



Debunked! 5 myths about immigrants

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Whether it's on cable news, around water coolers or on the stage of major political events, myths about immigrants — particularly those here without legal status — are traded like baseball cards.

While immigration has long been a hot topic for political debate, it was front and center during the 2016 presidential campaign, when Donald Trump railed against illegal immigration, called for mass deportations and promised a wall between the United States and Mexico.

But what's the truth?

Here are five myths about immigrants and the findings by scholars who debunk them:

1. "They don't pay taxes!"

According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, immigrants without legal status paid more than \$587 million in New Jersey state and local taxes in 2014. They paid more than \$11 billion in state and local taxes nationwide.

If granted a path to legal citizenship, those in New Jersey would have paid an estimated \$74 million more.

"Proposals to remove immigrants ignore their many contributions. In a time when most states are facing revenue shortages, the potential budgetary impacts of mass deportation merits careful consideration," the institute wrote in a March 2017 report.

2. "They commit crimes!"

During the Republican National Convention, Trump devoted an entire evening to victims of crimes committed by immigrants without legal status.

But the nonpartisan Cato Institute, a public policy research group, has said immigrants are incarcerated at a far lower rate than native-born Americans.

According to a March 15 report:

- Immigrants with legal status are incarcerated at a rate of 0.47 percent of all immigrants in that population.
- Immigrants without legal status are incarcerated at a rate of 0.85 percent of their population.
- Not including detainees for immigration offenses, immigrants without status are incarcerated at a rate of 0.5 percent.
- Native-born Americans are incarcerated at a rate of 1.53 percent of the entire population.

3. "They're taking our jobs!"

A 2001 report from the U.S. Department of Labor famously called this "the most persistent fallacy about immigration in popular thought."

According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, only teenagers who dropped out of high school and older immigrants saw their hours or employment opportunities cut due to newly arriving immigrants.

Immigrants in the science and technology sector had a positive impact on both working-class and highly skilled native-born Americans, spurring innovation that created jobs.

4. "They only come here to have babies!"

The concept of the "anchor baby" — born to an immigrant but on U.S. soil, granting instant citizenship — is not entirely untrue. According to a 2015 Pew Research Center report, about 295,000 babies were born on U.S. soil to immigrants without legal status. It represented about 8 percent of births nationwide.

But that number was down from about 15,000 births from 2012, and well off the 2007 high mark of 355,000 "anchor babies" born.

In 2010, Politifact interviewed medical professionals in states along the U.S.-Mexico border and found that higher quality treatment unavailable in Mexico was the main goal. Some did report patients who deliberately wanted their child to have citizenship.

5. "They're draining the system!"

Immigrants without legal status are not eligible for federal public benefits, such as Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare or food stamps. And legal immigrants cannot partake in these services until they've been in the country for at least five years.

According to the Urban Institute, more than two-thirds of children in families with U.S.-born parents received food stamps in 2008 and 2009. Less than half of children of immigrant parents received food stamps during the same time period.

In Freehold's immigrant community, many of those families that qualify for government assistance have declined. They're afraid that being labeled a "drain" would make them a target for deportation.

“People are dropping out of services for which they’re eligible because of the fear Trump has put in them,” said Rita Dentino, director of immigrant resource center Casa Freehold.