



Thought Leadership Corner

Manager at New American Pathways

[About the Author](#)

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A Vote for Resettlement is a Vote for Democracy

We are less than a week away until the 2018 midterm elections. If you’re like me and have found yourself struggling to turn your eyes away from the barrage of stories surrounding races in Georgia and elsewhere across the country, you’ve likely encountered a reoccurring theme frequently reiterated by pundits and politicians across the partisan spectrum: “This election is a referendum on the president and his policies.”

Personally, I disagree. While the president and his agenda undoubtedly cast a significant sphere of influence over how incumbents and candidates craft their own policy platforms and political personas in midterm elections, it should not cast a shadow over some larger issues and trends that have been brewing and bubbling up well before he took office. No matter how you dice it, this election is a referendum on American values, institutions and some long-withstanding traditions.

One of those traditions is the act of resettling refugees. Even before the U.S. began formally resettling refugees in partnership with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in 1980, our country provided relief to hundreds of thousands of people across all corners of the globe, sharing only one thing in common: statelessness brought on by experiences of political persecution, genocide or civil war. Through our participation in the refugee resettlement program, we choose to demonstrate moral leadership to the world by providing these individuals with a new chance at safety, stability and success in a country that doesn’t care if they’re Rohingya or Tutsi or a Bosnian Muslim. Or Jewish.

When we take off our partisan hats for a second, welcoming survivors of tyranny and injustice just makes sense. It’s diplomatically strategic, generates economic revenue for states and local communities, and showcases our uniquely American penchant for optimism and a love

for a great underdog comeback story. It's an institutionalized expression of the American spirit that has, until recent years, enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress and the White House. (Perhaps another tradition that appears to be waning.)

But our current climate has presented a new set of challenges. **Refugee new arrivals are at an all-time low in the United States, nativism is making a global comeback and our interpretation of how immigration fits within our country's larger narrative has grown increasingly cynical and fear-driven.** If this election is indeed a referendum on our values, then refugee resettlement is at the heart of how we define these values.

At New American Pathways, we're doing our part to define and promote our values as members of an inclusionary, equitable society by welcoming refugees and guiding them along a trajectory of upward mobility and integration. Helping new Americans obtain citizenship, a milestone point located toward the end of this trajectory, is a very specific way in which we welcome refugees and immigrants in our Civic Engagement program. Helping new citizens access the tools necessary for participating in a representative democracy is a beautiful thing when you believe in the power of the institution.

Whether it's seeing native-born citizens help register newly naturalized citizens to vote or seeing native-born folks and immigrants of all backgrounds knock on doors to help spread the word about early voting, I have witnessed so much power and unrelenting belief in Democracy that I can't help but feel hopeful that in the future, these institutions will prevail and welcoming values will endure.

But this is a long-end game and we can't do it alone. Join us and witness this power for yourself.

Ashley Coleman joined New American Pathways this summer as our Civic Engagement Manager. Read her bio [here](#). Interested in volunteering with Civic Engagement? Come to our [next volunteer orientation](#)!