

Discover More: Immigration Myths and Realities (PBS.org)

Myth #1: Immigrants don't pay taxes and "freeload" off of the welfare system.

Immigrants pay taxes, just like anyone else — between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state and local taxes. Moreover, it's estimated that immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in taxes, and use only about \$5 billion in public benefits,¹ so the government makes money off of immigrants — often because undocumented workers are afraid they'll "get caught" if they use public services such as healthcare. Undocumented immigrants pay income taxes, too: The Social Security Administration's balance of taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security number grew by \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998.²

Myth #2: Immigrants don't want to learn English because they want to make Spanish our national language and take over our culture.

While 83 percent of immigrants to the United States do not speak English at home, a recent survey by the Pew Hispanic Center shows that a clear majority of Latinos (57 percent) believe that immigrants have to speak English to be a part of American society. And it is Latino immigrants, rather than native-born Latinos, who are more likely to say that immigrants have to learn English.³ Another study published by the *Population and Development Review* concluded that English is not under threat as the dominant language spoken in the United States — even in Southern California, home to the largest concentration of Spanish-speaking immigrants.⁴

Myth #3: Immigration to the United States has increased over the last century.

This is technically true in terms of sheer numbers, but keep in mind that at the start of the 20th century, the U.S. population was less than half what it is now. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the early 20th century, the foreign-born population was about 15 percent of the total population, whereas now it stands at about 11.5 percent, so the rate of immigration relative to the U.S.-born population — the most accurate indicator — has decreased.⁵

Myth #4: Immigrants on average are dramatically less educated than native-born Americans.

Taken together, immigrants on average have perhaps a year less education than Americans born in the United States. The proportion of immigrants in the labor force that have a bachelor's or post-graduate degree is higher than that of the native labor force, and the proportion of adult immigrants with eight or fewer years of education has been decreasing, while the proportion of adult immigrants with 16 years or more of education has been increasing.⁶

Myth #5: Immigrants cause unemployment because they take jobs from native-born Americans.

The largest wave of immigration to the United States since the 1900s coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth. Many studies have shown that even among low-paid and minority groups, immigrants do not cause native unemployment.⁷ If anything, many believe that immigrants create new jobs with their purchasing power and the new businesses they start,⁸ a pattern that has been particularly important with the emergence of the high-tech industry. According to one recent study, immigrant entrepreneurs founded 25 percent of all U.S. engineering and technology companies launched in the last decade — such as Google, for example, which was co-founded by Russian immigrant Sergey Brin. Immigrant-founded companies were estimated to have generated \$53 billion in sales in 2005 and created about 450,000 jobs as of 2005.⁹

Related Links:

Take the Immigration Myths & Realities Quiz on PBS' *The New Americans* website.

Common misperceptions regarding immigration and its effects on American society often result in suspicion, discrimination and doubt. Do you know the truth? Take this quiz to test your immigration IQ.

See how much you know about immigrants and immigration in America... Take the quiz at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/quiz.html>.

Sources

1. [Immigration Forum: Top Ten Immigration Myths and Facts](#) (PDF)
2. Ibid.
3. [Pew Hispanic Center: Hispanic Attitudes Toward Learning English](#)
4. [Population Council: Linguistic Life Expectancies: Immigrant Language Retention in Southern California](#)
5. U.S. Census: [Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990](#) and [The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003](#)
6. [Cato Institute: Immigration: The Demographic and Economic Facts](#)
7. [Immigration Forum: Top Ten Immigration Myths and Facts](#) (PDF)
nd Facts
8. [Cato Institute: Immigration: The Demographic and Economic Facts](#)
9. [Pratt School of Engineering, Duke University: America's New Immigrant Entrepreneurs](#)