

Op-Ed Guidance: Evangelicals Want Immigration Reforms in 2024



Why this is important: *Thank you for leveraging your voice and influence to advocate for bipartisan reforms to U.S. immigration policies that are informed by biblical values – reforms that a [recent Lifeway Research study](#) confirms are broadly supported by American evangelical Christians. By adding your voice and personal perspective to the attached talking points, you are helping to speak up for just policies. Especially if you live in a “swing” general election state, it’s likely that presidential campaigns will read your Op-Ed if it makes it into print in a local newspaper, as will Members of Congress, especially if you mention them by name. An Op-Ed also informs how others in your community think about this important topic and can provide a winsome Christian witness to those who may have an inaccurate or incomplete view of who Christians are.*

How Op-Ed writing works:

- *Before you begin, you should consult with your local newspaper/online outlet to determine the word count they prefer for Op-Ed or guest column. This information will often be available on the outlet’s website, often listed under “Editorial” or “Opinion” or “Contact Us” on their main webpage. You can also simply call to inquire on their guidelines for an Op-Ed Guest Column. In most cases, they will be looking for somewhere between 500 and 900 words, but it varies from one publication to another.*
- *Op-Eds do not usually have footnotes or other formal citations, but it is helpful to include hyperlinks to any data sources, to give an editor the opportunity to fact-check.*
- *In some cases, a publication will consider a piece co-authored by two or even three leaders, though usually not more than that.*
- *Most publications will **only** consider your submission if it has not been published elsewhere (including on a personal blog, etc.) or offered to another publication, so we suggest that you reach out to just one outlet, then turn to another only if the first declines.*
- *We cannot guarantee that an outlet will agree to publish your piece, but we’ve most often had success in the past with pieces that bring a unique, authoritative local perspective to an issue that’s recently been in the news. Finding a recent news story to respond to and/or responding to the political dynamics of immigration can provide a starting point to then pivot to a perspective informed by your personal experience and biblical values.*
- *If no outlet agrees to publish the Op-Ed, you may be able to use it on a personal or church blog or website or on the Evangelical Immigration Table’s blog, [Telling a Better Story](#).*

Who should write an Op-Ed: *The ideal author for this piece will bring the unique credibility of a community leader – such as a local pastor, who can also speak to the biblical principles that inform his or her view – and/or a unique perspective from personal experience, such as that of a former refugee or an immigrant. If you decide to mention elected officials by name, we want our tone to be respectful of our elected leaders, but also to encourage them to consider the wisdom of Scripture and the wellbeing of immigrants who would be directly affected by changes to U.S. immigration policies.*

How World Relief can help you: *in the pages that follow, we provide content recommendations and sample language that you can adapt to personalize your own op-ed. When you’ve completed your draft, you can submit it directly to the newspaper, or you can contact me (msoerens@wr.org) or my colleague Liliana Reza (lreza@wr.org) and we would be happy to help assist you with this process.*

Thank you! 

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Sample Headlines:

- **Americans Are Divided, but Immigration Reforms Supported by Evangelical Christians Can Bring Us Together**
- **Presidential Campaigns Can Appeal to Evangelical Voters with These Immigration Solutions**
- **Despite What You May Have Heard, Evangelical Christians Aren't Anti-Immigrant. This Poll Proves It**
- **Evangelical Christians Want Secure Borders and Compassion for Immigrants. Here's a Plan That Does Both**
- **Churches Have Long Played an Essential Role in Welcoming Immigrants. Now We Need Congress to Do Its Part**
- **More Than Ever, Evangelical Christians Want the U.S. to Welcome Refugees**
- **Evangelical Christians Want Congress to Act on Behalf of Afghan Allies**
- **Christians Want Immigration Reforms That Secure Our Borders *and* Keep Families Together**
- **Immigration Isn't Just a Political Issue, It's a Biblical Issue**
- **We Can – and Must – Both Secure our Borders and Welcome Immigrants**
- **The Immigrants in My Congregation Are Eager for Immigration Reform**
- **These Are the Bipartisan Immigration Reforms Evangelical Christians Want and the U.S. Needs**

