



Ten Common Immigration Myths

1. Immigrants consume more government services than they pay in taxes.
2. Immigrants take jobs from poor native-born Americans, depress native-born Americans' wages, and cause higher unemployment.
3. Immigrants commit more crimes than native-born Americans.
4. Immigrants do not want to learn English.
5. Immigration advocates want to institute an amnesty plan.
6. Immigration reform would give preference to unauthorized workers over native-born Americans.
7. The federal government should secure the border before reforming the immigration system.
8. The state of Arizona has the authority to enforce federal immigration law through SB 1070.
9. A majority of Americans opposes immigration reform.
10. E-Verify is an accurate and effective method to crack down on corrupt businesses.

1. MYTH: Immigrants consume more government services than they pay in taxes.

The Executive Office of the President's Council of Economic Advisers in its 2007 report, "Immigration's Economic Impact," cited a 1997 study by the National Research Council which stated that on average, all immigrants (legal and undocumented) will pay \$80,000 more in taxes per capita than they consume in government benefits over their lifetime.

Even the undocumented, contrary to popular belief, pay taxes. The Social Security Administration estimates that 75% of undocumented workers pay payroll taxes. They pay \$6-7 billion in Social Security annually and contribute \$1.5 billion annually to Medicare. The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California, San Diego found that 75% of undocumented immigrants had taxes withheld from their paychecks, filed tax returns, or both in 2006. Further, the Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy estimated that undocumented immigrants paid \$11.2 billion in state and local taxes in 2010 through property, sales, and income taxes.

Yet, for undocumented immigrants alone, the picture is still more complicated. While undocumented immigrants mainly pay federal taxes, they tend to use mostly state and local government services like schools, hospitals, and prisons. However, economists find that the burden on state and local budgets is marginal. In 2007, the Congressional Budget Office concluded that in most estimates, spending for undocumented immigrants on education, health care, and law enforcement accounted for less than 5% of total state and local spending for those services, on average.

The Impact of the Undocumented on State and Local Governments *A Case Study*

Texas is home to 14% of the nation's undocumented immigrants.

- The Texas Comptroller reported in 2006 that undocumented immigrants generate about \$424.7 million more in state revenues, including sales taxes and school property taxes, than they use in state services like education and health care.
- However, undocumented immigrants cost local governments an estimated \$928.9 million more than they pay in local taxes.
- Consequently, undocumented immigrants in Texas make a significant contribution to the Gross State Product (\$17.7 billion in 2005), but often represent a significant burden for local governments.

2. MYTH: Immigrants take jobs from poor native-born Americans, depress native-born Americans' wages, and cause higher unemployment.

Immigrants increase the economy's total output, and native-born Americans benefit. A 2006 study by Berkeley economist G. Peri and Italian economist G. Ottaviano estimates that immigration raised average wages of native-born American workers by 0.7%-1.8% since 1990. The President's Council of Economic Advisers estimates that American income gains from immigration are \$30 billion per year because immigrants complement the American workforce's skill-set.

Some studies have shown that the arrival of low-skilled foreign workers may have a negative effect on the wages of low-skilled native-born workers. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that an influx of low-skilled foreign workers could reduce wages of native-born high school dropouts by up to 4%. However, this population group is shrinking among the native-born, resulting in low-skilled but vital positions going unfilled. At the beginning of the 20th century, 90% of American adults lacked a high school diploma; today, fewer than 10% do not have a high school diploma. Moreover, Daniel Griswold, an economist at the Cato Institute, argues that by complementing the American labor force's skill level and filling such positions, immigrants often boost productivity, which also encourages investment.

Berkeley economist David Card notes that new immigrant workers add to the supply of labor, but they also consume products and services, increasing the demand for labor. Therefore, new immigrants do not necessarily cause higher unemployment or depressed wages.

3. MYTH: Immigrants commit more crimes than native-born Americans.

Many studies show that in reality, immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans. A 2007 study by University of California, Irvine sociologist Rubén Rumbaut and Immigration Policy Center researcher Walter Ewing found that the incarceration rate for native-born men ages 18-39 (3.5%) was five times higher than the incarceration rate for immigrant men (0.7%) in 2000. Mexican immigrant men alone, who comprise the majority of undocumented immigrants (59%), had an incarceration rate of 0.7% as well. Salvadoran and Guatemalan men, many of whom are undocumented, had an even lower incarceration rate of 0.5%. Additionally, between 1994 and 2007, when the number of undocumented immigrants peaked, violent crime in the U.S. declined by 24.2% and property crime declined by 18.9%.

