

Who Will Care for the Rest? Obama's Executive Action on Immigration¹

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The response to President Obama's brief but pointed reference to the need for immigration reform during his State of the Union address on January 20, 2015, was predictably polarized. Under the headline "Dreamers at State of the Union Hope Obama Continues to Push Forward on Immigration," the Huffington Post noted that Obama's audience included twenty-one-year-old Ana Zamora and several other undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children.² NBC News, on the other hand, reported that

1. This article originally appeared on the website for the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California, January 21, 2015, <http://crcc.usc.edu/blog/news/who-will-care-for-the-rest-executive-action-on-immigration/>. It is reprinted here in a slightly edited form with permission.

2. Elise Foley, "Dreamers at State of the Union Hope to Push Forward on Immigration," *Huffington Post*, January 21, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/21/obama-dreamers_n_6508692.html.

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Representative Steve King (R-Iowa) lambasted the president for inviting a “deportable” to the event.³

In November 2014, Obama announced that he would take executive action in favor of some of the millions of undocumented people in this country. According to current estimates, about 48% of the undocumented could potentially qualify for the relief offered by the president’s plan. The details and the qualification process are still not clear, but this action has created a great deal of anticipation among immigrant advocates and the Latino community in particular. On the other hand, Republicans in the House of Representatives have taken action against the president by voting to defund Homeland Security unless he rescinds the action, and seventeen states have sued the Obama administration in court to stop the implementation of the executive order.

President Obama’s action represents a victory for immigration activists. But it is merely one victory in a very long fight. It is yet to be seen how the war on immigration will end. It is also not clear what impact this executive action will have on Latino voting patterns in the 2016 election and whether Latino votes will make a difference at the ballot box.

This flurry of activity—not to be confused with definitive progress—comes after a stretch of time during which the number of deportations under the Obama administration has increased nearly every year.⁴ In fact, though some of the figures can be explained away by a change in the way the statistics are reported,⁵ this president has overseen the deportation of more people than several pre-

3. Luke Russert, “Rep. Steve King Says Obama Invited ‘Deportable’ to State of the Union,” NBC News, January 20, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2015-state-of-the-union/rep-steve-king-says-obama-invited-deportable-state-union-n290021>.

4. See the yearly reports and removal statistics of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, <http://www.ice.gov/removal-statistics>.

5. See Alan Gomez, “Voices: Obama Deportee in Chief? Not Quite,” *USA Today*, April 15, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/04/15/voices-gomez-obama-deportation-record/7562779/>