By [Name]

Opening:

- If you are comfortable doing so, include a timely news hook, connecting to other stories in the news (often related to politics), right at the start, drawing on one or more of the following points:
 - As President Biden and former President Trump both travel to the U.S.-Mexico border to highlight the challenges there, evangelical Christians in our community and beyond are pleading with Congress to pass long overdue immigration reforms.
 - After months of negotiations, a bipartisan border security deal recently failed in the U.S. Senate, with some saying they'd rather keep the issue as a crisis in order to spur voters to the polls in November. But a new study from Lifeway Research finds that the vast majority of American evangelicals want Congress to find solutions *this year*, not to defer acting until there's a new Congress and potentially a new president.
 - As Congress faces a potential government shutdown over disagreements over border security, evangelical Christians have a clear message for their representatives in Washington: we want Republicans and Democrats to work together to solve very real problems.
 - As state and federal governments argue over the right way to secure our borders, evangelical Christians want Congress to act in ways that both ensure secure borders and respect the human dignity of each person and protect family unity.
 - While some politicians have given up on the idea of congressional solutions to our nation's immigration challenges, preferring to defer solutions until after the November elections, evangelical Christians increasingly believe solutions cannot wait.
 - As former President Trump wins GOP primary elections with strong evangelical Christian support, many presume that evangelicals fully support his immigration policy proposals and rhetoric – but a new poll suggests that evangelical Christians, including those who voted for President Trump in 2020, actually have much more nuanced views.
- Alternatively, or as a subsequent line, introduce yourself and your unique perspective on this issue:
 - The Bible makes abundantly clear that God loves immigrants and commands his people to love and seek justice for them. It also instructs us to respect the laws of our government, which God has ordained to maintain an orderly society. I firmly believe that we can reform our laws in ways that respect both of these biblical principles.
 - As an evangelical pastor, I don't think about immigration primarily as a political, security or economic issue, but as a biblical issue. The Bible is replete with commands to love and welcome immigrants, and it makes

clear that God established the family unit, giving us an impetus to prioritize the unity of families. Of course, the Bible also makes clear that God has put governments in place to maintain order and enforce the law, including ensuring secure borders.

- In partnership with World Relief, our congregation has long been involved in welcoming newly arrived refugees. Refugees are a distinct subset of immigrants who were selected for resettlement to the U.S. on account of the persecution that they fled in their countries of origin. As the number of refugees admitted to the U.S. has rebounded after the COVID pandemic, an increasing share of evangelical Christians believe that the U.S. has a moral responsibility to receive refugees.
- As a [Baptist/Presbyterian/evangelical/etc.] Christian/[pastor], I believe the biblical teaching that all Christians compose a single body, and that when one part of that body is suffering, we all suffer with it, so I cannot be indifferent to the plight of the many immigrants within my congregation and local churches throughout this country who are trapped in a dysfunctional immigration system. Most undocumented immigrants are desperate to get right with the law – and would be willing to do almost anything to make amends for their violation of U.S. immigration law – but that can only happen if Congress works on a bipartisan basis to create an earned legalization process.
- In my congregation, I've seen... [provide a personal example].

Highlight New Lifeway Research Study:

Note one or more of the following findings of [this Lifeway Research study of evangelical views on immigration in 2024](#):

