



IMMIGRATION MYTHS AND REALITIES

REALITY: Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, pay significant taxes each year

Immigration Myth 1: Immigrants don't pay taxes

FACTS:

- Undocumented immigrants are taxpayers - they pay sales and property taxes and many pay income taxes. The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) released a study showing that undocumented immigrants across the U.S. paid an estimated \$11.84 billion in state and local taxes in 2012.
- The Social Security Administration estimates that undocumented immigrants contribute about \$12 billion each year to the cash flow of the program without receiving benefits in return because of their status.
- In New York, undocumented immigrants contribute over \$1 billion in state and local taxes annually.

REALITY: Immigrants are learning English slightly faster than their predecessors

Immigration Myth 2: Immigrants aren't learning English

FACTS:

- Immigrants in the United States today are actually learning English slightly faster than their predecessors. Sixty-six percent of immigrants who speak a foreign language at home can also speak English "very well" or "well," according to a new study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.
- In many parts of the country, the demand for English as a Second Language classes is far greater than the services available.
- The most significant determinant of whether or not immigrants learn a new language is their age at the time of entry. Immigrants who arrive as young children learn a second language quickly while adults find it much more challenging.
- 89% of native-born Hispanics in the U.S. speak English well.

REALITY: Immigrants usually are not competing with native-born residents for jobs

Immigration Myth 3: Immigrants take jobs from native-born residents

Facts:

- Immigrants do not generally compete with U.S. born workers. Instead, immigrants usually compete with the migrants who came before them.
- Many immigrants with legal authorization to work here are highly skilled and sought after by U.S. companies because of shortages in the native-born skill base. Economists find that highly skilled immigrants have a significant positive impact on creating new jobs in the United States.
- Undocumented immigrants often fill the lowest rung of employment in construction, agriculture and domestic services. Studies show that low-skilled immigrant workers and low-skilled native-born workers take on very different jobs, with native-born workers taking jobs that require work authorization and English language skills.
- The largest reason that native-born employment has stagnated or declined is due to significant restructuring of the U.S. economy.



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Reality: Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for most federal public benefits and even authorized immigrants face strict eligibility restrictions

Immigration Myth 4: Undocumented immigrants are receiving extensive public benefits

Facts:

- Undocumented immigrants do not qualify for welfare, food stamps, Medicaid or most other public benefits.
- Most government assistance programs require proof of legal immigration status and even documented immigrants cannot receive many benefits until they have been in the United States for more than five years.
- Undocumented immigrants can receive schooling and emergency medical care. A recent report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce states that “economists view expenditures on healthcare and education for children as investments that pay off later, when those children become workers and taxpayers.”
- Studies have found that immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in government services and benefits.

Reality: Immigrants are less likely than native-born citizens to commit serious crimes and areas with high rates of immigration are associated with lower rates of violent crime

Immigration Myth 5: Immigrants are bringing a crime wave to the United States

Facts:

- Decades of research show that immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes than native-born citizens.
- Research also shows that high rates of immigration are associated with lower rates of violent crime and property crime. This holds true for both documented and undocumented immigrants.
- From 1990 - 2013, immigration in the United States increased significantly, including the number of undocumented immigrants, which more than tripled. During that time, the violent crime rate in this country declined 48%.
- The reasons for lower crime rates among immigrants are not fully understood. One theory is that people who choose the intense emotional and social sacrifice that comes with migrating are less likely to engage in risky or criminal behavior that would put their new lives in danger. Another theory is that immigrants revitalize neighborhoods and generate economic growth, which helps decrease the crime rate.

Reality: ALL children, regardless of immigration status, are legally entitled to public elementary and secondary education in the United States. Our entire society benefits from educating all children.

Immigration Myth 6: Immigrants are stressing our public schools

- Children of undocumented immigrants made up 7.3% of the U.S. school population in 2014. Most of these children (5.9%) were born in the U.S. and are citizens. The rest (1.3%) are undocumented immigrants themselves. In New York, children of undocumented immigrants make up 6% of the K-12 school population.
- In 1982 the Supreme Court ruled that children, regardless of immigration status, must have access to public elementary and secondary education. The Court found that the harm imposed on society by denying undocumented children a public education was far greater than any resources saved from excluding them.
- Immigrants, whether they own a home or rent, pay property tax that funds our local schools.
- Research shows that diversity in classrooms provides students with a range of cognitive and social benefits.
- An increase in the number of English-language learners (ELL) has helped spur the growth of dual language programs across the country, allowing all students the opportunity to learn two languages.



