

Do immigrants receive more welfare money than natural born US citizens?

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A study from a pro-'low immigration' policy institute estimates the United States spends 41 percent more on welfare for immigrant households than it does for households headed by natural born citizens. Critics say the study's methodology is flawed.

As the debate around immigration, a wall along the Mexican border, and migrant amnesty spills into the general election, a study released Monday by a think tank that aims to reduce immigration estimates that immigrant households receive 41 percent more federal welfare than households headed by native-born citizens.

The Center for Immigration Studies' (CIS) analysis builds on an earlier study the organization published in September.

The author of the more recent study, public policy analyst Jason Richwine, is no stranger to controversy. In 2013, he was dismissed from his position at the Heritage Foundation after it was revealed that his PhD dissertation at Harvard, titled "IQ and Immigration Policy," whose abstract asserted that "[t]he average IQ of immigrants in the United States is substantially lower than that of the white native population, and the difference is likely to persist over several generations."

In its analysis of a 2012 US Census Bureau survey, the Center for Immigration Studies estimates that average welfare cost of a household headed by a legal or illegal immigrant was \$6,234 in 2012, and \$5,692 for households headed only by illegal immigrants. By comparison, the average welfare cost of a household headed by a natural-born citizen is \$4,431, the study estimates. In particular, according to the study, immigrants receive more cash, food, and Medicaid welfare than households headed by natural-born citizens, even though their housing costs are roughly the same, the study estimates.

Of all immigrant households, the study found immigrants from Mexico and Central America received the most welfare of all immigrants, with \$8,251 in 2012.

"As long as the US continues to admit large numbers of low-skill immigrants (legal or illegal), then immigrant welfare consumption will remain high," writes Mr. Richwine. "Importing new clients of the welfare state likely makes it even harder to roll back."

Immigration policy analyst Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute, who criticized the center's previous analysis, tells The Christian Science Monitor this recent study is "fatally flawed" in the same way.

"If they actually wanted to count how much welfare immigrants use, they should have just counted the immigrants and the welfare they use, instead of the households of US citizens – that is an apples-to-apples comparison," says Mr. Nowrasteh.

"If we should count them, shouldn't we also count the welfare use of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren of immigrants?," wrote Nowrasteh, in his criticism of the September study. "Such a way of counting would obviously produce a negative result but it would also not be informative."

Nowrasteh also faulted the study for not including Medicare and Social Security programs in its comparison.

CIS also touches on a common myth about undocumented immigrants: Do they receive welfare? The short answer is no.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for public benefits, and legal immigrants can receive benefits only once they have been a citizen for five years. Yet, the study calculates the welfare costs for children of undocumented immigrants.

Yet, some argue there is an often overlooked benefit of supporting these children.

"These kids who get subsidized school lunches today will go on to graduate high school ... will go on to college and move up to the middle class of America," Linda Chavez, president of the Becoming American Institute, a conservative group that advocates for higher levels of legal immigration to reduce illegal immigration, told USA Today. "Every time we have a nativist backlash in our history, we forget that we see immigrants change very rapidly in the second generation."