

Some commonly stated views about immigrants do not hold up under close scrutiny. Often called “myths” by supporters of immigration reform, there are certain elements of truth to these statements.

Read about the following myths below:

- **Immigrants don’t pay taxes.**
- **Illegal immigrants take jobs away from Americans. Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy.**
- **Fences and effective border enforcement reduce the flow of illegal immigrants.**
- **Today’s immigrants don’t strive to be Americans as did those of 100 years ago.**

Additional information regarding myths:

- Brian Donohue of the NJ Star-Ledger writes about the myth that [My ancestors came here legally](#).
- Justice for Immigrants, the website of the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform, has a page [Countering the Myths](#) in which they give annotated responses to statements such as Immigrants don’t want to learn English, Immigrants Increase the Crime rate, and Undocumented immigrants are a Burden on the Healthcare System.
- Two other pro-immigrant Faith-based organizations, Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR) and Sojourners, make available on the web A Toolkit for Christian Immigration Reform. An article, [10 Common Myths about Immigrants](#), is found on pages 13-14 of this publication.

**Myth: Immigrants don’t pay taxes.** Every employee who earns more than \$600 in a quarter has income and FICA tax withheld by the employer whether they are immigrants or citizens. Anyone who purchases goods in the US will find sales and use taxes are collected by the merchants, regardless of their citizenship status.

Ironically, some illegal immigrants work under a false Social Security number. They contribute to the system through payroll taxes, but they will never qualify for benefits under that number. While filing a tax return shows good intentions toward citizenship, the IRS will reject any return found to have an invalid Social Security number. There is a way for immigrants to file a tax return without a Social Security number. For the purpose of filing a tax return, Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) are available to taxpayers who don’t have Social Security numbers. Tax returns with ITINs are accepted by the IRS.

Social Security benefits are limited to those who have valid Social Security numbers. An undocumented person does not qualify for a Social Security number. There are categories of people who receive benefits but did not contribute, such as minor children of a deceased citizen worker. One category of immigrants who receive benefits without having contributed is refugees over retirement age, but they are legal immigrants. They can apply for and receive Old Age Pensions.

**Myths: Illegal immigrants take jobs away from Americans. Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy.** This myth is refuted by a May 2010 [posting](#) on Factcheck.com, a project of the Annenberg Foundation, which states:

“Do immigrants take American jobs? It’s a common refrain among those who want to tighten limits on legal immigration and deny a "path to citizenship" to the millions of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally. There’s even a new Reclaim American Jobs Caucus in the House, with at least 41 members. But most economists and other experts say there’s little to support the claim. Study after study has shown that immigrants grow the economy, expanding demand for goods and services that the foreign-born workers and their families consume, and thereby creating jobs. There is even broad agreement among economists that while immigrants may push down wages for some, the overall effect is to increase average wages for American-born workers.”

Businesses rely on foreign workers to meet their needs when the economy is booming; does that change in an economic downturn? Rakesh Kochnar of the Pew Hispanic Center authored a [report](#) and presented testimony on 3/10/2011 to the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement.

“In the one-year period from the fourth quarter of 2009 to the fourth quarter of 2010, foreign-born workers gained 657,000 jobs and native-born workers gained 685,000 jobs. The unemployment rate dropped for both groups – for immigrant workers it fell .2 percentage points and for native-born workers it decreased by .5 percentage points. Thus, the economic recovery now appears to be benefiting all workers.”

In a new (1/2011) [report](#) for the Migration Policy Institute, Georgetown Public Policy Institute Professor Harry Holzer assesses the research literature and finds that the benefits of low-skilled immigration accrue primarily to employers, who benefit from paying lower wages; and to both higher- and lower-income consumers, who purchase the goods and services less-skilled immigrants produce. The costs are borne by low-skilled native and earlier-arrived immigrant workers who must compete with these immigrants for jobs; though there is little consensus on the exact magnitudes of these costs, they generally appear to be quite modest.

