

Five Myths about Immigration Refuted

By JOHN VINSON

Immigration advocates have a stable of myths they commonly repeat, and because their numerous friends in the media repeat them too, the general public tends to believe these false claims. Recently, Steve Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies took aim at five of these myths and blasted them with statistics from the U.S. Census, The Bureau of Labor Statistics, and private research organizations. The myths are as follows:

MYTH 1: IMMIGRATION CAN FIX AN AGING SOCIETY

Those making this claim often posit immigration as the way to save Social Security and Medicare. Immigration, they contend, will significantly lower our average age, thereby providing an adequate number of young workers to support those retirement programs.

It is true that the present level and character of immigration will raise the percentage of working-age people (16 to 65) over time, but the increase will be negligible—far too small to make meaningful contributions to Social Security and Medicare. To illustrate, in 2010, 66.6 percent of our population was working-age. By 2050, that total, without any immigration, would drop to 59.2 percent. With current immigration, it would only rise to 60.3 percent.

The percentage would be higher if we had an immigration policy that specifically selected for young immigrants, but such a goal would conflict with existing priorities for immigrants, including family ties, skills, and diversity. Given the constituencies for these categories, it seems unlikely that an overall age preference could be enacted.

Current policy will not make us much younger, but it will make us much more numerous. By 2050, if present trends continue, we'll add almost 80 million more people to our current population of 320 million. This rapid surge of population will place considerable stress on our finances, infrastructure, and environment. The attendant growth in diversity will strain national

unity. Social Security won't gain from it, but social insecurity just might.

Source: Steven Camarota, 2012 "Projecting Immigration's Impact on the Size and Age of the 21st Century Population," Center for Immigration Studies."

MYTH 2: IMMIGRANTS ARE UNIQUELY ENTREPRENEURIAL

Commonly we hear that we need not worry about immigrants taking U.S. jobs because they excel at creating businesses which create new jobs for everyone. The basis of this myth is that some national groups of immigrants are more likely than natives to create businesses. But it ignores the reality that other groups are less likely to be entrepreneurs. Overall there is very little difference in the percentage of natives who are self-employed (11.1) and immigrants (11.4).

This slight edge in favor of immigrants, however, is mitigated in favor of natives by several factors. One is that natives have a higher rate of part-time self-employment, 1.7 percent, compared with 1 percent for immigrants. Another is that a higher percentage of native-owned businesses (19 percent) employ more than ten workers, compared with 16 percent for immigrant-owned firms. Also, immigrant-owned businesses tend to hire other immigrants, usually of their national background, rather than natives.

Immigrants do reasonably well in business, achieving at a level comparable to that of natives. But they are not the entrepreneurial supermen portrayed by immigration advocates.

Source: Public use file of the 2015 Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the Current Population Survey. Figures are for employed persons 25 and older.

MYTH 3: WE NEED IMMIGRANTS BECAUSE OF A WORKER SHORTAGE

If we truly had a shortage of workers, some key statistics would reflect it, but they don't. One example is wage levels. According to the economic law of supply and demand, a real shortage in the supply of labor means that salaries will rise significantly. Between the years 2000 and 2012, the average dollar-per-hour wage for people with advanced degrees only rose from \$35.42 to \$37.34. For those with bachelor's degrees the increase was just \$27.99 to \$28.28.

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For all other levels of education, wages declined. For those with some college education the average went down from \$18.23 to \$17.30; for those with only a high school diploma: \$16.04 to \$15.78; and for those with less than a high school degree: \$11.92 to \$11.75. Basically stagnant wages throughout the workforce do not suggest a labor shortage.

Also, if we truly have a labor shortage, the percentage of the working-age people in the workforce (18 to 65) would be increasing. In fact, the percentages of natives at all educational levels have declined between 2000 and 2015—from 86 percent to 83 percent for people with a college degree; from 79 percent to 71 percent with some college; from 74 percent to 71 percent for high school graduates; and from 54 percent to 43 percent for those with less than a high school diploma. In terms of numbers, there were 48.1 million working age-natives not working in 2015.

There are many different reasons why these natives were not employed. Some, of course, couldn't find jobs. Some didn't work because spouses and parents supported them. Others went to school, and still others received public support. Whatever the case, a genuine labor shortage would be raising wages and drawing more people into the workforce, not less.

A further point to consider with respect to the labor shortage claim is that we are now entering an age of greatly increasing automation. According to a study done at Oxford University, almost half the jobs now being done by people in the U.S. will be automated within the next twenty years. In this situation, claims of labor shortage will be even harder to sell than now.

Sources: "A Decade of Flat Wages: The Key Barrier to Shared Prosperity and a Rising Middle Class," 2013 Economic Policy Institute; Public use file of the Current Population from the second quarter of 2000 and 2015; MIT Technology Review, Report Suggests Nearly Half of U.S. Jobs Are Vulnerable to Computerization, Aviva Rutkin, 9/12/13.

