



Cato study: Immigrants are politically similar to native-born Americans

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Roughly 150 immigrants, mostly children, are sworn in as U.S. citizens during a naturalization...

A new study released by the libertarian Cato Institute shows that immigrants are remarkably politically similar to native-born Americans. The study throws water on the often-used argument that immigrants are mostly liberals who will shift the electorate to support big-government policies.

“The political differences between immigrants and native-born Americans are small and, in most cases, so small that they are statistically insignificant,” the study said. “The descendants of immigrants rapidly assimilate into America’s political culture by adopting mainstream ideologies, political party identifications, and policy positions held by longer-settled Americans. ... Immigrants, they and their descendants are unlikely to alter America’s aggregate political attitudes.”

Immigrants are slightly different from native-born Americans in party identification. Compared to fourth-generation Americans, new immigrants are equally likely to identify as Democrats, less likely to be Republicans, and much more likely to be independents. But by the second and third generation, the differences with the fourth-generation are "so small that they are statistically insignificant." As the authors note, "The first-generation’s differences in party identifications are statistically significant compared to the fourth generation because immigrants are much more likely to identify as 'independent,' not because they are more likely to be Democratic."

This difference only exists among those who were born outside the U.S. and then moved here. Children who are born in the U.S. to immigrant parents are almost completely assimilated into the U.S. political system.

On whether respondents consider themselves conservative or liberal, the differences between each generation-group of immigrants were statistically insignificant.

Opinion differences between generation-groups were also statistically insignificant on questions over the levels of federal income taxes, government welfare spending, Social Security benefits, and government assistance to the poor.

The study gives more ammunition to those hoping to persuade conservatives to support immigration reform that makes it easier for immigrants to work in the U.S.

The study utilized data from the General Social Survey, which is conducted every other year and records its respondents' demographic characteristics, party identification, and public policy opinions on various questions, among other things.

The study was conducted by Sam Wilson, a PhD student in economics at George Mason University, and Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute.