

Borderline solutions? Systemic problems: Systemic problems

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President Obama said earlier this spring that the political climate wasn't right in this election year to work on immigration reform. But Arizona may have forced his hand when it passed a controversial law that authorizes police to apprehend people they suspect lack proper documents (see the story [Church workers and the law](#) for the law's implications for churches). Arizona has put immigration back on the front page.

Yet it remains to be seen if politicians will get serious about a comprehensive reform of immigration policy when it is so tempting to use the issue just to make political hay. (For a survey of options for comprehensive reform, see the article [What kind of reform?](#)) One poll shows that 60 percent of Americans agree with the tough measures taken in Arizona, and talk of sealing the border with Mexico remains a popular campaign theme.

The number of people coming into the country has less to do with border restrictions, however, than it does with the job market in the U.S., and restricting border entry has ironic consequences. When the border was more open, Mexicans and Central Americans tended to move freely back and forth between the U.S. and their home countries. When border restrictions intensify, immigrants stay in the U.S. for fear that if they leave, they may not be able to get back in.

Without addressing systemic issues—like why people come here in the first place—the immigration problem can't be solved. Besides, as Jeffrey Kaye, author of *Moving Millions: How Coyote Capitalism Fuels Global Immigration*, has argued, immigration is not a problem to be solved; it is a fact of life. For millennia, humans have been migrating in search of a better life.

Kaye often poses this question to people who oppose immigration: "If you had to support your family on \$3 a day or less, but had the opportunity to cross a border illegally to raise your living standard, would you migrate?" He consistently gets affirmative responses, even from the most vocal anti-immigrant advocates.

The church has a distinct vantage point from which to view the debate on immigration. Our loyalty is to a kingdom that knows no borders or boundaries. We proclaim a God who welcomes us as strangers, which impels us to welcome the aliens and strangers in our midst. And we have a biblical teaching that says the law and the prophets are summed up in the command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This faith perspective doesn't neatly translate into public policy. But it does call us to listen and respond to stories of the men, women and children who are now caught in the throes of American immigration politics and policies.