



Fact checking White House adviser Stephen Miller's controversial immigration claims

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White House senior policy adviser Stephen Miller spoke Wednesday about sweeping changes the president hopes to make to dramatically decrease the number of legal immigrants allowed into the country each year. The remarks came shortly after [President Trump](#) expressed his support for a GOP-led [immigration bill](#) that would overhaul the country's immigration system to accomplish those goals.

Miller claimed the current level of immigration hurts American workers and leads to wage stagnation. On that point, several economists flatly disagree. He also said that recent [polling](#) showed “immense” public support for stricter, more limited immigration policies and a switch to a so-called merit-based system. The polling on the issue is in fact complicated and shows a wide range of opinions on the topic.

Here are a few more of Miller's claims and how they stand up to the facts:

Claim: Net migration rates are increasing at a “record pace.”

Fact-check: The most recent numbers from the Department of [Homeland Security](#) show legal immigration was higher in 2015 than the previous two years and has been increasing each year since 2013. In 2015, 1,051,031 citizens were granted new legal permanent resident status, an increase of 34,513 people over the previous year. But this is not a record pace and does not stack up to previous fluctuations. The number of migrants to the U.S. spiked from 1.09 million in 1989 to 1.5 million in 1990, an increase of over 400,000.

Claim: "Every year, we issue a million more green cards."

Fact-check: This is half-true. It does not reflect the number of people coming into the U.S. each year. In 2015, the Department of Homeland Security reported issuing 1,051,031 new green cards. That being said, only about half of them, or 508,716, were issued to new residents. The rest of the green cards were given to people already living in the U.S.

Claim: “The reason why some companies want to bring in more unskilled labor is because they know that it drives down wages.”

Fact-check: Both the left-leaning Brookings Institution and the right-leaning [Cato Institute](#) have found in recent studies that immigrants do not cause any sizable decrease in wages. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine reaffirmed the finding that immigration does not impact wages for U.S. residents.

Claim: The flow of unskilled workers are “reducing pay for [unskilled labor] positions and reducing [native unskilled workers'] chance of getting those jobs.”

Fact-check: Scholars have debunked the idea that immigrants lead to higher [unemployment](#) among the general population, with the Cato Institute claiming that "higher immigration is not associated with higher unemployment." When it comes to the unskilled or less-educated segments of the population, the research is more divided. George Borjas, a Harvard Kennedy School economist, claims that the salaries of native workers without a high school degree is reduced between 2 and 5 percent by immigrants. But the Urban Institute and others found immigrants and native workers with low levels of education are often competing for different jobs. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found new unskilled immigrants often have the most impact on jobs of other unskilled immigrants.

Claim: “Ultra-high-skilled workers are in the back of the line to get into the country.”

Fact-check: It was not immediately clear what Miller was referring to with this statement. The H-1B visas are typically granted to highly skilled workers. It is true that demand for H-1B visas has far exceeded the number granted by the government each year. Members of the tech industry have lobbied to raise the cap on these visas, including [Bill Gates](#), who told Congress an increase was necessary to compensate for “a deficit of Americans with computer science degrees.” Miller said the White House hoped to prioritize skilled, merited applicants, but he did not say whether they would change the number of H-1B visas allotted each year.

Claim: "Over 50 percent of our households of legal immigrants today participate in our social welfare system."

Fact-check: Although he didn't specify a source, Miller appeared to be referring to the Center for Immigrant Studies, which claimed, in 2012, that 51 percent of households headed by an immigrant (legal or illegal) reported that they used at least one welfare program during the year, compared to 30 percent of native-born households. This study has been harshly criticized, even by the right-leaning Cato Institute, which conducted a similar study and found that “low-income non-citizen adults and children generally have lower rates of public benefit use than native-born adults or citizen children whose parents are also citizens.” Under current law, legal immigrants, with few exemptions, are not eligible for most welfare benefits until they have lived in the U.S. for at least five years. In order for immigrants to receive [Social Security](#) benefits on a green card, they must have already worked for 10 years in the United States.

Claim: “Public support is so immense on this [legislation], just look at the polling data in many key battleground states across the country.”

Fact-check: A Gallup poll conducted last January found only 36 percent of U.S. adults were dissatisfied with immigration and wanted less of it. White Americans were twice as likely to want less immigration. But the poll also found that the number of Americans who were satisfied with immigration levels was up to 41 percent, compared to 30 percent the year before. By a large margin, 72 percent said “immigrants take jobs Americans don’t want, compared to 18 percent who said immigrants take jobs U.S. adults want.” In a Pew Research Center poll in January, 77 percent of respondents supported a goal of stricter policies to prevent people from overstaying visas and 58 percent supported a goal of increasing deportation. The same number, 58 percent, supported encouraging “more highly skilled people from around the world to live and work in the U.S.”