

# Top 10 Immigration Myths and Facts

Myth	Fact	Source
1. Immigrants don't pay taxes	All immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other. As far as income tax payments go, sources vary in their accounts, but a range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes. Even undocumented immigrants pay income taxes, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers), which grew \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998.	National Academy of Sciences, Cato Institute, Urban Institute, Social Security Administration
2. Immigrants come here to take welfare <sup>1</sup>	Immigrants come to work and reunite with family members. Immigrant labor force participation is consistently higher than native-born, and immigrant workers make up a larger share of the U.S. labor force (12.4%) than they do the U.S. population (11.5%). Moreover, the ratio between immigrant use of public benefits and the amount of taxes they pay is consistently favorable to the U.S., unless the "study" was undertaken by an anti-immigrant group. In one estimate, immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in taxes, and use about \$5 billion in public benefits. In another cut of the data, immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the amount of government services they use.	American Immigration Lawyers Association, Urban Institute
3. Immigrants send all their money back to their home countries	In addition to the consumer spending of immigrant households, immigrants and their businesses contribute \$162 billion in tax revenue to U.S. federal, state, and local governments. While it is true that immigrants remit billions of dollars a year to their home countries, this is one of the most targeted and effective forms of direct foreign investment.	Cato Institute, Inter-American Development Bank
4. Immigrants take jobs and opportunity away from Americans	The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900s coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth. Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers, and foreign-born students allow many U.S. graduate programs to keep their doors open. While there has been no comprehensive study done of immigrant-owned businesses, we have countless examples: in Silicon Valley, companies begun by Chinese and Indian immigrants generated more than \$19.5 billion in sales and nearly 73,000 jobs in 2000.	Brookings Institution
5. Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy	During the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, filling gaps left by native-born workers in both the high- and low-skill ends of the spectrum. Immigrants fill jobs in key sectors, start their own businesses, and contribute to a thriving economy. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually. As Alan Greenspan points out, 70% of immigrants arrive in prime working age. That means we haven't spent a penny on their education, yet they are	National Academy of Sciences, Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, Federal Reserve

<sup>1</sup> Due to welfare reform, legal immigrants are severely restricted from accessing public benefits, and undocumented immigrants are even further precluded from anything other than emergency services. Anti-immigrant groups skew these figures by including programs used by U.S. citizen children of immigrants in their definition of immigrant welfare use, among other tactics.

	transplanted into our workforce and will contribute \$500 billion toward our social security system over the next 20 years.	
6. Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans	Within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. Greater than 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens; given increased immigration in the 1990s, this figure will rise as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization in the coming years. The number of immigrants naturalizing spiked sharply after two events: enactment of immigration and welfare reform laws in 1996, and the terrorist attacks in 2001.	U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services)
7. Today's immigrants are different than those of 100 years ago	The percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born now stands at 11.5%; in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century it was approximately 15%. Similar to accusations about today's immigrants, those of 100 years ago initially often settled in mono-ethnic neighborhoods, spoke their native languages, and built up newspapers and businesses that catered to their fellow émigrés. They also experienced the same types of discrimination that today's immigrants face, and integrated within American culture at a similar rate. If we view history objectively, we remember that every new wave of immigrants has been met with suspicion and doubt and yet, ultimately, every past wave of immigrants has been vindicated and saluted.	U.S. Census Bureau
8. Most immigrants cross the border illegally	Around 75% have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25% that are undocumented, 40% overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas.	INS Statistical Yearbook
9. Weak U.S. border enforcement has led to high undocumented immigration	From 1986 to 1998, the Border Patrol's budget increased six-fold and the number of agents stationed on our southwest border doubled to 8,500. The Border Patrol also toughened its enforcement strategy, heavily fortifying typical urban entry points and pushing migrants into dangerous desert areas, in hopes of deterring crossings. Instead, the undocumented immigrant population doubled in that timeframe, to 8 million—despite the legalization of nearly 3 million immigrants after the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986. Insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the U.S., compared with the number of jobs available to them, have created this current conundrum.	Cato Institute
10. The war on terrorism can be won through immigration restrictions	No security expert since September 11 <sup>th</sup> , 2001 has said that restrictive immigration measures would have prevented the terrorist attacks—instead, the key is good use of good intelligence. Most of the 9/11 hijackers were here on legal visas. Since 9/11, the myriad of measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have netted no terrorism prosecutions. In fact, several of these measures could have the opposite effect and actually make us less safe, as targeted communities of immigrants are afraid to come forward with information.	Newspaper articles, various security experts, and think tanks