


13 Realities As An Undocumented Immigrant During the 2016 Election

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As an undocumented transgender Colombiana, I am concerned by the level of misunderstanding of immigrants' push factors of migration and realities. Migration is a symptom of inhumane, imperialistic, and colonialist U.S. foreign policy and the militaristic, unilateral, and hawkish way the U.S. has and continues to interact with the world. In order to champion immigrant rights, we must address the root causes of oppression that leads one to leave their home and culture. What is most surprising is that those same push factors of migration: Islamophobia, the War on Terror, money in politics, the Carceral State, the War on Drugs, and climate change are all elements of Foreign Policy that affect people in the U.S. and abroad. Please note all of the aforementioned disproportionately affects immigrants, people of color, transgender and queer folks. Yet, little to no attention is given to immigration, detention, and foreign policy by those eligible to participate in the U.S. democratic process.

As it is, the current immigrant justice movement in the U.S. is about understanding the root causes of migration while fighting for our right to breathe and walk unapologetically in our truth.

Today, with over 11.2 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. the problem is not undocumented people in the U.S. but the government.

The current immigration discourse revolves around the Executive Branch's prosecutorial discretion orders granting legal presence under Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parental Accountability. These prosecutorial discretion orders are a result of immigrant communities' organizing and activism which force the U.S. government to defer from deporting hard working people and separating families. However, **even these short-term bandages that facilitate our ability to work and provide for ourselves and families are under attack during this election year.**

With the above brief synopsis of what are some push factors of migration and the current political dynamics around our immigrant existence, the question of what it means to be undocumented in 2016 remains.

1. To be undocumented is to understand the misplaced resources from the federal government that focus on creating detention centers as supposed to community centers.
2. To be undocumented is to be told that unless you speak fluent English with a U.S. accent, your voice means nothing and your thoughts and opinions disregarded.
3. To be undocumented is to live in fear while yearning to be visible outside of underground economies or capitalist systems that perpetuate labor abuse.
4. To be undocumented is to know that healthcare is a luxury and one that is barely available to us.
5. To be undocumented is to have people making money out of our stories and speaking for us rather than creating space for us to speak on behalf of ourselves.
6. To be undocumented is to see human rights as abstract concepts and our dignity and humanity as negotiating

pieces in U.S. politics.

7. To be undocumented is to drive to a hospital or school while terrified of being stopped, detained, and deported.

8. To be undocumented is to be seen with suspicion and demonized by U.S. media and nativist politicians that run their campaigns on toxic American Exceptionalism and racist platforms.

9. To be undocumented in this country is to be one of 11.2 million, which exceeds the population of Hungary, Czech Republic, and Tunisia.

10. To be undocumented is to fear deportation that could lead to a death sentence.

11. To be undocumented is to believe that your basic human needs (I.E. healthcare, employment, schooling, housing) are wrong and justify U.S. citizens labelling you as social parasites.

12. To be undocumented is to be forced into perpetual gratitude towards the U.S. government even though it is the same government that forced you to migrate in the first place.

13. To be undocumented is to have your life's worth reduced to human capital and productivity.

This is all within the understanding that undocumented is just one of the labels and identities people hold and that oppressive forces compound as people are undocumented and queer, undocumented and transgender, undocumented and with a uterus, undocumented and differently abled, undocumented and HIV+, undocumented and pregnant, undocumented and of low income, undocumented and Black, undocumented and Indigenous.

In other words, to be undocumented is not for the faint of heart and requires exceeding levels of courage and determination. The power to change the realities of underserved and invisibilized immigrant communities requires people in the U.S. to show up and vote responsibly for candidates that have humane Foreign Policy agendas and a solid plan to pass comprehensive immigration reform.