

Immigration through the Lens of Faith



Top 10 Immigration Myths

Myth #1: Immigrants don't pay taxes.

Most immigrants, whether documented or not, pay taxes like everyone else. Immigrants pay:

Payroll taxes. Many undocumented workers have payroll taxes—Social Security and Medicare— withheld by their employers, even though undocumented workers will not receive any benefits from these programs. In 2003, the government collected an estimated \$7 billion in Social Security taxes from 7.5 million workers and their employers in which the Social Security numbers did not match the taxpayer identification number. This dollar amount has more than tripled in the last decade.¹

Sales tax. Undocumented immigrants pay sales tax when they shop, just like everyone else.

Property tax. Whether they rent or own homes, undocumented immigrants pay property tax. Homeowners pay the tax directly, but renters pay property taxes indirectly, since landlords set rents at rates that allow them to pay taxes on their rental units.

Myth #2: Immigrants take more in government services than they pay for in taxes.

A large body of evidence concludes that undocumented immigrants are net contributors to the U.S. economy, providing much more in taxes paid and work provided than they receive in public benefits. A recent paper of the National Immigration Law Center, "Paying Their Way and Then Some,"²

¹ Jane Guskin and David Wilson. *The Politics of Immigration*, The Monthly Review Press, March 2007

² National Immigration Law Center, "Paying Their Way and Then Some: Facts About the Contributions of Immigrants to Economic Growth and Public Investment," September, 2006. Contact Tyler Moran, moran@nilc.org for a copy of this study.

reviews studies from disparate sources that reinforce this conclusion.

A 2006 study conducted by Texas State Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, a Republican, concluded that undocumented immigrants generated \$1.58 billion in state revenues, and received only \$1.16 billion in state services. The report also found that "the absence of the estimated 1.4 million undocumented immigrants in Texas in fiscal 2005 would have been a loss to our gross state product of \$17.7 billion."³

Myth #3: Undocumented Immigrants burden our health system and drive up rates

A National Immigration Law Center study found that undocumented immigrants spend less than half what US citizens spend for medical services⁴ According to the American Journal of Public Health 30 percent of immigrants use no health care at all during the year. Combined with immigrant's high labor force participation rate and tax contributions, immigrants contribute far more than they ever use.

Myth #4: Immigrants take American jobs.

According to a 2007 report by the President's Council of Economic Advisers, "immigrants not only help fuel the Nation's economic growth, but also have an overall positive effect on the income of native-born workers."⁵

³ Carole Keeton Strayhorn, Texas Comptroller, *Special Report: Undocumented Immigrants in Texas: A Financial Analysis of the Impact to the State Budget and Economy*. Austin, TX: December 2006, p. 1.

⁴ National Immigration Law Center, "Health Care Expenditures for Immigrants are Lower than for Citizens," (May, 2009), www.NILC.org

⁵ President's Council of Economic Advisors, "Immigration's Economic Impact" 2007, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/cea/cea_immigration_062007.html

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The conservative Alexis de Tocqueville Institution released a report that concluded that immigrants "create at least as many jobs as they take."⁶ They do "take" jobs, but they also buy goods and services, thus creating more jobs and contributing to overall economic growth.

If undocumented immigrants sometimes bring down wages (this is minimal, and mostly in low-skill, low-wage jobs), it is primarily because of the fact that they lack legal status – these workers are exploited and constantly threatened with the possibility of deportation. They are thus forced to put up with low pay and poor conditions. Most studies show that legalization would raise wages in these types of jobs, because workers could organize for better pay and employers could not scare immigrants into accepting poor wages and conditions.

Myth #5: Immigrants don't want to learn English.

Within 10 years of arrival, more than seventy-five percent of immigrants speak English well. Ninety-one percent of second generation immigrants are fluent or near fluent English speakers. By the third generation, ninety-seven percent speak English fluently or near fluently.⁷

⁶ Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore, "Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence," Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, Arlington, VA (Mar. 1994) See also: Richard Vedder, "Immigration Doesn't Displace Natives," Wall Street Journal, March 28, 1994, p. A12
⁷ Shirin Hakimzadeh and D'Vera Cohn, "English Usage Among Hispanics in the United States," Pew Hispanic Forum, Dec. 6, 2007.
<http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=82>; Janet Murguia

Myth #6: It's just as easy to become citizens as it was for my ancestors. Immigrants today just don't want to become citizens

In fact many immigrants seek citizenship despite the expensive and convoluted nature of the US immigration system. A report by the Pew Hispanic Center has shown in recent years the proportion of legal immigrants seeking citizenship has grown significantly.⁸ The primary hurdle to more immigrants seeking citizenship is a byzantine immigration system that imposes untenable wait times, offers too few spots, and requires expensive filing fees.

Myth #7: More immigrants mean a rise in crime rates

This is one of the oldest and most pernicious myths about immigrants that is quickly dismissed by the facts. According to a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research 18 – 40 year old male immigrants have a historically lower incarceration rate than native-born counterparts. In 2000, immigrants were incarcerated at a rate 1/5 that of native born citizens. According to the report newly

and Cecilia Muñoz, "From Immigrant to Citizen," *The American Prospect* (Oct. 23, 2005), <http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleid=10487>, American Immigration Lawyers Association, Myths & Facts in the Immigration Debate", 8/14/03

⁸ Pew Hispanic Center. "Growth in the Foreign-Born Workforce and Employment of the Native Born," Rakesh Kochhar, August 10, 2006

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arrived immigrants are the least likely to commit crimes⁹

Myth #8: There are many more immigrants today than there were one hundred years ago.

No. The portion of the U.S. population that was born in another country in 2002 was about eleven and a half percent; in the early twentieth century, it was approximately fifteen percent.¹⁰

Myth #9: Most immigrants cross the border illegally.

Approximately seventy-five percent of today's immigrants have legal permanent visas; of the twenty-five percent that are undocumented, forty percent overstayed temporary visas.¹¹

Myth #10: Americans oppose creating a path towards citizenship for undocumented immigrants

There has been a dramatic shift in public opinion towards comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship. A variety of polls from across the political spectrum show strong support. From a fox news poll (66% support) to CNN (56%

⁹ National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper Series. "Why are Immigrants' Incarceration Rates so Low? Evidence of Selective Immigration, Deterrence, and Deportation." Kritine F. Butcher and Anne Morrison Piehl. July 2007.

¹⁰ <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>

¹¹ Department of Homeland Security
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/index.htm>

support) to Public Policy Polling (65% support), it is clear that the impetus to reform lies not with an unwilling populace.¹² The American people realize the system is broken and that the only solution is comprehensive reform that allows undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows.

Go to <http://bit.ly/IWJ-CIR> to join other people of faith in pushing for meaningful immigration reform that provides a clear path to citizenship, keeps families together and protects all workers.



Let's act now!

¹² <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/01/28/fox-news-poll-66-percent-favor-path-to-citizenship-for-illegal-immigrants-with/>
<http://www.cnn.com/POLITICS/pollingcenter/polls/3215>
<http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2013/02/voters-consider-nra-endorsement-a-negative.html>