

## GOP should remember: Data show immigrants enforce, not threaten, US values

*One sticking point in the House GOP discussion of immigration reform is concern over whether immigrants will be productive members of society. Republicans shouldn't worry. Immigrants outperform native-born citizens on key measures of American values and civic engagement.*

By: Daniel Allott – July 10, 2013

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A comprehensive immigration reform bill has passed the Senate, but it faces dubious prospects in the House, where it probably won't garner enough of the Republican support needed to bring it to a floor vote. One Republican sticking point is that the prospective law doesn't go far enough to ensure that immigrants integrate into American society to become productive, contributing members who uphold American values and are civically engaged.

But there is a rich irony in such concern over whether immigrants will become productive members of society: On several traditional measures of American values and societal productivity, America's native-born citizens are being outperformed by its immigrants – both legal and undocumented.

Studies show that immigrants applying for citizenship surpass American citizens on tests of knowledge of American history and civics. To take one example, in a 2012 telephone poll, Xavier University researchers found that 35 percent of Americans failed the civics section of the US naturalization test. In contrast, 97.5 percent of immigrants applying for citizenship passed the test in 2012.

The willingness to defend one's country is generally considered a reliable measure of patriotism. As General George S. Patton once said, "The highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one's country."

Immigrants have served with distinction in the US military in every major armed conflict since the Revolutionary War. And according to the Center for Naval Analysis, the three-month attrition rate of non-citizen soldiers is nearly twice that of US citizens.

Many thousands of men and women have made the journey from non-citizen immigrant to citizen while fighting, and sometimes dying, in the US military. The Pentagon estimates that roughly 8,000 non-citizens join the military every year, which can be a path to citizenship.

Law abidance is another basic marker of good citizenship. And studies show that both legal and illegal immigrants are less likely than the native born to break the law. That was the conclusion of a 2010 Cato Institute report, which cited a 2008 study by the Public

Policy Institute of California (PPIC), the state with the highest number of immigrants. It found that “US-born men have an institutionalization rate that is 10 times higher than that of foreign-born men.”

Overall, the PPIC researchers found that American-born adult men are two-and-a-half times more likely to be incarcerated than foreign-born men, including both legal and illegal immigrants. The Cato report cites Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson, who in 2006 concluded that immigrants have not increased crime in America, and that they could actually be part of the reason why crime has decreased so much.

Religiosity is also a traditional American value. In his book “Democracy in America,” Alexis De Tocqueville wrote: “Religion in America ... must be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country.” Legal immigrants are more religious than native-born Americans. The most important recent shift in religious observance has been the rise of the “nones” – those with no religious affiliation, whose share of the adult population reached 20 percent in 2012, according to the Pew Forum. In contrast, a May 2013 Pew Form survey found that only 14 percent of legal immigrants are religiously unaffiliated, a share that has remained relatively stable over many years.

Also, as former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush pointed out in a recent speech, immigrants’ families are more likely to be intact than those of native-born Americans. According to the Census Bureau’s most recent data, 39 percent of births to native-born Americans are to unwed mothers, while just 24 percent of births to foreign-born mothers are out of wedlock.

In many cases, native-born Americans aren’t doing as well in school as the children of recent immigrants. A February Pew Research Center survey found that immigrants’ children are more likely than the general population to have a bachelor’s degree (36 percent to 31 percent). The report also found that “second-generation Hispanics and Asians place more importance than does the general public on hard work and career success.”

Finally, native-born Americans start fewer businesses than immigrants. In fact, they were half as likely as foreign-born Americans to start a new business in 2011.

According to the Pew Research Center, 46 percent of Americans believe “the growing number of newcomers threaten traditional American values.” But the data show otherwise. Newcomers reinforce – not undermine – American values.