



Immigration Roundup: Are immigrants taking your job?

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With Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump putting immigration in the national spotlight, the question again is arising as to whether immigrants are taking jobs from Americans. According to some economists, the answer is no.

Dartmouth's Ethan Lewis, for instance, disputes the idea that immigration means increased competition and a loss of jobs for U.S. workers. Speaking at a Sept. 2 Cato Institute **event** on immigration and economics, he said that concept is based on the "wacky idea" that somehow there's a fixed number of jobs.

In reality, the number of jobs in the U.S. has been growing since 1960, Lewis said.

It's during periods of slower job growth that people tend to think immigrants are taking away jobs, he said. But really it's the opposite, Lewis said. Immigrants are consumers, and their demand for goods and services creates jobs, he said.

What about resources? Immigrants also aren't using up a finite amount of capital, Lewis said.

There are more workers added to the labor force each year from people aging in than from immigration, he said. Yet the economy can accommodate those workers, Lewis said.

How About Lesser-Skilled Workers?

Recent high-profile cases of H-1B guestworkers replacing Americans at companies such as Walt Disney World and Southern California Edison have caused the focus in recent months to shift to high-skilled immigrants' impact on their American counterparts.

But concern about the wages and job prospects for lesser-skilled workers continues.

A recent report from the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for lower immigration levels, concluded that immigrants are replacing native-born workers who don't have a high school diploma, even if they're not displacing them.

What does that mean? The report, authored by conservative public policy analyst Jason Richwine, said policymakers are taking the easy way out, allowing employers simply to hire immigrants rather than attacking the root causes of declining employment among this demographic.

Harvard University's George Borjas takes the position that immigrants depress the wages of those they directly compete with—including both native-born workers and immigrants who came before.

At a Senate subcommittee hearing in March, Borjas said it's important to compare newly arrived immigrant workers in a particular job to pre-existing workers in that same job. Otherwise the impact gets diluted, he said.

No Impact, Economist Says

Economist Giovanni Peri of the University of California, Davis, however, says immigrants aren't impacting Americans' wages.

The wage disparity between high- and low-skilled workers increased between 1980 and 2014, at a time when immigration grew by 10 percent, he said at the Sept. 2 Cato event.

But if immigrants caused the wage decline among low-skilled workers, then most immigrants during that time should've been low-skilled, Peri said. The opposite was true—more immigrants were high-skilled, yet the wages of high-skilled workers increased during that time, he said.