



## **Rush Limbaugh says immigrants come to U.S. seeking prosperity from government**

By: Molly Moorhead – January 31, 2013

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Florida Sen. Marco Rubio talked immigration recently with conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh, steering into an interesting side issue: why people come to the U.S.

"You look at people that come from Latin America. They come to get away from stale, stagnant economies where the rich keep winning and everybody else keeps working for them because big government dominates those economies," Rubio said.

To which Limbaugh responded: "Well, is that the reason that a majority of immigrants come to this country today? I know it used to be. They wanted to be Americans. They wanted to escape oppression. They wanted to become citizens of the greatest country on earth. I've seen a number of research, scholarly research data which says that a vast majority of arriving immigrants today come here because they believe that government is the source of prosperity, and that's what they support."

Here, we'll look into Limbaugh's assertion that belief in an expansive central government is what draws people to our shores.

### **Polling Hispanics**

We did not hear back from Limbaugh's show, but we suspect that the research he referred to is a 2012 Pew Research Hispanic Center poll, asking Hispanics about their political ideology. The poll broke down the results by generation, so it's possible to distinguish first-generation Hispanics (i.e., immigrants) from U.S.-born Hispanics.

The poll, which queried 1,220 Latino respondents ages 18 and older, asked, "Would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?" In the results, 75 percent of Hispanics said they preferred bigger government (compared with 41 percent of the general population.)

A breakdown by generation showed an even greater skew: Among first-generation Hispanics (i.e., immigrants), 81 percent favored bigger government. In the second generation, 72 percent favored bigger government, and the figure fell to 58 percent in the third generation and higher.

Steven Camarota, with the Center for Immigration Studies, a group that favors stricter immigration laws, pointed us to another Pew poll asking people's opinions of socialism,

capitalism and libertarianism. Among blacks, whites and Hispanics, Hispanics had the most unfavorable view of capitalism: 55 percent. Overall, 50 percent had a favorable view of capitalism, while 40 percent had an unfavorable view.)

In Camarota's view, "the general sentiment (of Limbaugh's statement) seems to be right that a very large fraction -- of Hispanics anyway -- show a very strong sentiment toward what could be called progressive or liberal views of government."

But that's just Hispanics, and Limbaugh simply referred to "a vast majority of arriving immigrants."

Camarota cited similar figures about Asian immigrants, also from Pew polling. In a 2012 survey, 57 percent of foreign-born Asians in the U.S. said they prefer a bigger government that provides more services, while 33 percent want a smaller government providing fewer services.

So there is evidence that recent immigrants, at least among Hispanics and Asians, favor more government, which could reasonably be construed as a belief that "government is the source of prosperity," as Limbaugh said.

But is that belief the reason people immigrate?

#### Jobs & family

Alex Nowrasteh, immigration policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute, dismissed Limbaugh's claim as off-base.

"If Rush Limbaugh was right, we would not have people leaving during a recession like we did," Nowrasteh said in an interview. "About a million unauthorized immigrants have gone home to their home countries because there are no jobs for them here."

A separate study by the Cato Institute says "immigrants come to America today to build a better life through work, not welfare, just as they have throughout American history." It backs up this point with U.S. Department of Labor data on labor force participation. Among foreign-born people, the work rate was 67.9 percent in 2010, compared to the native-born rate of 64.1 percent.

It's worth noting that welfare benefits are generally not available to immigrants. Illegal immigrants, of course, cannot receive public services such as cash assistance or Medicaid at all, and legal immigrants aren't eligible for five years. Other programs are totally inaccessible until they become citizens.

"Undoubtedly, there are undocumented immigrants getting some of those things. But they are for the most part not eligible," said Jeffrey Passel, a demographer at the Pew Hispanic Center.

Immigration patterns indicate that that "source of prosperity" isn't what immigrants seek anyway.

"Immigrants go to states that have smaller benefits for welfare recipients," Nowrasteh said. "They go to the states that have the fastest-growing economies. If they were coming for welfare, they'd go to the places with the biggest welfare states."

A wide-ranging international survey by Gallup of people all over the globe found that 150 million adults worldwide would like to migrate to the U.S., making it by far the top desired destination. "Opportunity" was the most common reason given, meaning "the chance to join family members who are already in other countries, to start a new business, to express one's views without fear, or to live where children are treated with respect."

Gallup also found that the human development index of the country of origin was a significant factor too. That index measures citizens' health, life expectancy, schooling options and wealth. The poll found that the desire to migrate "tends to be higher in countries with medium to low human development."

Our ruling

Limbaugh said research shows that "a vast majority of arriving immigrants today come here because they believe that government is the source of prosperity, and that's what they support."

Surveys of Hispanic and Asian immigrants show that majorities of immigrants favor bigger government, which could be the "source of prosperity" Limbaugh meant. But we could find no research to say that those views are what drive people to immigrate. Family connections and job opportunities in the U.S. are the most common reasons cited in studies.

Limbaugh's claim contains a grain of truth but makes a misleading causal connection. That fits our definition of Mostly False.