

# Young Immigrants Turn Focus to President in Struggle Over Deportations

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PHOENIX — More than 500 leaders of a national network of young immigrants, frustrated that House Republicans said they would not move on immigration this year, have decided to turn their protests on [President Obama](#) in an effort to pressure him to act unilaterally to stop deportations.

After months of lobbying, rallies and sit-in demonstrations ended with no movement in the House on a pathway to citizenship for immigrants here illegally, the youths who gathered in Phoenix this weekend for an annual congress of the network, [United We Dream](#), said they felt disappointed by Republicans and Democrats. Pointing to Mr. Obama's pledge early this year to use his phone and pen when Congress did not move on his agenda, they said they would demand that he take executive action to increase protections for immigrants without papers.

“The community we work with is telling us that these deportations are ripping our families apart; this has to stop,” said Cristina Jiménez, the managing director of the network, the largest organization of immigrants who grew up in this country without legal status after coming as children and who call themselves Dreamers. “And we know the president has the power to do it.”

The young immigrants' demands will be uncomfortable for Mr. Obama in a midterm election year when his low approval ratings could allow Republicans to make important gains. Polls show wider sympathy among Americans for young immigrants than for others without legal status, and the young people have often been leaders in setting strategy among immigrant groups.

The youths said they would press the president to expand the [deportation deferrals](#) he provided to them by executive action in 2012. More than 520,000 young people have received deferrals so far, allowing them to work legally and obtain driver's licenses in many states. The program, known as [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#), has been very popular among Latino and immigrant voters, and Mr. Obama has cited it as an example of his commitment to overhaul the immigration system.

With their shift to concentrate on Mr. Obama, the youths are sharply scaling back their expectations. Last year, after a comprehensive immigration bill [passed the Senate](#), they hoped the House would follow through and also open a direct pathway to citizenship for most of 11.7 million illegal immigrants in the country.

This month, House Republican leaders offered principles on immigration, including legalization but not citizenship for most of those immigrants. But days later, Speaker John A. Boehner said his caucus [was not ready to move forward](#) on the divisive issue this year.

Lorella Praeli, a leader of the youth network, told the gathering here that Republicans had adopted a strategy of “death by delay” for immigration. But network leaders did not appear disheartened. An

organization that only a few years ago held its meetings clandestinely to avoid detection by immigration authorities, the network held its congress this year in the Sheraton hotel in downtown Phoenix. They filled the main ballroom with strategy debates, protest singalongs and group hugs. Other guests were surprised to encounter slogan-chanting youths parading through the lobby.

They chose Phoenix, leaders said, to confront Gov. Jan Brewer, a Republican, who has not allowed youths with deportation deferrals to apply for driver's licenses, as other states have.

On Saturday afternoon, the group marched through downtown Phoenix and rallied at a Department of Homeland Security detention center. Their chants were mainly directed toward the president. "Obama, Obama, don't deport my mama!" the crowd members shouted.

In Washington, a perception gap has emerged over enforcement, with House Republicans arguing that Mr. Obama has been lax on illegal immigration and border security, so they cannot trust him to enforce any new law. Administration officials counter with figures showing Mr. Obama has deported more than 1.9 million foreigners, a record for an American president.

The youths here said they had no doubts about the impact of the Obama administration's deportation policies, because their families felt they were under siege from immigration authorities.

"We can't wait for Washington to continue playing around with our lives," said Julieta Garibay, another network leader. "Our people see deportations every single day. They say, 'Maybe this might be the last day I get to see my mom because she might get deported tomorrow.' We're fed up with that."

The youths said they would ask Mr. Obama to cut back programs that have greatly expanded the local reach of federal immigration authorities and to grant deportation deferrals to undocumented parents of youths who had received them.

The president has insisted he does not have legal authority to grant more deferrals. But recently he hinted that he might revisit that position if legislation remained stalled.

In spite of the inertia in Washington, the youths, who represented 50 organizations in 25 states, said their ranks grew rapidly last year as measures to expand opportunities for them advanced in many states. At least 18 states now allow foreign-born students without legal residency to pay in-state tuition rates.

The youths said they were not giving up entirely on legislation efforts and planned drives in several districts in Florida, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas to register and mobilize Latino voters against Republicans who have resisted legalization.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/us/politics/young-immigrants-turn-focus-to-president-in-struggle-over-deportations.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/us/politics/young-immigrants-turn-focus-to-president-in-struggle-over-deportations.html?_r=0)