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Is Immigration Good For America? Trump DHS Executive Orders Could Hurt The Economy

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The Department of Homeland Security announced plans to enforce President Donald Trump's executive orders on immigration Tuesday, and based on ample research regarding the impact of foreign-born residents — both documented and undocumented — on the economy, the people deported and families separated as a result of the law likely won't be the only ones to suffer from its effects.

Read on for a few facts and myths about the impact of immigrants on the U.S.

Myth: They steal American citizens' jobs and the competition lowers everyone's pay.

Undocumented immigrants only made up 5 percent of the U.S. workforce in 2014, and the number has been sliding — down from 5.2 percent in 2009 and 5.4 percent in 2007. They also have generally taken far more jobs in the construction, farming and services industries than native-born citizens. As University of California, Berkeley economics professor David Card told the Economist in August, they've had a minimal impact on wages, with the “worst case scenario” being a 5 percent cut to high school dropouts' earnings over a 20-year period. Much research, including a report by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, confirms this hypothesis.

If anyone has faced job competition and low wages as a result of an influx of unauthorized immigrants, it's the migrants already present in the U.S., one study found, as they tend to enter the same sectors and vie for the same low-skilled jobs.

Fact: They keep the aging population—and therefore U.S. GDP—afloat.

An aging population with low rates of childbirth and few immigrants, like Japan's over the past few decades, has historically been the perfect storm for slow economic growth. The American fertility rate fell to its lowest level since researchers started keeping track in the early 20th century, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The wave of retiring baby boomers in the U.S. will mean less contribution to the economy by a significant portion of the population and higher aggregate health care and retirement expenditures.

Undocumented immigrants skewed younger and although foreign-born women helped fuel a recent drop in the U.S. fertility rate, they drove growth in American birthrates for nearly half a century.

Myth: They receive welfare payouts, but don't pay taxes.

Social Security Administration laws passed in 1996 and 2004 barred unauthorized immigrants from receiving Social Security payments. Programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid and the Supplemental Security Income program were restricted to citizens and most lawful permanent residents, such as people granted asylum. However, they were not provided to undocumented immigrants, according to the Congressional Research Service. The exceptions included emergency medical care, or disasters involving the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Still, often using false or borrowed identification to obtain jobs in the U.S., unauthorized workers have contributed anywhere between \$7 billion over four years — the conservative Heritage Foundation's approximation — to the Social Security Administration's estimated \$12 billion annually in payments to these programs. A May report from the libertarian Cato Institute found widespread assumptions of the cost of immigration to welfare programs to be vastly overstated.