



One Billion Americans?

Pawel Styrna

September 22, 2020

In his recently-published book, *One Billion Americans: The Case for Thinking Bigger*, Vox co-founder Matthew Yglesias makes a multi-pronged argument – combining pro-mass-immigration advocacy, liberal superpower “nationalism,” pro-natalism, technocratic social engineering, and expanding the welfare state – in favor of literally tripling the population of the United States. The essence of Yglesias’ argument is that America needs significantly more people to remain the richest and most powerful country on earth, and to successfully compete with communist China’s growing power (economic, military, and otherwise) in the future.

Why one billion Americans, as opposed to, say, 500 million or 700 million? Well, as Yglesias explains, both communist China and India have over 1 billion people, and both are building up their economic power and getting wealthier. Thus, even if the statistical Chinese (or Indian) citizen is not as rich as the statistical American on a per capita basis, sheer population will still mean that their economies will be bigger than that of the U.S.

Yglesias recognizes that tripling America’s population would entail numerous environmental, logistical, economic, and socio-political challenges. He argues, however, that much of the U.S. is underpopulated and can therefore supposedly accommodate many more people (including the suburbs, where Yglesias would like to place more apartment buildings). And he believes that technocratic innovation and creativity – in addition to sufficient effort, imagination, and spending – can help overcome the environmental impact of rapidly adding almost 700 million people to the country’s population.

To reach the magic one-billion mark, the author advocates combining pro-natalist policies with increasing mass immigration. Given that many Americans wish to have children (or have more) but feel they cannot afford it, Yglesias calls for more pro-family welfare spending and other policies to help make raising kids more affordable. That, however, works “with a built-in time lag,” argues the author, whereas mass migration is apparently a quick fix because “immigrants, by contrast, arrive at our shores good to go from day one.”

That, of course, is quite an oversimplification. Quite a few new immigrants are not proficient in English, and therefore have to first learn the language to a sufficient degree to function successfully in the U.S. Adapting, i.e. learning how “things work” in America, also takes time. But that is just one example of Yglesias’ generally naïve and out-of-touch view of mass immigration.

For Yglesias, immigration is largely a great boon – both in terms of economic growth and our national power – and we can hardly have too much of it. He thus supports increasing overall immigration levels, although he does acknowledge that making the immigration flow more merit-based would be a good thing. His “solution” to the illegal migration problem is simply more legal immigration while simultaneously granting blanket amnesty and a “pathway to citizenship” to millions of illegal aliens. If need be, Yglesias is willing to make some concessions – such as “more aggressive measures to mandate the use of the E-Verify system,” or higher payroll taxes for immigrants.

Writing for *National Review Online*, Razib Khan concluded that the section of *One Billion Americans* devoted to immigration “could have been drafted by a Cato Institute intern,” and that “the standard economic literature that immigration increases aggregate wealth, and has minimal impact on low-wage workers, is presented as uncontroversial and unchallenged.”

And, like the libertarian cheerleaders of open borders and “free” immigration, Yglesias completely ignores such issues as culture or national cohesion. As Khan noted, the book “does not accept the challenge of the cultural and social assimilability of so many new Americans, glossing over objections with a few asides and benign neglect.” In fact, culture is a giant gaping hole in Yglesias’ vision, leaving the reader to wonder how the author expects us to rapidly and smoothly integrate and assimilate tens or even hundreds of millions of new immigrants arriving from all over the globe within the next few decades. Both common sense and historical experience would suggest that such a scenario could easily lead to ethno-cultural tension and balkanization. That, in turn, would obviously weaken us vis-à-vis China or other rivals.