

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION

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## **Myth: Immigrants are a drain on the economy.**

### **Facts:**

- During the 1990's, a period of high rates of immigration, the US experienced the lowest national unemployment rate in 40 years and fastest economic growth.
- In addition to consumer spending of immigrant households, immigrants and their businesses contribute \$162 billion in tax revenue to US federal, state and local governments.
- The net benefit of immigration to the US is nearly 10 billion per year.
- Between 1988 and 2002 contributed \$500 billion towards our social security system.
- Immigrants are projected to contribute nearly \$2 trillion to social security between 1988 and 2072.

## **Myth: Immigrants take jobs from US workers.**

### **Facts:**

- The US has an aging workforce. While growth in the workforce is estimated to slow to 0.04% per year it is estimated that the US will create 21.3 million new jobs by 2012. Of the top 30 growing occupations 20 are in unskilled jobs.
- 57% of job growth is projected to be in unskilled occupations.
- The US worker shortage due to demographics and an aging society is expected to last 20 years.
- US high school graduates are less likely to go into unskilled, labor positions.

## **Myth: Immigrants lower wages for US workers**

### **Facts:**

- As immigrants fill lower skilled jobs, they push natives up the economic ladder. Immigrants who arrived in California between 1990 and 2004 increased wages for native workers by an average of 4%.

## **Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes.**

### **Facts:**

- Between 1990 and 1998 immigrants working with invalid social security numbers paid nearly all of the \$20 billion that went into the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to worker's names and social security numbers) and will probably never collect from that.
- In 2003 alone the amount in that fund was \$7.1 billion.
- Immigrants pay between 90 and 140 billion a year in taxes.
- Immigrants pay \$20 to \$30 billion more in taxes than they use in government services.

**Myth: Immigrants use many government services.**

**Facts:**

- Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for nearly all federal and state means tested benefits.
- Legal immigrants must wait 5 years before they qualify for those services, at which point they can become a citizen.
- Immigrant families with US citizen children who do qualify for benefits use public benefits at a lower rate than low-income native born families.
- Welfare does not drive immigration patterns. Between 1995 and 2000 the states with the least generous “safety nets” saw a growth in immigrant families four times greater than states with generous safety nets.

**Myth: We are spending too much money educating immigrant children.**

**Facts:**

- Many children of immigrants are themselves US citizens.
- Immigrants pay for public education the same way everyone else does, through taxes.
- As a nation we recognize the value of education and see it as an investment in the future. The problem is not with the investment but that we are not getting a return on our investment because when we deny undocumented children who graduate from our schools legal status, we deny them the opportunity to give back to our country.
- The lack of funding for education arises from misplaced state and federal priorities not from immigration.

**Myth: We are spending too much money providing health care for immigrants.**

**Facts:**

- The entire nation is healthier when everyone receives adequate health care. Providing immigrants with legal status will encourage more people to seek preventive services and enable more people to qualify for medical insurance.
- A lack of funding for health care, and the lack of a national health care system is due to misplaced federal and state priorities and not immigration.

**Myth: Immigrants don't want to learn English or be citizens.**

**Facts:**

- Within ten years of arrival more than 75 % of immigrants speak English well.
- Over 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens.
- Given the opportunity more immigrants would naturalize and learn English.

**Myth: Illegal immigrants are criminals.**

**Facts:**

- In every ethnic group incarceration rates among young men are lowest for immigrants. In fact, in the year 2000 the incarceration rate of US born men was 5 times higher than the rate of their immigrant counterparts
- An increase in undocumented people has not resulted in a rise in crime. In fact, since 1994 violent crime has declined 34% and property crime has declined 26%. At the same time, the undocumented population doubled to around 12 million.
- Being in an undocumented status is a civil, not a criminal law violation.

**Myth: Most immigrants cross the border illegally.**

**Fact:**

- About 75 % of today's immigrants have legal, permanent immigrant visas. Of the 25 % who are undocumented, 40 % overstayed temporary, non-immigrant visas.