- Among American evangelical Christians,
 - 77% say it is important for Congress to pass significant immigration reforms *this year* (2024), up from 68% who said the same in 2015
 - 75% support a creating a path to citizenship for immigrants in the country unlawfully
 - This includes 66% of evangelical Christians who voted for Donald Trump in 2020
 - 93% believe that U.S. immigration policies should ensure borders
 - 71% believe that the U.S. has a moral responsibility to receive refugees
 - 75% support the substance of a bipartisan bill known as the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would allow Afghan allies evacuated to the U.S. in 2021 to apply for permanent legal status after undergoing additional vetting
 - 80% say they would support a bipartisan package of reforms combining improvements to border security, a path to citizenship for Dreamers brought to the country as children and reforms to our visa system to ensure an adequate supply for agricultural workers
 - This includes 77% of evangelical Christians who voted for Donald Trump in 2020
 - 78% would support legislation that pairs improvements to border security and the establishment of a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who would pay a fine as restitution for their violation of an immigration law
 - Includes 71% of evangelicals who voted for Donald Trump in 2020
 - 65% of evangelicals say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supported this position, while just 12% say they would be less likely to vote for such a candidate
 - 34% of evangelical Christians have personally been involved in serving refugees or other immigrants
 - “The Bible” is now the most mentioned factor that evangelicals say influences their views on immigration, with the share of evangelicals citing the Bible as their top influence on this issue having increased from 12% in 2015 to 26% in 2024

Outline the key biblical themes that inform your particular view as a Christian, in a paragraph or two:

- In the Old Testament, God repeatedly commands his people to welcome, love and seek justice for foreigners, reminding the people of Israel that *they* were themselves foreigners in the land of Egypt, and thus that they should have empathy for those who had arrived as foreigners in their land. As Americans, almost all of whom have immigrant histories of our own [feel free to briefly describe your own immigrant ancestry], we too should seek compassionate policies for our immigrant neighbors.
- Throughout the Bible, God commands his people to love and seek justice for vulnerable foreigners. In the gospels, Jesus reserves some of his harshest words of judgment for those who would cause a child to stumble. Christians who

take these biblical principles as their authority have an opportunity to advocate for a policy change that would rectify a longtime stumbling block built into our immigration laws, which prevents individuals brought to the U.S. as children, who were too young to make that decision for themselves, from becoming fully integrated U.S. citizens. As a Christian, I believe it's past time for our elected officials to make this right.

- Throughout the Bible, there are three vulnerable groups of people repeatedly mentioned in the same passages – orphans, widows and immigrants – whom God commands his people to love, to treat justly and to protect from exploitation and mistreatment. God commands his people not only to tolerate these neighbors, but to love them as ourselves. And one way that we can demonstrate love is by urging our elected officials to finally pass immigration reforms that would allow vulnerable immigrants to step out of the shadows and earn the chance to be citizens of this country that they love.
- In the Greek of the New Testament, the command to “practice hospitality” literally means to “practice loving strangers.” When we do so, the author of the Hebrews says that we might just be entertaining an angel without realizing it, and the Gospel of Matthew says that by welcoming a stranger who is among “the least of these,” we are actually welcoming Jesus himself.
- The Bible makes clear that God has ordained government for a purpose, to ensure order and protection, which is why almost all evangelical Christians believe our government should ensure secure national borders. But the Bible also makes clear that each person, including each immigrant, has been in the image of God with inherent dignity, and thus that their lives are worth protecting. A new study by Lifeway Research finds that more than 9 in 10 evangelicals believe that each of these statements should guide immigration policy discussions.
- As a Christian, my approach to vulnerable children arriving at our border is informed by the Bible. The Bible tells us that Jesus himself was forced to flee the threat of violence as a small child and was brought by Joseph and Mary across a border to Egypt. U.S. laws rightly treat vulnerable children unaccompanied by a parent differently than they do an adult: our government should ensure that children are treated humanely and given due process to ensure that our government safely reunifies families and protects those who have fled persecution.

Discuss a personal perspective that has informed your view:

- If you are or were yourself a refugee or immigrant, briefly describe the circumstances of why you made the decision to come to the U.S., any challenges that you faced and how this experience informs your views of how public policies should change.
- If you know someone who is a refugee or other immigrant – such as a member of your church – you could (with their permission, and possibly using a pseudonym if they prefer) briefly describe their story and how it has informed your views.

