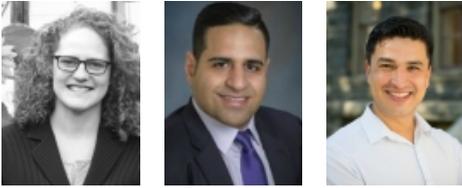


Here's what the Democrats need to do to get the DREAM Act through Congress.



Last week the United States government shut down for the first time in nearly 5 years. At the centre of the shutdown was the impasse between Democrats and Republicans over the DREAM Act, which would grant residency to those who came to the US as the children of undocumented immigrants. While the Democrats eventually agreed to a budget which did not include the legislation, [Hannah Walker](#), [Kassra A.R. Oskooii](#), and

[Sergio Garcia-Rios](#) write that there is still widespread support for such a measure among Democratic voters. In order to get immigration reform through Congress, they argue, the Democratic Party, must mobilize its supporters en masse into a broad-based coalition to push for reform.

Last September, [we wrote](#) about the possible impact Latino-only leadership has on mobilization efforts around DACA, after Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the end of the Obama-era program. Using an embedded survey experiment, we found that when liberal white voters were told that a Senator with a Hispanic surname was promoting the DREAM Act they were significantly less supportive of the proposed law than those who saw an Anglo surname attached to the legislation. We theorized that diminished support for the DREAM Act among even racially progressive individuals can be explained by latent racial biases that scholars elsewhere have documented.

President Obama issued DACA in 2012 after Congress failed to pass the DREAM Act, as a stop-gap measure while lawmakers ostensibly worked towards a permanent solution for young, undocumented immigrants brought into the country as children, and who were attempting to work and go to school lawfully. Sessions accompanied the administration's directive to end DACA last year with an appeal to Congress to pass a bill which would protect DREAMers. Immigrants' rights activists mobilized immediately, advocating for the attachment of protective measures for DACA recipients to other bills. Due to the significant impact of implicit racial biases on policy attitudes, we recommended expanding the scope of mobilization efforts. That is, to meaningfully increase support in favor of a DREAM Act among progressive voters, a diverse, broad-based leadership effort from the Democratic Party has to emerge.

Since last September, more democratic lawmakers have spoken in support of the DREAMers, and the party leadership recently attempted to attach provisions to protect the DREAMers to the budget bill to fund the government. Some Republicans' insistence on the inclusion of measures like funding for a border wall met this effort. The conflict over immigration and the failure to pass the budget bill led to a government shutdown in January. The continuing resolution which finally broke the shutdown deadlock traded funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for relief for DACA recipients.

The increasingly heated debates characterized by broad-based leadership from Democrats appears to have heightened public support for DACA recipients, particularly among democratic voters. Before government funds started to expire, a nationwide [poll](#) conducted between January 18-19 reported that 59 percent of Democrats supported passing a bill to grant young immigrants brought over to the US protection from deportation even if it meant that the government would shut down. As debates intensified and government agencies began furloughing some employees, the [same poll](#)—this time fielded between January 20-21—showed that 65 percent of Democrats thought that protecting DREAMers was important enough to prompt a government shutdown.



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Moreover, [researchers have documented](#) that mass outcry and Democratic face-offs with the President have generated increasing support for the targets of xenophobic policies emanating from the White House, particularly for Muslim Americans. This, together with polling data on increasing support for DACA recipients suggests that Democratic voters are responding *positively* to Democratic lawmakers' strategy to protect undocumented immigrants brought over to the US as children.

The fight, however, is far from over. The budget deal to fund CHIP only buys lawmakers three weeks, and in February they will once again return to the question of immigration. This week the White House offered what they called a [bipartisan immigration plan](#) inclusive of a path to citizenship for the DACA eligible. Yet, the plan severely limits family reunification, effectively pitting DREAMers against their families and communities. Consequently, immigrant's right activists and their allies [denounced the plan](#) immediately, Senator Dick Durbin (D–IL) [commented](#) that, "Dreamers should not be held hostage to President Trump's crusade to tear families apart and waste billions of American tax dollars on an ineffective wall."

While the specific details for the plan proposed by the White House will be officially announced Monday, President Trump has [made it clear](#) that DACA concessions have a price tag: funding for the border wall. Democratic leadership, on the other hand, has made protecting DREAMers a priority. They are joined by a handful of moderate Republicans, an unexpected outcome of the increasing popular support for DACA recipients. Among them, Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) tweeted "Today's DACA recipients can be tomorrow's [#TRUMPdreamers!](#)" Yet, the cost at which a compromise will be reached is unclear. Democrats will have to balance increased border protection measures against an increasingly popular DACA. The failure to act at all would likely cost support among Latino voters, for whom DACA is as [important as any other](#) concession that could be made on immigration.

Lessons from the first year of the Trump presidency suggest that mass resistance to draconian policies works to stop legislation. Yet, stopping bad legislation from going forward is only part of what activists hope to achieve. Activists additionally hope that Congress can pass a clean DREAM Act that protects the DACA eligible without additional restrictions on immigration as well as funding for security and law enforcement. Passing good laws, [even those which are supported by popular majorities](#), is [more difficult](#) than stopping bad legislation. Our research suggests that in order to achieve immigration reform, elite and mass mobilization should continue to be broad-based, and use diverse tactics. To get a clean DREAM Act passed, individuals must [take immediate action to hold their representatives accountable](#), not only in the streets, but on the phone, on the internet, and by any other means possible.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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