While correlation is not causation, the number of immigrants generally rises and falls with the economy and moves in the opposite direction of crime rates. While studying residents in Chicago neighborhoods, Harvard sociologist Robert J. Sampson found that first-generation immigrants were 45% less likely to commit a violent act than third-generation Americans. Sampson argues that this includes both legal and undocumented immigrants, since undocumented immigrants typically settle in areas where immigrant networks already exist. Rutgers University economist Anne Piehl notes, "When we control for things like race and education, immigrants actually start to look even better."

Immigrants make up 19% of the federal prison population. However, this is mainly because immigration violations – for example, not filing a change-of-address form or over-staying a visa – are prosecuted under federal jurisdiction. In fact, the majority of federal officers empowered to make arrests belong to agencies that monitor immigration and are stationed in border states. In the Bureau's of Justice Statistics most recent report on Federal Law Enforcement Officers, Customs and Border Patrol and ICE accounted for 36% of all federal officers – a category that also includes corrections officials, bailiffs, and various security personnel not regularly making arrest. Further, 33% of all federal officers are stationed in border states (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas). Finally, the federal prison population represents only 8% of the total prison population, which is mostly housed in state prisons and local facilities.

4. MYTH: Immigrants do not want to learn English.

In a Pew Hispanic Center survey, only 23% of Latino immigrants report speaking English “very well,” but 88% of their U.S.-born adult children speak English very well. The percentage rises to 94% among later generations. Moreover, 96% of Latino immigrants believe that teaching English to children is “very important.” Unfortunately, many ESL programs are overbooked and overcrowded: 57.4% of ESL providers had waiting lists in 2006, which only exacerbates the already difficult process of learning a new language.

5. MYTH: Immigration reform is an amnesty plan

There are approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants living and working in the U.S. There are three options to address this population: 1) deport them; 2) maintain the current situation; or 3) establish a pathway to legalization for non-criminal undocumented immigrants living and working in the U.S.

Research has demonstrated that deportation would be impractical and costly. It would take 250,000 buses to return all undocumented immigrants to the border, assuming they were all captured by law enforcement. Maintaining the status quo compromises national security by making it impossible for the federal government to know who is in the country. It also limits the government’s ability to regulate the flow of immigrants to match U.S. labor needs. Establishing an earned pathway to citizenship will benefit the economy and security of the U.S., and make communities safer. It will enable undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses, open bank accounts, and eliminate their fear of reporting crimes; they will be able to seek legal employment, pay their taxes, and fully integrate into American society.

Advocates for immigration reform are not proposing an amnesty plan; amnesty is a total pardon granted to a large group of individuals. True immigration reform would require all undocumented individuals in the United States to immediately register with the federal government and submit to a rigorous process to gain legal status and earn citizenship or face imminent deportation. Unlike an amnesty, a path to citizenship would require potential citizens to pay significant fines, undergo a background check, have no criminal record, learn English, and other civic requirements.

Previous bi-partisan efforts to pass immigration reform, such as the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005 introduced by Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and John McCain (R-AZ), have included similar provisions for an earned pathway to citizenship. Coupled with border security improvements and updated visa rules, an earned path to citizenship will create a modern, working immigration system for the U.S.

6. MYTH: Immigration reform would give preference to unauthorized workers over native-born Americans.

Neither the current immigration system nor immigration reform legislation shows preference for undocumented workers over native-born Americans. In fact, there are many penalties in place to discourage hiring undocumented workers, and employers are legally required to verify their employees’ work authorization status through the I-9 form. Immigration reform legislation would also include penalties for employers who hire workers without proper documentation, a provision which will lower the demand for undocumented labor.

In addition, most sectors give U.S. workers preference in employment, even over potential immigrants. For example, the U.S. government only issues temporary agriculture worker visas (H-2A) once employers show that they have sought out American workers and that their labor demands are still unmet. Employers’ requests have for both high- and low-skilled workers have been consistently high because they face labor shortages even after their extensive searches for American workers.