**Myth: Weak border enforcement leads to illegal immigration.**

**Facts:**

- From 1986 to 1998 the Border Patrol's budget increased sixfold and the number of agents on the Southwest border doubled. Yet during that time the undocumented population doubled as well.
- The only way to reduce the numbers of people entering illegally is to address the reasons that they come related to conditions in their home countries, and to provide legal avenues of immigration so that families can be together and employers can meet their needs.

**Myth: Enforcing existing laws can solve our problems.**

**Facts:**

- The entire immigration system is dysfunctional and needs comprehensive reform. The borders are out of control, families are divided, and the system is plagued by backlogs and delays. Enforcement alone will not solve these problems.

**Myth: Immigrants can wait their turn and come here legally.**

**Facts:**

- The currently immigration system is dysfunctional, does not allow employers to hire workers and divides families.
- Family members have to wait years to enter legally and re-unite with their family. Spouses and minor children of legal residents may wait over 10 years. Siblings of US citizens may wait 20 years or longer.
- US citizens are often unable to legalize their status of their spouses.
- Employers cannot legally bring in unskilled, year round labor. The number of visas available for temporary workers has been cut back to the point that the visas are filled every year on the first day of the year that visas become available, leaving many employers without workers.
- An employer interested in sponsoring a skilled worker with a bachelor's degree may wait over six years until that employee arrives.
- Employers cannot legalize the status of undocumented workers here in the US.
- A person who enters illegally cannot get legal status in the US.
- Over 808,000 people are currently waiting to become citizens.
- Over 1,000,000 are waiting for legal permanent residency.

**Myth: We can win the war on terrorism by making immigration more difficult.**

**Facts:**

- No security expert since September 11, 2001 has said that restrictive immigration measures would have prevented terrorist attacks.
- When we are spending our time and resources chasing people who come to our country to work and re-unite with family we make it easier for those who wish to do us harm to slip through the cracks.

**Myth: Immigrants come here illegally and have babies so they can stay.**

**Facts:**

- Children cannot legalize the status of a parent until the child turns 21. If the parent entered the US illegally they will not be allowed to legalize their status from within the US and will face a 10-year bar to re-entry when they leave.

**Myth: Immigrants are bad for the environment.**

**Facts:**

- Our ecosystem is global and issues like overpopulation, air and water pollution, and waste must be addressed globally. Most of our national environmental problems stem from problems with US consumption patterns, and foreign-born persons tend to consume less goods and resources than native-born Americans.
- Global overpopulation, that is the increase in the number of people on the planet, is indeed a problem and can lead to environmental and resource problems. However, it should not be confused with immigration, the movement of the same number of people from one place to another, which is not the cause of environmental problems.

**Myth: Immigrants have no ties or allegiance to the US**

**Facts:**

- 85% of immigrant families have US citizen members.
- Between 1970 and 2000 the naturalized citizen population increased by 71%.

**Myth: Most Americans want immigrants out of the US and stricter enforcement**

**Facts:**

- Surveys have shown that three quarters of American voters support a comprehensive immigration reform that combines toughness, fairness, a guest worker program, family reunification, and a path to legal residency.
- The vast majority of voters believe that deporting 10 million people is unrealistic.
- Voters overwhelmingly believe that the immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed.
- Over 8 out of 10 people believe that if an immigrant has been in this country working, paying taxes and learning English there should be a way for them to become a citizen.

Statistics from: the Social Security Administration [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov); National Immigration Law Center [www.nilc.org](http://www.nilc.org); American Immigration Lawyers Association [www.aila.org](http://www.aila.org); [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org), Immigration Policy Center [http://www.ailf.org/ipc/ipc\\_index.asp](http://www.ailf.org/ipc/ipc_index.asp), and the Public Policy Institute of California <http://www.ppic.org/main/home.asp>