

TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

Undocumented immigrants would legalize their status if they had the option.

The vast majority of those in the country without proper immigration status have done so because our immigration system provides no way for them to receive a visa. For instance, while our economy relies on an estimated 485,000 new, low-skilled immigrant workers each year, but our immigration system provides only 5,000 visas (Pew Hispanic Center). That is a huge discrepancy between what our economy needs and what our immigration system allows. Moreover, the wait time for children in other countries to join their parents here legally often exceeds five years. This hardship and unrealistic allotment of work visas is why we way the US immigration system is broken.

Immigrants – even undocumented immigrants – pay taxes.

Undocumented immigrants pay sales and vehicle taxes, which help run our government services. An estimated 60% of undocumented immigrants pay federal income taxes, yet are not eligible for the federal programs their taxes fund (Pew Hispanic Center). Undocumented workers pay an estimated \$7 billion in Social Security and \$1.5 billion in Medicare taxes a year, with little hope of ever receiving benefits (Social Security Administration). By the end of the 2000 tax year, there was \$374 billion in the Social Security Suspense Fund from undocumented workers. Former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan testified before Congress, immigrants pay into the system far more than they ever receive in services: “There are great misperceptions that immigrants are a drain on our economy, but many studies have confirmed the opposite is true. Even undocumented workers – commonly referred to as ‘illegal’ – contribute more than their fair share to our great country.”

Immigrants do not take jobs away from native-born workers.

In fact, the U.S. economy increasingly requires foreign, low-skilled workers, as the U.S.-born workforce becomes older, better educated, and less willing to take these jobs. In 1960, half of all American men dropped out of high school and joined the low-skilled labor force; now the number is about 9% (Manhattan Institute).

Immigration raises wages for the vast majority of native-born workers.

The National Bureau of Economic Research found that immigration in the 1990s increased the average wage of American-born workers by 2.7 percent and raised wages for 91% of the population. The wages of native-born workers increase for a number of reasons, including:

- a. Unskilled foreign-born construction laborers allow skilled U.S. craftsmen and contractors to build more homes at a lower cost and therefore the U.S. natives’ productivity and income rise.
- b. As the numbers of immigrants available for jobs and tasks increases, so does the need for complementary jobs in managing, organizing, and training - work typically done by natives for higher pay.
- c. Skilled migrants make significant contributions to the scientific and academic communities, boosting the technical capabilities of U.S. firms and the native-born workers employed there.
(Council of Economic Advisers, *Economic Report of the President*)

The only group whose wages do not increase are high school dropouts, who represent 9% of the population. (The study also noted that it is not clear whether the decline in this group’s wages was due to immigration, technology transfer, jobs moving overseas, or other factors.)

Health care costs lower for immigrants than for U.S.-born individuals.

Immigrants do not impose a disproportionate financial burden on the U.S. health care system. In fact, total health care costs of immigrants were 55% lower than those of U.S.-born persons. In 2005, Latinos made up only 1.6 percent of all the hospital discharges (inpatient, outpatient, and/or emergency room visits). In comparison, 33.6 percent of all discharges were African-Americans, and 64.8 percent were Caucasians. Further, only 1.3 percent of all Latinos who had been hospitalized for any reason were classified as “indigent,” and only 0.6 percent of Latinos who had emergency room care were classified as “indigent.” (American Journal of Public Health in August 2005.)

Undocumented immigrants are not a drain on U.S. government programs and public benefits.

The reality is that even most legal immigrants are ineligible for the majority of public funded programs for the first five years after they receive their green card. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for public benefits such as food stamps, welfare, and public housing assistance. The only benefits undocumented immigrants can receive are Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and health care for emergencies, but only in certain circumstances. U.S. citizen children living with immigrant parents are eligible for some benefits, but they use them less often than children of the U.S.-born (Urban Institute).

Immigrants are law-abiding and have a relatively low crime rate.

Unlawful presence in the U.S. is a civil violation of federal law; therefore, undocumented immigration status does not make someone a criminal. Immigrants have the lowest rates of imprisonment for criminal convictions in American society (Migration Policy Institute). What is more, various studies, including one by Harvard Sociologist Robert J. Sampson, have shown that immigration actually reduces crime in communities, for immigrants and native-born alike.

While immigrants send significant amounts of money to family in their home countries, the vast majority of their income stays in the U.S. benefiting local communities.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank, immigrants sent \$34 billion home to Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2004, however these same immigrants spent \$306 billion in the U.S., benefiting our economy.

Immigrants do learn English.

