criteria to use to determine the usefulness and effectiveness of a particular policy. As Christians, we can use criteria like efficiency, adequacy, and equity when evaluating policy, but we should not stop there. We must ask ourselves not only *does this work*, but *how should it work? What ought to be? What gets us closer to a world where people are living in right relationship with one another, with creation, and with God?* For these questions, we should also evaluate policy solutions using criteria of biblical justice, respect for persons (based on the belief that all people are created in the image of God), and mercy. Policy — by definition — creates boundaries between the eligible and the ineligible, the available benefits or consequences for abiding by or violating a policy. As we participate politically in [advocating for a more responsive immigration system](#), or as we evaluate the proposed solutions of the myriad presidential candidates, it is important for us to remember to question how our values as Christ-followers are reflected in proposed policy solutions.

---

## Footnotes

1. Poe, M. Good news for the poor: Christian influences on social welfare. In Huguenot, B. and Laine-Scales, T. *Christianity and Social Work: Readings on the Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice*, 3rd Ed. Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work. ↩
2. Ingram, H., Schneider, A., & deLeon, P. Social construction and policy design. In Sabatier, P., Ed. *Theories of the Policy Process*. (2007). Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ↩