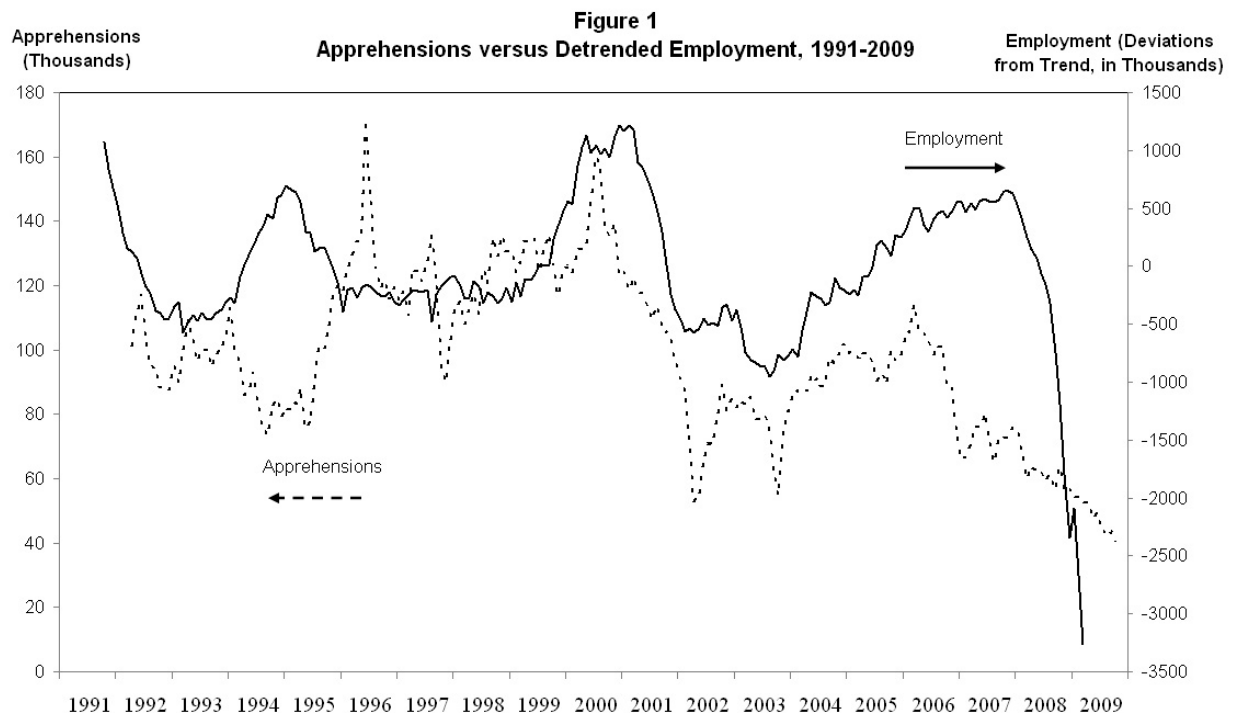
There often is little competition for jobs between citizens and undocumented or legal immigrants. This is because unemployed natives and employed immigrants generally have different levels of education, live in different parts of the country, have experience in different occupations, and have different amounts of work experience.

Impact of immigration on wages from 1994 to 2007 by education level									
	U.S.-born			Foreign-born			All		
	Low	High	Typical	Low	High	Typical	Low	High	Typical
Less than high school	-0.7%	1.0%	0.3%	-3.3%	-4.3%	-3.7%	-1.4%	-0.4%	-0.7%
High school	0.3	0.4	0.3	-2.9	-6.1	-4.5	0.1	-0.1	0.0
Some college	0.6	0.8	0.7	-1.9	-4.3	-3.1	0.5	0.4	0.4
College	0.2	0.5	0.4	-3.8	-7.4	-5.6	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2
All	0.3	0.6	0.4	-3.2	-6.0	-4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0

SOURCE: EPI analysis of CPS data.

7. MYTH: The federal government should secure the border before reforming the immigration system.

Immigration enforcement is at an all-time high, with increased personnel, technology, and resources at our borders. The U.S. Border Patrol's 2011 budget was \$3.6 billion—more than nine times its 1992 budget—and its total number of agents has doubled over the past ten years. Border Patrol is supported by thousands of other agents from Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), National Guard, and Coast Guard, as well as Air Force and Marine agents.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; Department of Homeland Security; Author's own calculations.

Since 2006, the Department of Homeland Security has constructed 646 miles of fencing along the southwest border. In addition, there are 37 Border Patrol checkpoints, 93 tactical checkpoints, 139 Border Patrol stations, 26 miles of special access roads, 39 ports of entry, and 7 forward operating bases to complement the newly constructed fence. High-tech security mechanisms have also been deployed: there are thousands of infrared cameras and ground sensors to detect intrusions, in addition to remote video, aircraft, and radar surveillance systems. These high-tech mechanisms were part of the SBI-Net initiative, which was repeatedly postponed and finally abandoned in 2010.