No one can learn another language overnight. It takes time. Immigrants do want to learn English and within 10 years of arriving, more than 75 percent of immigrants speak English well. For long-term immigrants, 97% speak English well (National Academy of Sciences). The demand for English classes at the adult level exceeds supply. Today’s immigrants understand that learning English is vital to full participation in society, and they are learning English just like immigrants of the past. The best way to help immigrants learn English is to enable them to work and interact with native speakers, and to improve English as a Second Language programs in public schools and local communities.

Policies directed at immigrants quickly impact citizens.

Eighty-five percent of families with immigrant household members also have family members who are here legally, either because they are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Because of this, adverse immigration policies affect not only the immigrant, but also the citizens living with the immigrant.

Local enforcement of federal immigration laws will not fix immigration.

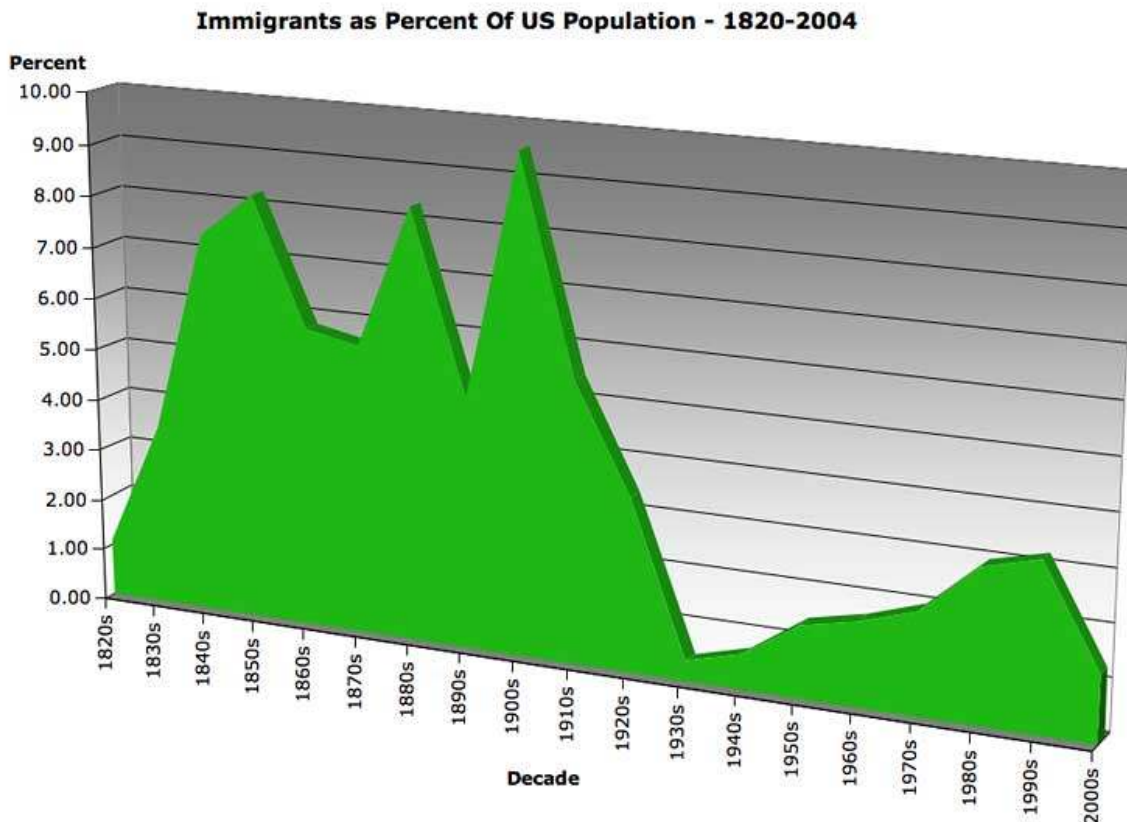
Local law enforcement depends on developing trust with the community. When local police enforce immigration laws it:

- a. compromises their primary mission: to ensure the safety of our communities (Major Cities Chief of Police statement on immigration).
- b. causes immigrants to fear reporting crimes. If immigrants do not report perpetrators, then criminals remain on the street endangering every South Carolinian.
- c. divides our communities, threatens public safety, and escalates anti-immigrant sentiment and discrimination.

State and local attempts to fix a federal problem promise instead to create a patchwork of inconsistent laws across the nation, divide our communities, threaten public safety, and escalate anti-immigrant sentiment and discrimination.

The percentage of foreign-born in America is not at an all-time high.

We have a greater total number of immigrants than in the past simply because our population is larger than ever before. The facts show that the percentage of immigrants was higher in the early 1910s than it is today (U.S. Census Bureau).



Updated January 2011