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Reality: There is no single “line” to wait on in order to immigrate to the United States, nor is there any simple way to “get legal” after entering the U.S.

Immigration Myth 7: Undocumented immigrants should have “waited in line” outside the U.S. in order to immigrate here or should have “fixed” their status after entering.

Facts:

- **THE LAW CREATES NARROW CATEGORIES OF ELIGIBILITY**

Most people immigrate to the United States through one of three routes: family relationships, job offers, or humanitarian grounds. Both family and employment-based immigration are limited to specific situations and relationships. Humanitarian protection is only available to certain categories of people. All three routes are expensive, complicated and narrow. Most immigrants do not have the necessary family or employment relationships and often cannot get humanitarian protection. Therefore, even if immigrants have family and jobs in the U.S. or are fleeing persecution back home, these three routes may not be available to them.

- **EVEN ELIGIBLE IMMIGRANTS FACE SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES**

Immigrants eligible for one of the three routes often face significant obstacles. Under the law, no country can receive more than seven percent of the visas available each year. Therefore, people from countries such as Mexico, China, India and the Philippines, who often have U.S. citizen family members and are most interested in immigrating to the United States, usually have a very long wait. Often this can exceed twenty years depending on their family tie and country of origin.

- **IMMIGRANTS ALREADY IN THE U.S. OFTEN HAVE NO LEGAL WAY TO CORRECT THEIR STATUS**

Once somebody has entered the United States without authorization or has overstayed their visa, the law typically prohibits them from getting legal status within the United States. To get status, an immigrant will usually have to leave the U.S. first and return to their country of origin. When this happens, they may be banned from returning to the United States for up to ten years. This is true even if they are married to a U.S. citizen and have U.S. citizen children. The limited exceptions to this rule only apply for select groups of people.

- **THE RULES HAVE CHANGED DRAMATICALLY**

Immigration law has changed dramatically over the past 100 years. It has become extremely complex and confusing. Most of the people who immigrated to the United States more than 75 years ago would likely not be eligible under our current laws.



IMMIGRATION MYTHS AND REALITIES

Myths and Realities about Family-Based Immigration

Some people have asked us to explain what is meant by "chain migration," a term that has been in the news recently. "Chain migration" is being used to describe what has traditionally been known as "family reunification" or "family-based immigration." Since the Immigration and Nationality Act was enacted in 1965, legal immigration to the United States has been based mainly on family ties or work skills. The family-based immigration program enables citizens of the United States and green card holders to bring certain qualified family members to the United States. This is currently the most common legal form of immigration to the United States, but it has many restrictions.

There are limits on which family members are eligible (based on whether the person petitioning is a green card holder or citizen). There are also caps on the total number of immigrants who can come from each country, so even family members who are eligible for this program may have to wait 10 to 20 years or more to come to the United States. Finally, the family member in the United States must show an income level that is above the poverty line and has to commit to support the family member they are bringing to the United States.

Research has shown many benefits of a family-based immigration system:

- This system keeps families together and provides a strong support system for new immigrants.
- Having the support of a family often ensures that those immigrants are more successful, which means they are able to contribute more to their own communities.
- Family-sponsored immigrants are the most upwardly mobile American workers (regardless of whether they are high or low skilled workers).
- Family-based immigration has been shown to have a strong positive impact on the development of new businesses and on revitalizing communities.

Sources:

American Immigration Council	Migration Policy Institute
Cato Institute	Pew Research Center
Urban Institute	Harvard Education Letter
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	The Century Foundation
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
The Niskanen Center	

To receive more Immigration Myths and Realities, join our mailing list by emailing Katie at kgraves-abe@neighborslink.org

Neighbors Link operates throughout Westchester County and has locations in Mount Kisco, Ossining and Yonkers.

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