MYTH 4: IMMIGRANTS AREN'T ALLOWED TO GET WELFARE

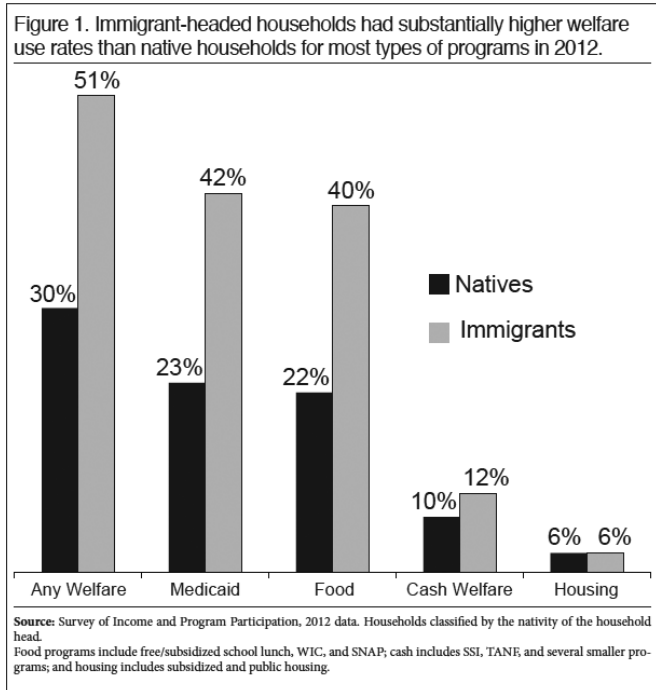
There are restrictions on immigrants getting welfare, but numerous loopholes keep them from having much effect. Immigrants aren't supposed to become "public charges," but this only applies to cash benefits, and this restriction is seldom if ever enforced. Immigrants are not eligible for some federal welfare programs until they've been here for five years, but 87 percent here have already met that requirement. Often those here for less than five years can access state programs.

Furthermore, foreigners who come as refugees may apply for all welfare programs as soon as they arrive. Illegal aliens aren't eligible for most public assistance, but they benefit from the welfare that their

American-born children can receive. Those children are counted as citizens and have the same eligibility for public assistance as all other citizens.

Immigrant-headed households use significantly more welfare (51 percent) than native-headed households (30 percent). For Medicaid, the immigrant rate is 42 percent, compared with 23 percent for natives. For food assistance, it's 40 percent for immigrant households versus 22 percent for native households. With cash welfare immigrant households receive 12 percent, compared with 10 percent for natives. For housing, both groups use the same percentage (six percent).

One point made by the Center for Immigration Studies is that high welfare usage by immigrants is not an indicator that they are lazy and shun work. Immigrants indeed have a slightly higher participation rate in the workforce than natives. The problem is that many working immigrants work at low-wage jobs, and their low salaries qualify them for welfare. Continuing mass immigration helps to keep those wages low.



Source: Steven Camarota 2015, "Welfare Use by Immigrant and Native Households: An Analysis of Medicaid, Cash, Food, and Housing Programs," Center for Immigration Studies; All Employment Growth Since 2000 Went to Immigrants, CIS Background, Karen Zeigler and Steve Camarota, June 2014.

MYTH 5: IMMIGRANTS ARE NATURAL CONSERVATIVES

This is a statement commonly made by conservatives who believe that immigrants have a love for freedom, family values, and other characteristics that

will incline them to support conservatism. Yet data show that Hispanics and Asians, groups with the largest numbers of immigrants and first generation citizens, strongly incline to liberal positions—particularly on government and economics. As a consequence, they favor Democrats by a margin of 2 to 1.

A key conservative issue is limiting the size of government. Forty-eight percent of the general public favor smaller government and fewer services, but only 19 percent of Hispanics and 36 percent of Asians share that view. Conversely, 41 percent of the general public want larger government and more services, compared with 75 percent of Hispanics and 55 percent of Asians.

Hispanics have a strongly negative view of capitalism, with 55 percent expressing this view, compared with 40 percent of the general public. Significantly, self-identified liberals have a higher view of capitalism than Hispanics. Forty-seven percent of liberals see capitalism negatively.

Among the reasons for the leftist economic bent

among immigrants is that many are from countries with that outlook. Also, many of them settle in liberal urban areas of the U.S., and that political climate tends to influence them. They also may embrace liberalism out of self-interest for welfare benefits and affirmative action.

On social issues there is no clear liberal or conservative disposition among immigrants. They are liberal on some issues and conservative on others. Many conservatives cite stronger anti-abortion sentiments among Hispanic immigrants than natives. That is true, but second generation Hispanics hold views on abortion comparable to those of native-born Americans. In any case, social issues are not a high priority for immigrants. Top issues for Hispanics are education, jobs, health care, and immigration.

Immigrants are not natural conservatives. They much more naturally incline to liberalism, as their preference for the Democratic Party clearly shows.

Source: Pew Research Center ■