Address a few of the misconceptions about immigrants or immigration reform:

- Our nation's borders are at a breaking point, with far more people arriving than our government has the capacity to process. But many people don't realize that most of those arriving are not trying to sneak past the Border Patrol and into the U.S. – they're largely individuals looking for Border Patrol because they want to avail themselves of the asylum protections offered by U.S. law. The problem is that our government's capacity to process these requests is so woefully inadequate, and instead people are being allowed to travel to locations throughout the United States to await a court date, but not allowed to work and provide for themselves, creating an impossible situation both for vulnerable immigrants and for the communities seeking to receive them.
- The opioid crisis is very real and having a devastating impact on our community, but while it's true that most fentanyl comes from or through the U.S.-Mexico border, it's not true that it's largely coming on immigrants who cross the border unlawfully. About [90% of all fentanyl seized at the U.S. border is being carried by U.S. citizens](#), largely through the lawful ports of entry. We absolutely do need to improve border security, but if we're only focused on stopping individuals from crossing the border unlawfully, we'll at most stop 10% of incoming fentanyl, and conflating these issues only keeps us from reaching real solutions.
- It's devastating whenever any American is a victim of crime, and perpetrators should face justice. But it's a misconception that immigrants disproportionately commit crime. In fact, an [extensive study](#) from the State of Texas – the only state that tracks the immigration legal status of felony convictions – finds that immigrants, whether lawfully present or not, actually commit crimes at dramatically lower rates than native-born citizens. We should not hold an entire community responsible for the evil actions of someone who happens to share their nationality or

mode of entry to the country. And while some have overstayed their visa or crossed a border unlawfully, they've demonstrated over the years they have been in our country that their intention is to live peacefully and not commit more serious offenses, we should allow them to pay a fine and get right with the law.

- As our country continues to deal with the effects of inflation on our economy, some might presume that we simply cannot afford to welcome more immigrants, or to allow those already here to legalize their status. But more employment-authorized immigrants could actually be a huge part of the solution to our economic challenges, filling labor shortages that have helped to fuel inflation. In fact, almost all economists acknowledge that the [net economic impact of immigration](#) for the U.S. is positive; a smart economic policy can be a key part of our economic recovery.
- DACA recipients and other Dreamers, who have been educated in the U.S., are contributing in many ways as workers, taxpayers, entrepreneurs and consumers. But pending court challenges could lead them to lose their ability to work lawfully. After our society has invested in their education, it would be poor stewardship to deny them the ability to work and contribute back to this community. But the only way that permanently provide them that certainty is for Congress to work on bipartisan basis to pass legislation such as the Dream Act, which would allow them to apply for citizenship in the U.S.
- While I'm eager for our country to welcome immigrants of any faith background, consistent with our constitutional commitment to religious freedom for all, I suspect many in our community may not realize that [most immigrants who arrive in the U.S. are Christians](#). In fact, immigrant believers are revitalizing churches and denominations throughout our country, bringing strong biblical values that value family and freedom. Rather than keeping these brothers and sisters out – or in the shadows – we should find ways to welcome them, including passing immigration reforms.

Closing: Restate your case, emphasizing the urgency of action:

- Scripture commands us to pray for our leaders, and I am committed to praying for [Senators', Representatives' or Candidates' names] and for all those with the influence to help get a bipartisan immigration bill over the finish line.
- Evangelical Christians may have the reputation as reliable Republican voters, but this is one issue where we want to see our leaders on both sides of the aisle lead – and we'll have their backs if they do.
- Fortunately, there are already bipartisan proposal in the Congress that would address many of evangelical Christians policy priorities, such as the [Dignity Act](#), which would pair \$35 billion in new border security funding with an earned legalization process for undocumented immigrants who pay a significant fine and reforms to the visa system to facilitate family reunification.

Include a one- or two-sentence biographic statement at the end of the piece. For example, "George Smith is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Yorkville." Some publications may also request a photograph of you.

You may submit your final draft directly to the local newspaper, but if you would like assistance, please feel free to reach out to Matthew Soerens (msoerens@wr.org) or Liliana Reza (lreza@wr.org) at World Relief and one of them would be happy to advise you on next steps.