Increased border security is costly and shows diminishing returns. According to a 2005 Cato Institute report, the cost per arrest increased from \$300 to \$1,200 over a ten-year period. Constructing a fence along the entire border would be extremely cost-prohibitive, and the current fences have only shifted migrants to less-patrolled areas, resulting in a greater number of migrants' deaths. Meanwhile, increased border security has made the process of crossing the border arduous and inefficient for those who need to do so legally for business or personal reasons.

As a result of both increased enforcement and the economic recession, the number of people apprehended at the borders has dropped by nearly two-thirds since 2000. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano cited this statistic to support her claim that "the security of the Southwest border has been transformed from where it was in 2007." Yet, even as we increased security infrastructure and the number of agents along the border, the population of undocumented immigrants increased, tracking the economy more closely than the number of resources at the border. Moreover, nearly half of all undocumented immigrants were once here legally and have overstayed their visas. Fences and increased land-border enforcement will not stop this class of violators.

8. MYTH: The state of Arizona has the authority to enforce federal immigration law through SB 1070.

In 1875, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that only the federal government has the authority to regulate immigration in *Chy Lung v. Freeman*. Immigrants must be charged with—and, if necessary, deported for—immigration offenses by federal officials. Even in state-federal partnerships (287g agreements), state officials are only permitted to assist federal officials, who still reserve the exclusive power to remove or penalize immigration violators.

In many areas, SB 1070 goes beyond federal law, imposing new and sometimes more severe punishments. For example, Section 5 of the new law makes it a misdemeanor for an undocumented immigrant to solicit work or for someone to pick up day laborers on the street for hire. Section 2 allows citizens to sue local or state authorities if they believe the new law is not being enforced, a provision that would cost police departments money and time (\$1,000 to \$5,000 a day). In any event, SB 1070 and similar laws discourage cooperation between neighborhood communities and local law enforcement, thereby endangering public safety.

Police chiefs from across the country have voiced their opposition to SB 1070. "Laws like this will actually increase crime, not decrease crime," said Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck. Head of the Arizona Association of Chiefs of Police, John Harris, confirmed that "the added responsibilities will stretch our resources when they are already stretched to the max."

A number of states have since followed Alabama's examples, including Indiana, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina. Alabama's law, among the strictest, would criminalize offering a ride to an undocumented immigrant and requires school districts to verify students' immigration status. Georgia, meanwhile, has faced significant labor shortages due to the exodus of Latinos from the state. The governor's plan to fill these vacancies with felons on probation has failed to ease the burden. And all of these laws are facing federal and state court challenges, and provisions of the Indiana law were struck down on the basis that they interfered with the U.S. diplomatic relations.

9. MYTH: The Majority of Americans do not support immigration reform.

The Pew Research Center for People and the Press reported that support for immigration reform had risen by three points to 63% from 2007 to 2009. This percent increase is supported by an ABC/Washington Post poll showing 61% approval for establishing a path to citizenship for the undocumented population. And according to a poll of likely voters by the Benenson Strategy Group, 71% believe that the nation would be better off if undocumented immigrants became legal residents and citizens, rather than being deported – an undertaking that would require a quarter of a million buses to the border. Further, support for immigration reform transcends party lines, and coalitions supporting immigration reform include Democrats, Republicans, unions, chambers of commerce, religious and ethnic groups, teachers, law enforcement, and healthcare officials.

10. Myth: E-Verify is an accurate and effective method to crack down on corrupt businesses.

5% of the total workforce is estimated to be undocumented, and the proportion is substantially higher in a number of industries. Instituting E-Verify will result in a major crisis for a number of businesses who may have unknowingly hired undocumented immigrants or who are simply forced to do so out of necessity. The least scrupulous employers will secretly maintain their undocumented employees, swelling the size of the labor black market and depriving the government up to \$17.3 billion in tax revenues over ten years, according to a 2008 Congressional Budget Office report. This will also cause a number of businesses to go under, resulting in a loss of jobs and income for a number of Americans, and may increase the cost of many goods, due both to higher labor costs and decrease in supply and the number of suppliers.

Further, estimates on E-Verify's accuracy vary greatly, and a 2009 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services study showed that E-Verify only identifies unauthorized workers 46% of the time. The system is not adept at flagging identity fraud, and even in Arizona, where employers are *required* to screen new hires, only slightly more than half of all new employees are screened. And the National Immigration Law Center estimated that – in light of the error rate – 1.2 million individuals would have to go through the hassle of contacting a government agency to get their records corrected following a system error. This process may take a great deal of time and effort, reducing worker productivity, causing unnecessary stress, and resulting in job-loss because records cannot be corrected quickly enough – or at all.

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