



Source: AAUW

DISSENT WITHIN DEMOCRACY: POLITICAL RHETORIC ON IMMIGRATION

POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why does civil discourse promote the common good and why does rhetoric undermine the common good?
- What are common stereotypes about immigration and immigrants?
- What do you think you need to know to develop a more informed position on immigration?
- What rights do immigrants have that might be violated without more public knowledge and awareness?

BACKGROUND

The concept of “civil discourse” can be traced back to the ancient Greek scholars Plato and Aristotle. These philosophers defined civil discourse as arguments with the intent to support advancement of society and the common good. This support of civil discourse was directed against the practice of rhetoric used by the Sophists. According to Plato and his disciple Aristotle, rhetoricians appealed to human emotions, especially the basest emotions such as jealousy, anger, and prejudice to persuade their audience. The ancient philosophers saw rhetoric and those who practiced it as a danger to the Republic and civil society. They even asserted that the rhetoricians divided the public and left the Republic vulnerable to manipulation and demagoguery.

If civil discourse prioritizes knowledge and reason then it naturally relies on research and facts for support. Citizens can’t engage in productive discussions on any topic unless they possess data and facts from reliable sources that allow them to draw logical conclusions. Moreover, everyone who agrees to engage in civil discourse must also agree that they might be wrong in their opinion because they aren’t as well informed as they had previously thought or relying on emotions more than logic to draw conclusions.

Our current political climate seems to be undermining the practice of civil discourse and elevating the art of rhetoric, particularly on the issue of immigration. Rather than encourage the public to get informed on immigration issues, some politicians have used rhetoric to stereotype and marginalize immigrants and refugees. While this outpouring of emotion might feel right to some listeners based on their media consumption and/or limited experience with immigrants, it does not promote civil discourse and, therefore, the common good. If American citizens want to find solutions to the current immigration challenges then they must agree to inform themselves about the topic, discuss the topic with the intent to make the situation better for the majority of people, and remain open to changing their position on the topic.

RESOURCES

Personal Stories

- [Stories of Young Immigrants \(Scholastic\)](#)
- [Story of a Refugee \(Human Library\)](#)
- [Julia Moves to the United States \(Learning for Justice\)](#)

Articles

- [On Political Correctness \(The American Scholar\)](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance Facts on The Immigration Path](#)
- [Know Your Rights on Immigration \(ACLU\)](#)
- [Immigrant Justice \(SPLC\)](#)
- [Immigration Facts \(Urban Institute\)](#)
- [Immigration Myths \(Learning for Justice\)](#)
- [U.S. Citizen Children Impacted by Immigration Enforcement \(American Immigration Council\)](#)

Graphs and Maps

- [Frontline Immigration History Timeline \(PBS\)](#)
- [Maps of Immigrants in the United States \(Migration Policy Institute\)](#)
- [Mapping U.S. Immigration Detention \(Freedom for Immigrants\)](#)

Images

- [St. Paul Teachers Create a Wall of Support for Immigrant Students \(The Advocate\)](#)
- [Photos Thousands Protest at Airports Nationwide Against Trumps Immigration Order \(NPR\)](#)

- [Photos Show How the US-Mexico Border Changed - and Didn't - in 2021 \(Washington Post\)](#)
- [Why the Stories of Ellis Island Matter \(TED\)](#)

Photos

- [84 Lumber Super Bowl Commercial](#)
- [Chris Abani On Humanity \(TED\)](#)
- [Playlist Series on Refugees \(TED\)](#)
- [Why Immigration History Repeats Itself \(NPR\)](#)
- [Nine Reasons Why America Would Benefit From A More Liberal Legal Immigration Policy \(Medium\)](#)
- [Shifting the Meaning of the Word Alien \(NPR\)](#)

Websites

- [Understanding Prejudice](#)
- [IOM UN Migration 2020 \(World Migration Report\)](#)
- [U.S. Immigration Timeline \(History\)](#)