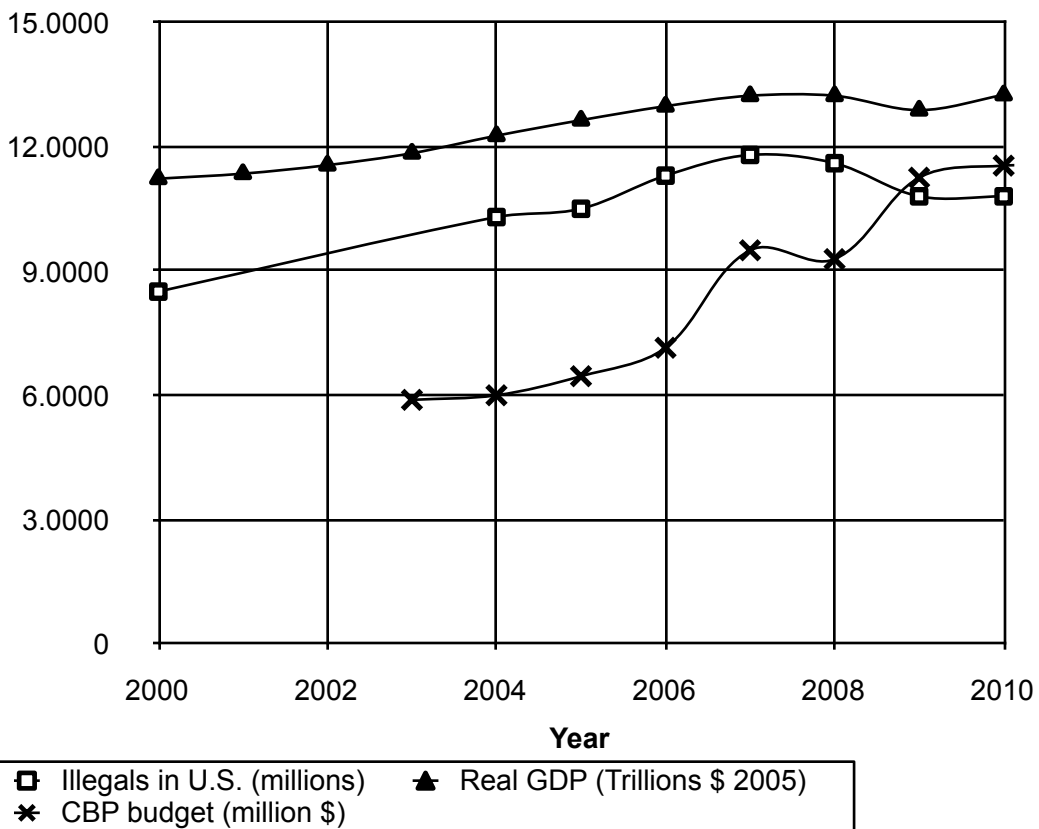
Immigrants’ negative impacts on native workers are muted by a range of factors, the report explains. Low-skilled immigrant workers are themselves consumers of U.S. goods and services (and thus job creators). They are more likely to compete with earlier cohorts of immigrants than with U.S.-born workers because they are concentrated in jobs requiring limited English skills. Employers adjust their production techniques to make use of the greater supply of less-skilled labor available.

Immigrants may actually boost average incomes for native-born population, while having no significant effect on native-born rates of employment, argues Giovanni Peri, an economist at the University of California, Davis. "Data show that, on net, immigrants expand the U.S. economy’s productive capacity," he writes in an August report for the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. He found "no evidence that these effects take place at the expense of jobs for workers born in the United States.”

[Another perspective](#) on the question of whether immigrants push down wage levels is offered by The Christian Science Monitor’s staff writer Mark Trumball.

**Myth: Fences and effective border enforcement reduce the flow of illegal immigrants.**

Most foreign nationals entering the U.S. come as tourists or on business. Others are students who enroll in our schools. In fact, oftentimes individuals lose legal status when they overstay their visas, though the stereotypical illegal alien arrives by sneaking across the border from Mexico. A 2005 Migration Information Source [story](#) describes characteristics of unauthorized migrants to the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does its own estimates of the [number of illegal residents](#). The Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency within DHS is responsible for enforcement at and between ports of entry. As can be seen in the chart below, the number of illegals rose at a fairly steady rate from 2000 to 2007, despite an increase of over 50% in the [CBP budget](#). After peaking in 2007, the number of illegals has dropped, mirroring the changes in gross domestic product (GDP) over the last 10 years. Certainly many factors influence an individual's decisions to migrate, but there are reasons to think that a desire to improve one's standard of living is a more potent factor than is fear of being apprehended when crossing a border.



**Myth: Today's immigrants don't strive to be Americans as did those of 100 years ago.**

Some feel that today's immigrants are not taking on American values such as freedom, democracy, hard work, patriotism to the degree necessary for a unified society. Not only in the U.S. but in other countries dual citizenship is becoming more common. There is concern over U.S. residents who do not learn English. Judgments about attitudes are necessarily subjective, but characteristics such as educational attainment and income can be quantified. Michael Barone\*, author of *The New Americans*, writes "The statistics showing that the average Latino has only slightly improved mastery of English, education levels, and incomes are actually evidence of substantial gains. . . . overall statistics that average in huge numbers of new arrivals mask the progress that pre-existing immigrants have made." As might be expected, the longer immigrants are here, the greater their fluency in English, the more they and their children acquire new skills, the better their wages, and the more likely they are to own a home and be moving into the middle class. This follows the pattern of earlier waves of mostly European immigrants of the late 1800s and early 1900's. While today's recently arrived immigrants tend to be poor, compared to natives, immigrants generally are better represented in the work force and less likely to be on welfare or in prison.

\* quoted on page 144 of Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders by Jason L. Riley (Gotham Books, New York, NY, 2008)